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Women, Heroines, Mothers: Motherhood in Ovid's *Heroides*

Simona Martorana

A thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Classics and Ancient History

Durham University

2021

Simona Martorana

Abstract:

Women, Heroines, Mothers: Motherhood in Ovid's *Heroides*

My thesis navigates the maternal experience in the *Heroides*, thereby resituating them within the most recent gender-based readings of Ovidian works, and Latin literature as a whole, as well as addressing works that deal with motherhood in the Roman world. Ovid's elegiac epistles, which – almost uniquely in classical literature – give a subjective voice to female characters, offer a fertile ground of enquiry to broaden the scholarly debate on motherhood in Latin Literature, as well as contributing to discussions on gender-informed interpretations of Ovidian poetry. By building on a combination of a philological approach and gender theory, my thesis uncovers the subversive content of the *Heroides*, as well as leading us to appreciate their stylistic, thematic, and narratological peculiarities, including: a high degree of ambiguity; ironic discourse; interplay with previous sources; references to their contemporary context; polyphony; and the coexistence of literary genres.

Chapter 1 (*Her*. 1) navigates Penelope's relationship with Telemachus to show how motherhood serves the heroine's appropriation of a central role within her household. Chapter 2 shows Phaedra's self-empowerment in *Her*. 4, as well as Canace's (re)appropriation of her maternal experience (*Her*. 11). Chapter 3 mainly draws from Butler's gender performativity to explore Deianira (*Her*. 9), but also from Braidotti's posthuman feminism to analyse Medea's motherhood (*Her*. 12), which contributes to her self-construction as a female (posthuman) subject-in-becoming. Chapter 4 focuses on Hypsipyle's and Dido's letters (*Her*. 6 and 7) through the lens of Ettinger's recent theorisations on the maternal body and narrative theory, respectively. My thesis demonstrates that the heroines' motherhood enhances their self-empowerment and catalyses the gender-role reversals that feature in their epistles. By showing how these mothers express their independence, in ways that are perhaps subtle, ironic, and highly rhetorical, my thesis also engages with contemporary discussions about women's leadership, maternity, and gender equality.

Ph.D. Thesis

Women, Heroines, Mothers: Motherhood in Ovid's *Heroides*

Department of Classics and Ancient History

Simona Martorana

First Supervisor: Prof. Jennifer Ingleheart

Second Supervisor: Dr. Ioannis Ziogas

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction I-XXX

Chapter 1: A traditional *matrona*? Penelope between motherhood and heroism 1
1.1. Sources and context: the epic Penelope and 'the distaff side' 3
1.2. An Ovidian character: Penelope revisited 9
1.3. Mother or *matrona*: implications of motherhood 14
1.4. A struggle for heroism: who is the master of the house? 24
Conclusion 26

Chapter 2: Incest, rebellion and the 'Law of the Mother': Phaedra and Canace 27
2.1. Sources and context: Phaedra, storytelling and writing 29
2.2. (Ovid's) Phaedra and the rejection of (step-)motherhood 38
2.3. Phaedra's new perspective: the 'Law of the Mother' 53
2.4. Sibling relationships: story, background and main patterns of *Her*. 11 59
2.5. An ill-fated mother or an insolent daughter? 68
Conclusion 87

Chapter 3: 'The name of the Mother': abomination, mistake and revenge (Deianira and Medea) 90
3.1. (Ovid's) Deianira: a response to the sources 92
3.2. *Nomen est omen*? Deianira, Omphale and the fall of a hero 100
3.3. Iole, Hyllus and Deianira: τὸ μητρὸς ὄνομα 114
3.4. Sources and context: Medea's divided self 123
3.5. *Nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit*: becoming-Medea 129
3.5.1. The hero(ine) and the abandoned woman: gender and genre fluidity 131
3.5.2. Medea and becoming: motherhood, metamorphosis and autopoiesis 143
Deianira and Medea: motherhood as self-empowerment 157

Chapter 4: Motherhood, literary (pro-)creation and the birth of the text: Hypsipyle and Dido 159
4.1. Background and sources: Hypsipyle's Medea 160
4.2. Hypsipyle (Jason and Medea): standing alone 167
4.3. The 'Self' and the '(M)Other': encounters, borders and formation of subjectivity 178
4.4. Background and sources: "When Dido *rewrites* Vergil" 192
4.5. Ovid's Dido: creation of the text, continuation of the story 201
4.5.1. The burden of the past: Dido's (re)construction of reality 207
4.5.2. Control over the future: *écriture feminine*, pregnancy and the birth of the text 213

Conclusion: Hypsipyle and Dido as (M)others of the Text 225

Epilogue 227

Bibliography 232

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Alle corse sotto la pioggia
agli allenamenti alle sei del mattino
al coraggio di non mollare
alla luce che brilla negli occhi di chi accarezza i sogni

A chi ha creduto in me prima che ci credessi io –
A tutta la mia 'tribù'

Introduction

Heroines or *Hero(-id-)es*? Motherhood, gender and self-identity

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads.
He smelled a familiar smell.
It was the Sphinx.
Oedipus said, “I want to ask one question.
Why didn’t I recognize my mother?”
“You gave the wrong answer,” said the Sphinx.
“But that was what made everything possible,” said Oedipus.
“No,” she said. When I asked, what walks on four legs in the morning,
Two at noon and three in the evening, you answered,
Man.
You didn’t say anything about a woman.”
“When you say Man,” said Oedipus,
“You include women too.
Everyone knows that.”
She said, “That’s what you think.”
[M. Rukeyser, *Myth*]

Mota dea est sortemque dedit: “discedite templo
et velate caput cinctasque resolvite vestes
ossaque post tergum magnae iactate parentis!”
[Ov. *Met*. 1.381-3]

Moved, the goddess gave the prophecy:
“leave the temple, cover your head, untie your girded clothes
and throw behind your back the bones of the Great Mother”.

Eo maiorem laudem *omnium* carissima mihi mater meruit, quod / modestia, probitate, pudicitia, opsequio, lanificio, diligentia, fide, / par similisque ceteris probeis feminis fuit, neque ulli cessit vir-/tutis, laboris, sapientiae ...
[*CIL* VI, 10230, 27-30, 27 BC-14 AD]

For that reason, my dearest mother deserved the greater praise from everyone because in modesty, honesty, chastity, compliance, wool-working, diligence and trustworthiness, she was the equal and the model of other earnest women nor did she fall behind any woman in *virtus*, work or wisdom ...[1]

When I first decided that the goal of my doctoral journey would be to go in search of women’s voices in ancient literature, I certainly did not think that I was embarking on an easy adventure. Feminist and gender-informed readings of ancient history and literature, which have become increasingly widespread from the 1990s onwards, have demonstrated that ‘seeking the woman’ may well posit many more challenges, rather

[1] Translations from Latin and Greek texts are mine, unless otherwise stated.

than simply answering unsolved questions.[2] If we wish to stick to the metaphor of a sea journey (so beloved by ancient authors), feminist interpretations of classical texts are likely to give rise to waves of such size that they can easily shake and destroy the ship of your research, no matter how well-equipped it may be with systematic arguments, deep critical thinking, cohesive structure, and subject knowledge. The journey becomes even more uncertain, almost Odyssean, if the specific aim is 'seeking the mothers' within a historical and social context, namely Augustan Rome, which seems to have been highly patriarchal, restrictive and authoritative. Focusing on these marginalised figures, namely women and mothers, in Antiquity leads us to challenge, and to try to expand, the intrinsic borders of Classics as a discipline.

This attempt at seeking the feminine voice, as well as recovering the maternal experience of women that 'are written' by a (male) poet like Ovid in his *Heroides*,[3] builds upon ongoing discussions concerning the margins, and the potential, of the concept of Classics. If one thinks of 'Classics' in the most traditional, mono-dimensional way, i.e. as a relatively small body of *canonical* texts ranging from, for instance, Homer to the 2nd-3rd century CE, written in a fairly restricted geographical area by male authors belonging to a cultural elite, the very concept of Classics may well appear somewhat static, stagnant and wholly irrelevant to our contemporary society. If, by contrast, the (perceived) meaning of Classics also encompasses more, for example: the Mycenaean world and, conversely, (so-called) Late Antiquity; material evidence and culture, as well as Medieval and Church Latin; its reception, that is, the lively and still-breathing manifestations of Antiquity throughout history, from the Plautine and Terentian dramas of Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim (a abbess in Germany during the 9th

[2] Besides the seminal volume edited by Rabinowitz and Richlin 1993 (cf. in particular, the chapters by Gold 1993, 75-100, and Hallett 1993, 44-72), see also Poster 1998, 327-350; Keith 2000, 1-7; Leonard and Zajko 2006, *passim*; Zajko 2007, 387-406; Kampen 2009, 207-215; Skinner 2013, 1-16; Corbeill 2015, *passim*, among others.

[3] For the "*scripta puella*" in elegiac poetry, cf. Wyke 1987, 47-61, and 1989, 25-47; Ingleheart 2012, 227-241, on Perilla as Ovid's *scripta puella* in *Tr*. 3.7.

century CE) to the popular brand of jewels "Pandora"; if it includes all this, then perhaps the concept of Classics is no longer outdated, nor is it irrelevant to our fast-changing, ever-evolving, 21st century world. The idea of 'what Classics is' only needs to be re-imagined, rather than dismantled, and expanded upon in terms of chronological limits, themes, and 'canonical' texts.[4] That is why seeking the women, mothers, and heroines within (Ovid's) *Heroides* is to, above all, broaden the traditional meaning of Classics.

While engaging with the most recent attempts at giving a new facet to the Classics, my work on the *Heroides* is also preoccupied with issues concerning anachronism, consistency and profitability. More specifically, it posits the three following macro-questions: can a gender-based reading be applied to a text written more than two thousand years ago? Can such a reading be said to be *faithful* to the *philological* meaning of the text? Why is it so important to 'seek the *mothers*' within the *Heroides*? To answer these questions, we need to enter into conversation with existing scholarship on gender and Antiquity, Ovid, the *Heroides*, and motherhood in Latin literature.

Questions and *status quaestionis*

Among the authors that have been explored through gender-informed approaches throughout Greek and Latin literature, Ovid certainly occupies a very prominent position.[5] As Alison Sharrock brilliantly summarises, the traditional dichotomy between an optimistic and a pessimistic approach to ancient literature, particularly Vergil's *Aeneid*,[6] has more recently evolved into a resisting and releasing reading of Ovidian

[4] An insightful, and very recent, discussion on the role and challenges of the Classics in the contemporary era can be found in Formisano 2018, 1-28; see also Martindale 2010, 135-48; Butler 2016, 1-20; and Matzner 2016, 179-202.

[5] See e.g. Desmond 1993b, 56-68; Segal 1998, 9-41; Liveley 2003, 147-162; Keith 2009, 355-369; Fulkerson 2011, 113-133; Fox 2015, 335-351; Fabre-Serris 2018a, 127-144.

[6] The original dialectic between a 'pro-Augustan' and an 'anti-Augustan' interpretation of the *Aeneid* has subsequently developed into an opposition between "the optimistic European school" and "the

poetry, which draws from feminist interpretations.[7] However, the borders between these alleged dichotomies (pessimistic vs optimistic; resisting vs releasing) are blurred.[8] The 'resisters' see it as difficult and highly problematic to free the voices of women within Ovid's texts from the constraints of a reality dominated by patriarchy and phallogocentrism; however, they acknowledge that a critical survey of women within Ovidian poetry may lead to a greater awareness of sexual harassment and gender bias, as well as contributing to the contemporary feminist debate.[9] The 'releasers' argue that female voices can find their space within Ovid's writings and thus can indeed be released; equally, they acknowledge the precariousness and fragility of this hermeneutical operation, which might lead to distortions and misinterpretations of the texts, as well as anachronistic views.[10]

When applied specifically to the *Heroides*, this interpretative framework has found expression in three scholarly works that represent the foundation of my survey: two of these were published in 2003 (Lindheim and Spentzou), and the third in 2005 (Fulkerson). Sara Lindheim's Lacanian interpretation notes how the discourse of the heroines is deeply affected by the rules of the Symbolic realm, which is articulated by Ovid's male authorial voice. Therefore, it offers a rather resisting reading of the *Heroides*.[11] Taking a different route, Efi Spentzou explores these epistles by employing modern hermeneutical tools, particularly Irigaray's and Kristeva's reception of the

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pessimistic Harvard school": cf. Johnson 1976, 9; 11; 15; also Putnam 1995, *passim*; Perkell 1997, 257-286; Schmidt 2001, 145-171; Grebe 2004, 35-62.

[7] Cf. Sharrock 2020, 33-53; for some earlier references, cf. Sharrock 2002, 95-107, and 2011, 55-77.

[8] Cf. Fulkerson 2005, 5-6; Salzman-Mitchell 2005, 20; McAuley 2016, 16-18; Sharrock 2020, 37: "Both the optimistic and the pessimistic responses to the *Metamorphoses* are valid readings of the poem. Often, however, our readings need to acknowledge both possibilities at once and to accept that the coexistence of objectification and empathy should make it impossible for us either to convict or to exonerate the poet".

[9] For some connections between the violence in Ovidian works (and ancient literature at large) and our misogynistic present, cf. e.g. Richlin 1992a, 158-179; Kahn 2006, *passim*; Liveley 2006, 318-337; Thakur 2014, 175-213; James 2016, 86-111; Zuckerberg 2018, *passim*; see also Everett Beek 2016 and Marguerite Johnson 2016 in online journals.

[10] Cf. McAuley 2016, 25-27.

[11] Lindheim 2003, 3-12 and *passim*.

Platonic *chora*. Through this post-structuralist lens, Spentzou uncovers the rhetorical complexity of the *Heroides* and shows how modern theory can be fruitfully applied to this work.[12] Finally, Laurel Fulkerson reads the *Heroides* as an example of *écriture feminine*, giving space to the heroines' authorial personas. By suspending the awareness that they 'are written' by a male poet, Fulkerson reads the heroines as though they were writing within a community and addressing each other's text, thereby exploring intertextual links, narrative similarities and allusivity across the collection.[13] Given the role that intertextuality has played within Ovidian scholarship and Augustan poetry as a whole,[14] my work also takes into account the intertextual parallels between the epistles, although it does not make these its pivotal hermeneutical tool. Intertextuality serves to uncover the heroines' rhetorical construction, ironic discourse and innuendo to previous, forgotten, or less attested mythological narratives, as well as "opening windows" to alternative outcomes of the story.[15] The acknowledgement of the *Heroides* as the heroines' complex and multifaceted poetic, artistic creation leads us to appreciate the role reversals, the blurring of gender, and genre, boundaries, as well as the re-interpretation of traditional concepts and definitions (motherhood in particular) that characterise the collection as a whole.

By further building on the theoretical framework set by these studies and entering into conversation with these three scholars, I take a sort of 'third' way, in between a purely resisting and an entirely releasing reading. Whilst I side with Fulkerson's (and Spentzou's) releasing approach, whereby the *Heroides* are seen as a *possible* example of

[12] Spentzou 2003 navigates questions of gender within the *Heroides* by focusing on the heroines' self-depiction as helpless and innocent (Ch. 3), their writing (Ch. 4), the genre of the epistles (Ch. 5), and narrative patterns (Ch. 6).

[13] Fulkerson 2005, 1-22.

[14] For a summary of "Ovidian Intertextuality", cf. Casali 2009, 341-354, and 2018, 25-54; see also Barchiesi 1993, 333-365; Hardie 2002, 150-165; for intertextuality in Augustan poetry, see e.g. Thomas 1999; 2001; 2009, 294-307; Hallett 2009, 141-155; Paschalis 2011, 73-98; Gale 2013, 278-296; Rosati 2017, 117-142; Fabre-Serris 2018b, 67-79.

[15] Cf. Liveley 2008, 86-102; Barchiesi 2001, 31: "The poetics of the *Heroides* suggest, more simply, that new windows can be opened on stories already completed. Ovid's narrative prowess is evident in the respect he shows for the traditional script".

female writing, I do not think it necessary to assume a complete obliteration of the author's voice. On the contrary, the authorial voice, characterised by irony and ambiguity, enhances the fluidity and ambivalence of the heroines' construction of a self-identity as subjects, and even poets. I often employ expressions such as "female subjectivity", "female agency", and "self-definition", as well as speaking of "(Ovid's) heroines", that is, placing the name "Ovid" into brackets. However, I do not intend to provide a definitive answer to questions as to whether Ovid was able to 'write like a woman' or was empathetic with women and women's experience, nor do I look for a 'genuine' female voice. By paying attention to the generic interplay within the epistles, and their highly rhetorical content, as well as analysing them vis-à-vis their historical, social, political and legal context, this study merges rather traditional philological methodologies with modern theory. This combination sheds new light on the text of the *Heroides* and resituates it within the contemporary feminist debate, without distorting its meaning. While I will focus on the historical context and theoretical framework in the next two sections, it is beneficial here for the progression of my argument to navigate certain aspects of the *Heroides* that concern code-switching and variety of literary genres.[16]

Interpreting these epistles is particularly complicated due to their intrinsic gender polyphony, which is determined by the fact that the *female* characters are a creation of a *male* poet, who tells their story through mythological elegy. An innovative, even provocative text, the *Heroides* are unique within the Greco-Roman poetic landscape, as Ovid (who is not exactly modest in the display of his poetic achievements) does not fail to acknowledge at *Ars*. 3.346, where he refers to his *epistulae* as *ignotum ... opus*. Ovid's closest model is probably Propertius' Arethusa (4.3; cf. also Prop. 1.3.35-46;

[16] For an early definition of Ovid's poetry as "Kreuzung der Gattungen", cf. Kroll 1924, 202-224; for the coexistence of various literary genres within the *Heroides*, see e.g. Steinmetz 1987, 140; Rosati 1989, 5-9; Auhagen 1999, 12.

3.12), who writes a poem to her lover.[17] However, as an isolated poem, this fictional epistle is not comparable to a collection like the *Heroides*.[18] Although these epistles are, in formal terms, part of the elegiac genre, the *Heroides* are in fact a blend of elegy, epic, tragedy and epistolography.[19] While (Ovid's) Penelope casts herself as an elegiac lover, she cannot help alluding to her epic *Doppelgängerin* and her relationship with her son Telemachus (*Her*. 1).[20] Similarly, the elegiac Phaedra forecasts Hippolytus' and her own tragic (Euripidean) destiny in *Her*. 4, while the Ovidian Dido challenges her Vergilian counterpart by playing with her lack of offspring in *Aen*. 4.[21] Despite this coexistence of genres, which is typically Ovidian, the *Heroides* are formally elegy. What is the reason for such a choice? Or, rather, what does this choice tell us about the content and interpretation of the epistles?

Elegy, the genre of erotic poetry and complaint, is perfectly suited to vocalising the feelings of abandoned women, as the heroines are. Equally, elegy is characterised by a reversal of roles, insofar as the male poet expresses his complaint through (what has been defined as) a feminine attitude.[22] Ovid, in particular, seems to re-employ in his exile poetry the patterns of the abandoned and complaining lover that we can note in the

[17] Cf. Barchiesi 1987, 63-90.

[18] Most of what survives from Greco-Roman (and more generally pre-modern) literature is by men, with female voices lost (for evidence of female authors in Antiquity, and throughout history, cf. Stevenson 2007, *passim*). Besides the Greek Sappho, the most attested female author in the Greco-Roman world would be Sulpicia, to whom some poems from the poetic corpus of Tibullus are attributed. The actual existence of Sulpicia, however, is still debated: see e.g. Hinds 1987, 29-46; Hubbard 2005, 177-194; Hallett 2006, 37-42; Keith 2006, 3-10; Hauser 2016, 151-186; for female literacy in the ancient world, cf. Plant 2004, *passim*; Bowman 2004, 1-27. Among other examples of fictional female writers in Ovid and elsewhere, one can mention Phaedra (who, beyond being the author of *Her*. 4, in Euripides writes her message on a *deltos*: cf. *Hipp*. 1312) or Byblis in *Met*. 9.521-563; see Chapter 2.

[19] See e.g. Kennedy 1984, 413-422, and 2002, 217-232; Rosati 1993, 71-94; Farrell 1998, 307-338; Volk 2005, 83-96.

[20] See Chapter 1.

[21] See Chapter 2; 4.

[22] The poet (*amator*), who as a man would normally dominate, submits to the *puella*, who is often described as *dura* (while, as a woman, she would be expected to be *mollis*) and indicated as *domina*. Furthermore, the poet is often characterised by features that pertain rather more to the feminine sphere (emotionality, a lack of constraints, oscillation between opposing feelings, etc.); cf. e.g. Holzberg 2000, 28-29; James 2003, 12; 129: "Elegy thus presents the lover-poet as violating all standards of upper class Roman masculinity, through both servile behavior and inertia of character. So fundamental is this characterization of the lover-poet to elegy that some form of it appears in the beginning of each elegist's oeuvre".

Heroides: he has been said to take inspiration from his own writing, thereby creating a link between the fictional persona of the *Heroides* and his autobiographical persona in the exile works.[23] Thereby, the heroines give voice more directly to the impulses and inner feelings of the poet, and almost help him to express a quasi-feminine voice of complaint. This sort of tension between the female and male side, however, is never definitively reconciled, but emerges from the constant reversal of roles between the two main actors of the epistles, i.e. the female fictional author and the male addressee, as well as the coexistence of various literary genres. Polyphony, multifariousness, and variety of gender and genre enhance the ambiguity, irony, and doubleness of the heroines' discourse, which sanctions their departure from expected social roles and subtly undermines contemporary political institutes.

The heroines' subversion of traditional definitions and relationships is articulated, at a formal and stylistic level, by the cyclical nature of their *écriture feminine*.[24] It is precisely the self-enclosed unity of the elegiac couplet that conveys this sort of cyclicality: not only is the elegiac distich a metrical hypostasis of circularity, but the epistolary form is also characterised by opening and closing formulae that convey circularity to the poetic diction.[25] Instead of articulating the heroines' submission to well-established norms and their incapability of freeing themselves from the patriarchal discourse, this stylistic and formal circularity, the repetitive content of the collection, as well as the fluidity and ambiguity intrinsic to their letters, enable the heroines to dismantle traditional categories and dichotomies.[26] Finally, this cyclical essence of the heroines' writing coexists with their intervention in a 'linear' history, which is

[23] Cf. Rosenmeyer 1997, 29: "I interpret his [*scil*. Ovid's] choice of the letter form for the exile poems as not only an allusion to, but also as an authorial statement of identification – on some level – with his earlier epistolary work, the *Heroides*".

[24] Hélène Cixous (1976, 875-893) first conceptualised the so-called "*écriture feminine*", which was then applied by other French feminist writers, such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.

[25] Cf. Goldsmith 1989, VII.

[26] *Pace* Lindheim 2003, 4-12.

expressed through their active involvement in the process of creative work, as well as their agency at a familial, social and political level.[27] As I shall show, the heroines' subjective re-interpretation of their maternal experience leads to a break with the fulfilment of roles that they are made to play by the source texts. This subversive re-appropriation of their motherhood also conflicts with the tasks that they would presumably have been expected to perform in their contemporary society, as fictional counterparts of Roman women.

Motherhood: Augustan Age, the *Heroides* and beyond

In her seminal work *The Roman Mother*, Suzanne Dixon stated that "motherhood had always established or enhanced a woman's status",[28] thereby underscoring the importance of maternity in the life of a Roman woman, both in the private and public sphere. A good marriage, alongside the (re)production of offspring, was considered the most important achievement for a Roman *matrona* – a conception that, incidentally, is not true only for ancient Rome, but has lasted until very recent times, and is still in place in many parts of the world, as well as in certain social and cultural contexts.[29] Although this pivotal role was particularly enhanced under the Augustan Principate, women's procreative function had been highly valued since early Republican times. According to Plutarch (*Caes*. 61), for instance, the ancient ritual of the Lupercalia was specifically intended to foster female fertility, which was induced by flicking women with leather thongs. Moreover, from the earliest Republican times, the censors used to

[27] For the opposition between a historical (or linear) and a cyclical time, cf. Moi 1986, 187-213.
[28] Dixon 1988, 71.
[29] Cf. Hackworth Petersen and Salzman-Mitchell 2012, 1: "[...] a woman's primary role has traditionally been defined vis-à-vis her ability to reproduce and/or care for offspring".

verify that men were marrying for reproductive purposes (*liberorum procreandorum causa*) and even urged the citizens to have children.[30]

While this stress on reproduction had always characterised Roman culture from the early Republic onwards, it seems that Augustus focused more specifically on the role of women, by issuing laws and promoting policies that were aimed at defining and, accordingly, limiting female duties, tasks and liberties.[31] His concerns about legal marriages, parenthood (particularly motherhood), and a reduction of adultery and concubinage were without precedent.[32] This policy played a prominent role in Augustus' propaganda from the very start, as demonstrated by, for instance, the elevation of *Venus Genetrix* and the restoration of the statue of *Cornelia mater Gracchorum*, which had been built between 121 and 100 BC, and represented the traditional values of motherhood (cf. e.g. Plut. *C. Gr.* 4; Plin. *HN* 34.31; *CIL* VI 31610).[33] Such a promotion was part of a political programme supporting peace as well as a restoration of the *antiqui mores* (the so-called *res publica restituta*), and can be seen as a consequence of and reaction to the civil war against Pompey, which had caused the death of a large number of Roman citizens, especially Italians.[34] In the years following Actium (31 BC) and after Octavian acquired the titles of *Princeps* and *Augustus* (27 BC), which de facto sanctioned his status as an emperor,[35] this political agenda was intensified through his intervention in the legal system and revision of family law.

[30] Cf. Aul. Gell. 5.19.6; 17.21.44; 4.3.2; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.25.7; Plut. *Cam.* 2; *Cat. Mai.* 16; Val. Max. 2.9.1; Cic. *Leg.* 3.7.

[31] Treggiari 2005, 144-147; Hallett 2012, 373: "These laws [...] compelled women of all social stations to place a high premium on sexual chastity if they were not married and on marital fidelity once they had wed, and also pressured them to produce multiple offspring"; McAuley 2016, 42-44.

[32] Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 4.5, 21-24; Ov. *Fast.* 2.139; Svet. *Aug.* 34; Ulp. 11.20: *Dig.* 23.2; 44-46; Raditsa 1980, 278-339; McGinn 2008, 1-32.

[33] The complete inscription is: "*Cornelia Africani f(ilia)/Gracchorum <mater>*"; cf. Coarelli 2008, 358; Valentini 2009, 196-201.

[34] On Augustus' political and cultural restoration, cf. e.g. Zanker 1988, 33-166; Taylor, Rinne and Kostof 2016, 43-51.

[35] Roberts 2007, 858.

The most evident example of this intervention is the issue of the *Leges Iuliae* (18-17 BC) and the *Lex Papia Poppaea* (9 BC), whereby a system of rewards and punishments was established: illegal unions and adulteries were punished; the unmarried and childless (*caelibes* and *orbi*) were hindered in their capacity to inherit, while families with three or more children received the *ius trium liberorum* ("right of three children"), consisting of privileges for the political career of the man/father and providing the woman/mother with a sort of financial autonomy.[36] This focus on family and parenthood was also mirrored by the structure of the imperial household, as well as certain honorary titles that Augustus attributed to himself and his wife, Livia. While Augustus designated himself as *pater patriae*, Livia was celebrated as *uxor*, *mater* of the state (Tac. *Ann*. 1.14.1; Svet. *Tib*. 50.2-3), and the *patrona* (a word that comes from the same etymology as *pater*) of local communities. This is proven by the construction, in many Roman settlements and colonies, of statues portraying her as a *parens* and protector of cities or guilds.[37] On the one hand, Augustus' preoccupation with motherhood and procreation has thus been said to have provided 'mothers' with more power and autonomy than they used to have during the Republican period;[38] on the other hand, this autonomy was controlled, encircled and determined by the political authority and regulations of the *pater patriae* Augustus – that is, by 'the Law of the Father' (of the state), to put it in Lacanian terms. Women's autonomy and status were therefore directly related to their performance as (good) mothers: they were valued for their procreative function, and surely not appreciated as women per se.[39]

[36] It seems that Augustus (then still Octavian) had tried to introduce this new legislation in 28 BC already (cf. Propertius' reference to a *lex sublata* at 2.7.1; Hor. *Carm*. 3.24.17-41); for further bibliography, cf. Treggiari 1991, 277-278.

[37] See Hemelrijk 2012, 201-220; Woodhull 2012, 225-251; Brännstedt 2016, 91-136; for an overview of Livia Drusilla, wife of Augustus, cf. the works of Bartman 1999, Barrett 2002 and Brännstedt 2016.

[38] Milnor 2005, 1 and 3: "In the Augustan period, we find women [...] who are able to take on real and important roles in the civic sphere, without compromising their perceived performance of 'traditional' domestic virtues. [...] Women as the focal point of domestic sphere had an important role to play in the new vision of Roman society".

[39] Cf. above, n. 29; McAuley 2020, 28.

Besides these legal arrangements, Augustus also promoted moral regeneration more widely in the public sphere through the construction or restoration of symbolic buildings, the erection of statues (as we have seen), as well as by encouraging literary production that supported his policy. One very famous and well-acknowledged example of a symbolic building is the Ara Pacis Augustae ("The Altar of Augustan Peace"), whose construction was started on the 4th July 13 BC[40] and ended on the 30th January 9 BC.[41] Beyond representing a symbol of the religious and moral restoration of Rome carried out by Augustus, the Altar also emphasised his role as *Pontifex Maximus* ("Highest Priest"), which he had acquired after Lepidus' death in 12 BC. Furthermore, the lower frieze of the Altar, decorated with acanthus scrolls that ran along the entire precinct, together with the upper panels, particularly the so-called "Tellus relief",[42] was intended as an open reference to procreation, regeneration and wealth.[43]

In terms of literary production, two examples stand out as being prominent in relation to Augustus' propaganda: the fourth of the *Eclogues*, which celebrates the advent of a *puer* bringing a new Golden Age, characterised by peace and wealth; and Horace's *Carmen saeculare*, which was composed in 17 BC for the opening of a new *saeculum* of prosperity, marked by the celebration of the *Ludi Saeculares* ("Games of the Century").[44] Although the theme of Rome's restoration and wealth emerges throughout the poem, lines 13-20 are particularly instructive for their emphasis on reproduction and procreation.

[40] The construction of the Ara Pacis started after Augustus had recently returned from the campaigns in Gaul and Spain, and therefore shows his intention to preserve peace throughout the whole Empire (see *RGDA* 12); for Augustus' cultural policy, see Zanker 1988, 101-238.

[41] Perhaps not coincidentally, the 30th of January was Livia's birthday; on the Ara Pacis, see Moretti 1973; Koeppel 1987, 101-157; Torelli 1999, 70-74; Rossini 2006.

[42] For the identification of this figure, see e.g. Schaefer 1959, 288-301; Zanker 1988, 173; Galinsky 1992, 457-475; Spaeth 1994, 65-100; La Rocca 2008, 211-224.

[43] For an analysis of the acanthus' frieze, cf. Pollini 1993, 181-217, and Caneva's work on the "botanic code of Augustus" (2010).

[44] Cf. Martino 2005-2006, 217-228; besides the volume of Schnegg-Köhler (2002), for the *Ludi Saeculares*, see e.g. Šterbenc Erker 2018, 377-404; Beard, North and Price 1998, 205.

rite maturos aperire partus
lenis, Ilithyia, tuere matres,
sive tu Lucina probas vocari 15
seu Genitalis.

diva, producas subolem patrumque
prosperes decreta super iugandis
feminis prolisque novae feraci
lege marita ...[45] 20

(Hor. *Carm. saec*. 13-20)

The goddess of childbirth, who can be identified with the pantheon deity Diana (the Greek Artemis), and in this context is indicated with three names, *Ilithyia* (14), *Lucina* (15) and *Genitalis* (16), is asked to bring forth offspring (*producas subolem*, 17). After linking procreation with the senators, or more specifically with the "decrees of the senators" (*patrum ... decreta*, 17-18), the poet refers to Augustan legislation on marriages for women (cf. *iugandis feminis*, 18-19) and the generation of children (19-20): *prolis novae feraci / lege marita* (cf. the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*). While *patres* is a very common way to refer to the senators in Latin, the expression *patrum ... decreta* linguistically recalls the 'patriarchal' control of the 'fathers', and of the 'father' Augustus, over female procreation. Through the open encouragement of legal relationships and childbirth, these lines translate certain key aspects of Augustus' family policy into text.

This historical survey shows how crucial motherhood is to navigate socio-political, as well as cultural and literary, aspects of the Augustan period. As we have said, motherhood enhanced the status of a Roman woman but was still inscribed in and controlled by a society ruled by the 'fathers'. The idea of motherhood as a means for women's deployment and quasi-enslavement to the dynamics of a patriarchal system is a well-acknowledged view and conforms to certain (old-fashioned) positions of the feminist movement. The revaluation of the maternal experience was first catalysed by

[45] The Latin text is from Rudd 2004.

Irigaray's and Kristeva's works, increasingly politicised from the late '90s, and more recently applied to women's subjective perception of their corporeality (e.g. Grosz, Braidotti, Ettinger).[46] Building upon this revaluation, the next chapters demonstrate that in the ancient world, and more particularly in Ovid's *Heroides*, motherhood could also become a tool for women to increase their agency – instead of enhancing their reification and belonging to their male counterparts. With this, I do not wish to argue that motherhood should always be seen in a positive light, i.e. as an opportunity for women's self-empowerment. Yet a more in-depth reading of the *Heroides* reveals that it could serve as a means to strengthen the heroines' subversive discourse, as well as the formation of their self-identity. The heroines sometimes benefit from such a profoundly transformed and rhetorically manipulated idea of motherhood as to gain a higher level of autonomy and authority, and a role in society. As we shall see to some extent with Dido in *Her*. 7 (Chapter 4), her potential, rhetorically constructed, pregnancy (133-138) serves to enhance her heroic status and to diminish that of Aeneas. Providing women with the opportunity to take control of the political career of their sons, motherhood in some cases led them to gain more influence than they previously had, as well as legitimating their decisions, both in the familial and social sphere (cf. e.g. Sen. *Helv*. 16.2; 18.6).[47] Such an agency characterises Penelope in *Her*. 1 (Chapter 1), who takes advantage of her responsibilities as a mother to act as the master of the house, and ruler of Ithaca, thereby replacing Ulysses.

Through her motherhood, therefore, a woman may have been able to acquire a rather active and quasi-male role, as well as masculine qualities, such as *virtus*, consistency, austerity and self-control.[48] These qualities, pertaining mainly to men, were attributed to

[46] See e.g. Grosz 1994; Braidotti 2002; 2017, 21-48; Ettinger 1992, 176-208, and 2010, 1-24.

[47] See Dixon 1988, 41-70.

[48] Cf. Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, already mentioned (Tac. *Dial*. 28); Procilla, mother of Agricola (Tac. *Agr*. 4); see also Seneca's *Consolatio ad Helviam*, where maternal virtue is described as a male quality and Seneca praises his mother for her *pudicitia*, her ability to sustain grief without complaining

good wives and mothers who appeared particularly virtuous vis-à-vis allegedly less virtuous women, who could be stigmatised simply because of their excessive ambition and sexual freedom. To these women, more stereotypically *feminine* features were attributed, such as levity, weakness, and inconsistency.[49] Bad wives or mothers were depicted as adulterous, unchaste, selfish, ambitious and violent, and were said to behave irrationally and instinctively.[50] Well-known historical examples are Messalina and Agrippina,[51] whereas in literature the most (in)famous instances are probably Phaedra and Medea, who also feature in the *Heroides*. A passionate, ambitious, resolute woman was considered to have illegitimately taken on the role usually attributed to a man.[52] This allegedly wicked, almost perverted motherhood is what gives Ovid's Phaedra (*Her*. 4), Deianira (*Her*. 9) and Medea (*Her*. 12) the opportunity to free their voices and challenge the patriarchal, well-established authority. The reference to this coexistence of (allegedly) masculine and feminine attitudes within women calls for some clarification at this point on my use of gender categories and definitions.

Although words like man/woman, male/female and masculine/feminine have been hitherto, and will be, widely used in this study, I side with the most recent works on gender and sexuality in Antiquity that have shown how gender roles were perpetually

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excessively (*Helv*. 16.2), and her generosity in helping her son in his career (*Helv*. 18.6); see e.g. Fantham 2004-2005, 113-124; Gloyn 2011, 14-47.

[49] For the opposition between the *severitas ac disciplina* of exemplary wives/mothers (Liv. 2.40-41; Plut. *Cor*. 33-36; Cic. *Brut*. 211; Tac. *Dial*. 28; Plut. *Ti. Gr*. 1; *C. Gr*. 19) and the abjection of the wicked ones (e.g. Medea, Phaedra and Cicero's Sassia in the *Pro Cluentio*; cf. Ige 2003, 45-57; Richlin 1992b, 97), see e.g. Treggiari 1991, 262-319, and 2005, 130-147.

[50] Rawles and Natoli 2014, 342: "Women who actively sought out control of a sexual encounter were described as unnaturally aggressive". Famous examples of misogynistic invectives can be found in Juvenal's satires (cf. 2, 6 and 9), but attacks against allegedly lascivious and luxurious women are rather frequent throughout Latin literature, from Sallust's Sempronia (*Cat*. 25), to Cicero's Clodia (*Cael*. 33; cf. Cat. 8.14-19; 70), to Horace's Cleopatra (*Carm*. 1.37.20-32). Cleopatra, in particular, was masculinised in Augustus' propaganda, whereas Antony was feminised (cf. Jones 2012, 165-184).

[51] For Agrippina, cf. e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 12.66; Cass. Dio 61.34; Svet. *Claud*. 44; Barrett 1996, *passim*; Deline 2015, 766-772; for Messalina, cf. Tac. *Ann*. 11.37-38; Juv. 6.114-132; Svet. *Claud*. 26-40; Questa 1995, 399-423; Joshel 1997, 221-254; Keegan 2004, 99-148.

[52] This sort of maleness was even more emphasised if a woman was involved in a relationship with another woman. In the Roman world, such women were indicated as *tribades*, and they were thought to be sexually active: cf. Phaedr. 4.15.1; Sen. *Con*. 1.2.23; Mart. 7.67.1; *OLD* 1971, *s.v*. 'tribas'; Williams 1999, 211-215; Schachter 2015, 39-55.

redefined and "in the making", as well as going beyond the biological.[53] As I shall explain in more detail in the next section, I understand the dichotomies masculine-feminine and man-woman as loose definitions. Alongside terms like heteronormative or binary, these words articulate the divide between the actions which (those who were identified as) men were expected to perform and the actions which (those who were identified as) women were expected to perform. One of the main challenges of contemporary feminist theorists is precisely to find new notions that encompass the renewed perception of gender/s as in flux, non-binary, evolving, transforming, and fundamentally subjective concept/s.[54] By a critical analysis and re-interpretation of the *Heroides*, this work endorses and defends gender fluidity, the instability of gender categories, as well as challenging a binary view of social relationships, both in Antiquity and in the present; however, it cannot forgo, for reasons of clarity and specificity, the use of widely acknowledged, and recognisable, definitions. This does not mean that these concepts are used uncritically, but that their application is functional to their displacement, destabilisation, re-interpretation and re-semantisation.

Having shed light on the historical context, it is now beneficial to briefly explain how my work is situated within the latest developments of motherhood studies, and how it engages with the most recent scholarship on motherhood within classical authors. As for the former, we have seen that not only was motherhood important in the ancient world, but also that it has occupied a central place in the contemporary feminist debate. On the one hand, I support the idea that motherhood has the potential to enhance a revaluation

[53] For gender identity in Rome as a social construct "perpetually in the making", cf. Gleason 1995, XXVI, *passim*; also Gunderson 2000, *passim*; for gender fluidity in elegy, see James 2003, 7-12 (155-211 for Ovid's *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*).

[54] Besides Butler's fundamental works at the beginning of the '90s (particularly, *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990, and *Bodies That Matter* from 1993), see Grosz 1993, 167-179; Braidotti 2002, 24-25, 32, 37-39, 103; Fine 2011, for a psychological and sociological approach; Fineman 2013, 16, for a legal approach; Fine, Dupré and Joel 2017, for a psychoanalytical approach: "Similarly, although at the population level there are differences between women and men in a variety of behavioral and psychological characteristics, most humans have a mosaic of both feminine and masculine characteristics, rather than segregating into two categories, or aligning on a masculinity-femininity continuum" (670).

of women's subjectivity and the construction of an independent self-identity by advocating for a materialistic return to the female body.[55] On the other hand, I am also deeply aware of the most recent shifts in the conception of motherhood, which is intertwined with an increasingly non-binary and fluid perception of gender relationships. Motherhood is attaining a more flexible and malleable definition, which can encompass diverse forms of parental experience, such as surrogacy or adoption for homosexual (or, more broadly, LGBTQ^{+}) couples.[56] The question of 'what makes a mother a mother' is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago, when it was addressed by, for instance, Phaedrus in one of his fables (3.15). Within this, a dog urges a lamb to look for his mother among the sheep, instead of the goats (*inter capellas*, 1) as he was doing. The lamb replies that he does not consider his mother as the one who gave birth to him, but the one who nurtured and took care of him, and concludes by saying *facit parentes bonitas, non necessitas* ("parenthood is about love, not about blood relationship"; 18). By incorporating popular beliefs and folkloric tradition, the fable mirrors a fairly fluid idea of parenthood within Roman society, which also found many expressions in everyday practice: cf. e.g. imperial adoption or, conversely, the exposure of infants.[57] The question as to whether motherhood is about blood, love or social conventions will be addressed again in the first part of Chapter 2, which focuses on Phaedra (and Hippolytus) in *Her*. 4.

The interest that has been shown towards motherhood in recent feminist discussions, as well as in certain fields of the Humanities and Social Sciences,[58] has led this topic to

[55] See above, n. 46.

[56] For example, for UK current legislation on this topic, cf. "Surrogacy Act" (1985), "Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act" (2008), "Marriage Same Sex Couple Act" (2013).

[57] Among the most recent studies on adoption in Ancient Rome, see Lindsay 2011, 346-360; Davenport and Mallan 2014, 637-668; Maas 2016, 175-185; for exposure, see e.g. Zelyck 2017, 37-54; Cooper 2007, 3-33; Barry 2008, 222-246.

[58] Besides the volume *Motherhood in Literature and Culture* (2018), edited by Rye, Browne, Giorgio, Jeremiah and Six, cf. e.g. Ettinger 2010, 1-24, for motherhood in visual art; Heritier 1999, for motherhood in anthropological studies; Maclean 1994, for a socio-linguistic study of motherhood; cf. Keith, McAuley and Sharrock 2020, 14-17.

undergo some diffusion within classical scholarship, as demonstrated by the recently published *Maternal Conceptions in Classical Literature and Philosophy*.[59] In the introduction to the volume, Alison Keith, Mairéad McAuley and Alison Sharrock pointedly show how research on mothers can benefit the study of classical mythology and ancient history, wherein mothers, along with fathers, feature in foundational myths, historical accounts and material culture. While identifying the role of women (and mothers) within the ancient world has not always been a priority for classical scholars (to speak somewhat euphemistically), the feminist movement, and particularly second-wave feminism, has compelled classicists to pay more attention to the role of women and mothers in Antiquity.[60]

Concerning the Roman world more specifically, aside from the works tackling motherhood historically (see above), the presence of motherhood within Latin literature has been explored most recently by Anthony Augoustakis' *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic* and Mairéad McAuley's *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and Statius*.[61] While Augoustakis mainly focuses on motherhood in Flavian poetry, particularly Statius' *Thebaid*, Mairéad McAuley offers new insights into the implications of 'seeking the mothers' across four selected Latin authors, namely Vergil, Ovid, Seneca and Statius.[62] Mairéad McAuley's gender-based analysis mainly builds on more 'traditional' feminist writers, such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler, as well as most recent theorists like Adriana Cavarero, Rosi Braidotti or Patrice Di Quinzio, to name but a few.[63] While my work is deeply indebted to Mairéad McAuley's pioneering study and gladly converses with its results, it also differs from it in two main aspects. First, it deals specifically with the

[59] Cf. Sharrock and Keith 2020.
[60] Keith, McAuley and Sharrock 2020, 3-25.
[61] Augoustakis 2010 and McAuley 2016; see also Clayton 1999, 69-84; Gold 2006, 165-188; Lateiner 2006, 189-202; Gladhill 2012, 159-168.
[62] McAuley 2016, 1-52.
[63] Cf. DiQuinzio 1999; Cavarero 2000; Braidotti 2002, 2013; also Mazzoni 2002.

Heroides, instead of a diverse body of texts and authors, with the implication that the specificity of this work (a high degree of ambiguity; interplay with previous sources; references to the contemporary context; polyphony; coexistence of literary genres) plays an important role in the interpretation of the heroines' motherhood. Second, I tend to apply a very limited set of theories (often with a prevalent one) to each heroine, or epistle, and explain the value of my choice case by case. Besides this case-by-case explanation, my theoretical and methodological approach is described in more detail in the following section.

Theoretical framework: the *Heroides* and their 'gender trouble'

It should be clear by now that motherhood is the cornerstone of this study. While motherhood has never been considered as the pivotal hermeneutical tool to examine the (Ovidian) heroines, this would not be the first attempt to apply modern theory to the *Heroides*, as we have seen in particular with Efi Spentzou's and Sara Lindheim's volumes. These works are extremely helpful in offering new insights into the *Heroides* and successfully engaging with modern theory; however, they also give rise to certain issues concerning the use of theory to investigate ancient texts. The most compelling among these is whether we can label a literary work produced two thousand years ago according to our contemporary categories, and evaluate historical processes that happened in such a distant context from that which we are used to.

As a first, though somewhat simplistic, point, one can say that human attitudes and behaviours have always been characterised by certain repeated patterns, regardless of their particular historical and geographical context: if the circumstances change, these patterns will change accordingly, albeit always consistently and predictably with respect to the context. So, for instance, the response to unrequited love or an unhappy relationship would be characterised by the same main features throughout time and

space, while still being affected by different concomitant conditions. These conditions, however, are accidental; the substantial elements will remain unchanged. A study of the context should therefore help us to understand why certain reactions or responses have developed, but a different context does not prevent us from applying the same interpretative framework to similar phenomena. In other words, and more substantially, one may argue that contemporary psychological categories, anthropological and social models, or gender theories can be legitimately applied to the reactions of the abandoned heroines in Ovid's *Heroides*. This approach does not imply that the literary or historical context is overlooked. Although the context may appear very different from ours, the study of this context cooperates with more recent theories to uncover unexplored angles of the text. This Terentian-flavoured argument that since we are humans, "nothing that pertains to humans is extraneous to *us*" (*homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*; Ter. *Haut*. 77) may not be enough to justify the deployment of certain theories to explore the *Heroides*. Moreover, the epigraph to this introduction will claim that (the Terentian) *homo* does not truly encompass humanity, that is to say that nobody can reconstruct someone else's subjective experience. While this argument surely does not suffice, it is nonetheless a good start.

If applying, for instance, gender theory to the *Heroides* may be considered anachronistic, this issue affects also other methodologies and approaches. With respect to Ovid's poetry, for instance, we have seen in the last decades the extensive application of the often abused, but now widely acknowledged, intertextuality.[64] However, intertextuality is also a modern category and cannot be said to be *intrinsic* or *peculiar* to Ovidian or, more generally, ancient texts. Nonetheless, intertextuality is now considered as a familiar, traditional, and well-established hermeneutical tool to explore Ovidian works – and, as we have seen, one that has given very fruitful outcomes (see above, V).

[64] Cf. above, n. 14.

As for other similar examples, a psychological interpretation of many Euripidean characters, or an anthropological approach to Greek and, more recently Roman religion, has now become fairly conventional.[65] Despite this conventionality, it is widely acknowledged that each of these approaches is not unproblematic: how can we know whether an ancient poet was consciously referring to previous works, or that some other mechanisms (memory; oral tradition) were in place?[66] How can we be sure that certain psychological or anthropological models are valid cross-culturally and trans-historically? The fact that we cannot be certain should not mean we disregard these questions or embrace an aporetic position; otherwise, it would no longer make sense to study ancient texts. These questions simply make us realise that the study of ancient texts can be tackled from different perspectives and through various methodologies.[67]

Concerning gender-informed approaches, it is certainly important to acknowledge that contemporary concepts related to gender and gender studies, such as binarism, heteronormativity, patriarchy, 'Law of the Fathers' and phallogocentrism,[68] which will be addressed fairly frequently throughout this work, are recent coinages. Accordingly, these terms cannot be imposed wholesale upon the ancient world but need to be reassessed in light of a different historical context. While it is indeed crucial to keep in mind that there are differences between the contemporary and the ancient world, it is likewise important to note that certain aspects of the Greco-Roman world may be profitably compared to, and help us to understand, certain criticalities (such as heterogeneity, fluidity in the subject-object relationship, and the blurring of gender, as

[65] Cf. e.g. Lawrence 1988, 91-109; Pedrick 2007; Weiss 2008, 39-50; Burkert 1983; Stowers 1995, 293-333; also Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988.

[66] For instance, in a seminal work for our understanding of allusivity within Latin literature, Conte (1986) speaks of "poetic memory".

[67] Cf. DuBois 1995, 18, on her own use of Lacan to interpret ancient texts; on "queer unhistoricism" applied to the Classics, cf. Matzner 2016, 179-202.

[68] For a definition of heteronormativity, as well as the related concepts of binarism and phallogocentrism, see Warner 1991, 3-17; also Rich 1980, 631-660; for the "Law of the Fathers", see Lacan 1997, 67, 218-219.

well as social, categories) of the contemporary social, cultural and gender debate.[69] Concerning gender fluidity in particular, the notion that gender roles in Antiquity were continuously redefined and went beyond the biological mirrors certain contemporary theorisations on gender identities, from Butler's gender performativity to the posthuman feminist conceptions of gender as flux, which stand as the theoretical foundation of Chapter 3, for instance.[70] Therefore, while acknowledging that Ovid surely did not describe reality or produce literature by relying on, and being aware of, our same categories, these categories – and the means to dismantle or escape from them – have always existed to some extent, and have only been given a definition, or been problematised, in more recent years.

On a similar note, drawing from Barthes' and Derrida's post-structuralism, I believe that, once it has been *released*, the text no longer entirely belongs to the author.[71] The various readers, and their various interpretations, contribute to giving new form and meaning to it. As the final lines of the *Metamorphoses* suggest (15.875-869), what allows the survival of the author is not simply his literary work, but rather the fact that this work, which Ovid identifies with himself, will be read (*ore legar populi ... vivam*; 878-879). That Ovid will be read throughout the ages implies not only Ovid's survival, but also a transformation of the book itself. Building on the idea of the text as a living, malleable, and ever-changing organism that is continuously shaped by the intervention

[69] For a discussion about the problematic application of modern labels (e.g. heterosexual, heteronormative, homosexual) to the ancient world, see Williams 1999, 4-5. More recently, in an edited volume about transgender dynamics in Antiquity, Carlà-Uhink 2017, while acknowledging that 'transgender' is a contemporary concept, states that "nonetheless, in Classical Antiquity, it is possible to identify forms of behaviour and action which might fall into our modern category of transgender" (3). Carlà-Uhink also adds that an analysis of the behaviours which may be classified according to the contemporary category of transgender "highlights ... aspects of ancient sexuality which otherwise would be only partially visible" (4).

[70] See Butler 1990 and 1993; Braidotti 2002, 2013 and 2017; also Haraway 1997.

[71] Cf. Barthes 1975, Derrida 1976; on the application of this post-structuralist approach to the Classics, see Batstone 2006, 14-20; Martindale 2006, 1-13.

and interpretation of the reader,[72] one may say that Ovid's work (and every work of literature) is re-interpreted, re-created and rewritten as many times as it is read.[73] The application of this idea to the *Heroides* suggests that these epistles may have been received and re-interpreted by their contemporary or future readers. Many of these readers could have looked at them from a female perspective, as well as considering them as an expression of feminine writing.[74] Among other things, this study should also pave the way for each reader to (re-)interpret these letters according to their own sensibility.

If we can now appreciate why modern theory is fruitful to explore the *Heroides*, one fundamental question still needs a more specific answer: what does this have to do with motherhood? We have seen how important motherhood was in Augustan Rome, but how does this central role interact with modern ideas about motherhood? Within feminist writing, motherhood is depicted both as a form of subjective *jouissance* of the female (maternal) body and as a pleasure that has to be repressed by the patriarchal system. In particular, the figure of Electra, who kills her mother Clytemnestra to avenge her father, is the most extreme representation of a woman who does not tolerate the *jouissance* of motherhood.[75] Electra, the Greek tragic heroine, stands as an *exemplum* for every woman who wants to escape her condition, namely the demand for her to be(come) a mother. As we shall see in our analysis of the *Heroides*, motherhood is

[72] Cf. e.g. Barthes 1975, 14: "On the stage of the text, no footlights: there is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader); there is not a subject and an object. The text supersedes grammatical attitudes: it is the undifferentiated eye which an excessive author (Angelus Silesius) describes: 'The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which He sees me'".

[73] See Kirichenko 2019, 315-321.

[74] As for potential female readers of Ovid, there is evidence of the existence, throughout the imperial period, of literary circles that included educated women: cf. e.g. Hemelrijk 1999; Hallett 2002a, 421-424, and 2002b, 45-65; James 2003, 71-107, on the *docta puella*. In terms of reception, Ovid himself suggests at *Am.* 2.18.27-34 that his *Heroides* provoked a direct response and reinterpretation from Sabinus. Concerning the contemporary response to the *Heroides*, it is worth mentioning Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* and Clare Pollard's *Ovid's Heroines*. Among the studies focusing more generally on the reception of the *Heroides*, see the works from Hexter 1986 and McKinley 2001; also Harvey 1989, 115-138, on the (pseudo-)Ovidian *Her.* 15.

[75] Moi 1986, 138-139.

sometimes rejected (Medea), or at other times reshaped (Phaedra) and re-appropriated (Hypsipyle), or even exploited (Penelope) by the heroines. Through this construction of their motherhood, the (Ovidian) heroines challenge traditional gender categories and enhance their subversive discourse. Motherhood makes these heroines troublemakers.

This (gender) trouble within the *Heroides* may also be read as an articulation of Ovid's subversive discourse against the contemporary political authority, i.e. the Augustan principate. Ovid proved in many cases to be less than eager to promote or even to agree with Augustus' family policy, as can be seen in particular in the *Ars Amatoria*.[76] Therefore, Ovid does not simply ventriloquise these heroines, he also cooperates with them. Through the adoption of marginalised voices that speak from the 'distaff side', Ovid may well have masked his mockery of current Augustan policies and questioned the consistency, and validity, of the Roman political, social and legal system as a whole. Such a polyphonic and complex background makes the heroines' discourse contradictory, ambiguous, *queer* (in the broadest sense this word implies).[77] The *Heroides* are thus characterised by a continuous alternation between acceptance and refusal of the role that the heroines are supposed to play: between passivity and activity, autonomy and dependence, strength/violence and weakness; and, to put it in Kristevan terms, the cyclical and linear time of history.[78] This contradictory nature of the epistles, which engenders many interpretative possibilities, is the reason why the *Heroides* have been read in such different, often contrasting, ways by previous scholars. Accordingly, the heroines have been depicted either as mere puppets (Lindheim 2003) or, conversely,

[76] The *Ars Amatoria*, whose date of composition falls between 1 BC and 1 CE, is acknowledged to be a very provocative text towards Augustus' family policy, since it seems to promote a sort of relaxed morality and to diverge from Augustus' principles about parenthood, legal marriages and the punishment of adultery (see e.g. Ziogas 2016, 213-240). In particular, the *Ars Amatoria* is mentioned by Ovid himself as the *carmen* that, along with his *error*, led to his banishment (cf. Ov. *Tr*. 2.207: *perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error*); see Green 1982, 202-220; Ingleheart 2006, 64-86; Hinds 2007, 194-220; Ingleheart 2010, 1-7; 200-205.

[77] When using the adjective "queer" to refer to classical texts, I build upon recent scholarship that endorses a fluid conception of Antiquity, in terms of gender, temporal and spatial borders (cf. e.g. Matzner 2016, 179-202).

[78] Cf. Moi 1986, 187.

as early, yet problematic, examples of *écriture feminine* (Fulkerson 2005), as we have seen. By using motherhood as my primary hermeneutical tool, I attempt to find a balance between these opposing views. This survey should demonstrate that the coincidence of opposites (opposite genders, genres, attitudes) is exactly what makes the *Heroides* unique, as well as being a key to interpreting sexual and gender issues, both in Augustan and contemporary times.

Outline of chapters

Focusing on *Her*. 1, Chapter 1 examines Penelope's relationship with Telemachus to show how motherhood serves the heroine's appropriation of a central role within her household. By taking advantage of Ulysses' prolonged absence from Ithaca, Penelope accentuates her responsibilities as a parent of Telemachus, thereby increasing her independent agency within the family and realm. One reading of this epistle vis-à-vis the contemporary social and legal context reveals Penelope's hint at Augustan legislation, which is recalled through linguistic choices and expressions that belong to the legal lexicon. By manipulating well-known, and recently institutionalised, legal concepts, Penelope legitimates her status not only as the mother of Telemachus, but also as a master of the house, a sort of Roman *paterfamilias*. While Penelope's motherhood is further investigated through Adrienne Rich's theorisations on the relationship between the mother and her male child, the veiled conflict between the heroine and her son is explored through Julia Kristeva's reception and re-elaboration of Freudian and Lacanian theories concerning the Oedipal complex.[79]

Moving on to incestuous motherhood, Chapter 2 deals with Phaedra (*Her*. 4) and Canace (*Her*. 11). While Phaedra's motherhood is mainly explored through narrative and visual theory (Cavarero; Mulvey and Doane in particular), Canace's illicit

[79] Cf. e.g. Kristeva 1982 and Moi 1986.

pregnancy is analysed through Kristeva's abjection.[80] Canace's fluctuating attitude towards her childbirth articulates her struggle between the rejection of a part of her body that she perceives as 'abject' and the re-appropriation of her corporeality. This re-appropriation is finally achieved through the writing of her epistle, whereby the body of the text overlaps with the (dead) body of her child. Writing is also a powerful means of self-expression for Phaedra in *Her*. 4. Through her epistle, Phaedra skilfully portrays Hippolytus as effeminate, reconstructing and modifying their shared mythological narrative by presenting herself as the most authoritative (and only) source for their story, eventually re-interpreting the meaning of her (step-)motherhood.[81]

Although it also incorporates Kristeva's and Irigaray's theories, Chapter 3 mainly draws from Butler's gender performativity to explore Deianira (*Her*. 9), as well as from Braidotti's posthuman feminism to analyse Medea's motherhood (*Her*. 12).[82] By emphasising Hercules' effeminacy through the detailed description of his cross-dressing in Lydia, as well as his (erotic) enslavement by Iole, Deianira attributes to him feminine attitudes and performative acts. In this way, she strengthens her active agency within her narrative and presents herself to her son Hyllus (who, as I argue, is the implied addressee of her epistle) as the legitimate substitute of the male hero, thereby justifying her allegedly accidental murder of Hercules. Medea's (predicted) infanticide, by contrast, is an expression of her fluctuation between genders and literary genres, her maternal love and her thirst for revenge. By lingering in this suspension, Medea unsettles traditional dichotomies and constructs her self-identity as a female

[80] Mulvey 1989; Doane 1982; Cavarero 2000; Kristeva 1982.

[81] The choice of writing '(step-)motherhood' with 'step-' in brackets is due to the peculiar nature of Phaedra's relationship with Hippolytus: while Phaedra is not Hippolytus' biological mother, she could have been perceived as his legitimate mother from a legal point of view, as I shall explain in more detail in Chapter 2.

[82] Butler 1990 and 1993; Braidotti 2002.

(posthuman) subject-in-becoming, that is, as a subject perpetually in the making and self-definition, to put it in Braidotti's words.[83]

Finally, Chapter 4 explores Hypsipyle's and Dido's letters (*Her*. 6 and 7) through the lens of Ettinger's recent theorisations on the maternal body and narrative theory (Barthes; Cavarero; De Lauretis), respectively.[84] Ettinger's notion of a matrixial border-space as a site of formation for female subjectivity is particularly instructive to navigate Hypsipyle's relationship with her pregnant body and children. By distancing and then re-appropriating her maternal body, Hypsipyle re-incorporates motherhood into her subjective experience and distinguishes herself from other, 'external' subjects. The material experience of pregnancy is also pertinent to Dido in *Her*. 7, who changes the rhetorically constructed body of her potential foetus (7.133-134) in the body of the text, that is, the epistle she is writing. As both the potential mother of Aeneas' child and the actual mother, creator, and crafter of the text, Dido intervenes in her (Vergilian) narrative and recasts it.

This outline shows that the application of a specific theory or, in some cases, a body of theories to a particular heroine is determined by reasons of suitability and appropriateness. Theory is always applied according to the features of each epistle and aims at a deeper understanding of the text. In return, by engaging with modern theory, the ancient text provides new insights into contemporary feminist debate: the voices of these mythological women converse with contemporary issues concerning motherhood, female subjectivity, and gender identities. The choice of these seven heroines (Penelope, Phaedra, Canace, Deianira, Medea, Hypsipyle and Dido) is determined by the fact that motherhood plays a very prominent role in their letters – as the summary of the four chapters clearly shows. One may argue that Hermione's letter (*Her*. 8) is also

[83] Cf. e.g. Braidotti 2002, 118-120.
[84] Ettinger 2010; Barthes 1975; Cavarero 2000; De Lauretis 1984 and 2008.

characterised by the relationship with her mother Helen (cf. 21-24; 39-42; 79-80), and the letter from Helen herself (*Her*. 17) may also be investigated through the filter of motherhood. While the explanation for the exclusion of *Her*. 8 is more straightforward, insofar as Hermione's letter reflects her experience as a *daughter* of Helen and not as a mother (namely what is truly of interest to this study), the exclusion of Helen's letter requires a more articulated discussion, as well as addressing a more general issue. In my research, I have chosen not to deal with the so-called double *Heroides*, i.e. the six epistles (16-21) in which each heroine replies to a previous letter from her partner (Paris to Helen, Helen to Paris; Leander to Hero, Hero to Leander; Acontius to Cydippe, Cydippe to Acontius). As they are staged as responses to other letters, the three epistles written by the female heroines (*Her*. 17; 19; 21) are characterised by a range of motifs and issues that differ from those we find in *Heroides* 1-15, as scholars have rightfully noted.[85] The premises for an analysis of these epistles would therefore be fairly different from those which I have outlined in this introduction.

Similarly, I have excluded the *Epistula Sapphus* (or *Her*. 15) from this work and reserved it for separate analysis,[86] as it raises certain issues (a higher degree of polyphony; difficulty in identifying its sources; the complexity of its reception) that make it unique among the *Heroides*.[87] The question of authenticity and attribution to Ovid is not among these issues,[88] since Sappho's letter shares this question with many other epistles. While authenticity has been a significant matter of discussion in many studies concerning the *Heroides*,[89] this issue is not relevant to my work, which acknowledges both the coexistence of different 'authorial' voices within the collection

[85] Cf. e.g. Kenney 1979, 394-431; for a summary, see Knox 1986, 208, n. 4; Kenney 1996, 1-27.

[86] Cf. Martorana 2021a, forthcoming.

[87] See e.g. Lipking 1988, 67-70; DeJean 1989, 1-28; Gordon 1997, 274-291; Bessone 2003, 209-243; Fabre-Serris 2009, 149-173.

[88] For an updated discussion, see Thorsen 2014, 96-122.

[89] The reference to the *Heroides* at *Am*. 2.18.19-34 kicks off this debate; see e.g. Goold 1974, 475-484; Courtney 1965, 63-66, and 1998, 157-166; Reeve 1973, 324-338; Kenney 1979, 394-431; Lingenberg 2003.

and the weight of the (readers') reception for our understanding of these epistles. Moreover, granted that one or more letters may be considered spurious, it is still possible to acknowledge an Ovidian 'flavour' throughout their entire text, as the supposed imitator/s would surely have been aware of the most important motifs featuring in the epistles. Therefore, the interpretation of the heroines is not affected by their being Ovidian or non-Ovidian for two reasons: first, because they demonstrate, in many passages, a quasi-independent voice; second, because they also reproduce Ovidian accents and ironic discourse. The issues concerning authenticity will therefore be discussed individually, if needs be, but this will not affect my understanding of the letters. In a similar way, questions that regard the sequence of the epistles or the letter openings, which have been central to the scholarly debate for many years,[90] shall be addressed only on a case-by-case basis as they appear relevant to my discussion.[91]

Leaving aside the search for the *auctor* – both "author" and "father" in Latin – of these elegiac epistles, in the next chapters we shall therefore be looking for the 'mothers' and to some extent forget about the authority, or the 'father', of these poems. The mothers are central and essential to this research on the *Heroides*, not to mention all research concerning Ovidian poetry, Augustan literature, Augustan Rome and – dare we say it – perhaps the history of literature, philosophy, thought, and humanity at large. Equally, the mothers have been long forgotten or, more often, silenced throughout history, and this is even more true of the women generically addressed as 'mothers', buried by the patriarchal construction, or reification, of motherhood. As I said at the beginning of this introduction, by 'seeking the women' we are surely not embarking on an easy journey, since for so many centuries (the history of) *Man has included women*

[90] For the sequence of the epistles, see e.g. Dörrie 1972; Jacobson 1974, 407-409; Pulbrook 1977, 29-45; Knox 1995, 11-12.

[91] Abbreviations for ancient sources follow those reported by the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*; journal titles follow the format of *L'Année Philologique* and, when not present there, are given in full. Finally, the text of the *Heroides* is based on Goold's revision of Showerman's Loeb (1977). Explanations for any divergences from the text printed in this edition will be provided in the footnotes.

too. But, like Rukeyser’s Sphinx, we can try to undertake this task nonetheless, to challenge this conception and listen to these female voices.

Chapter 1

A traditional *matrona*? Penelope between motherhood and heroism

"Nine months he sailed the wine-red seas of
his mother's blood
Out of the cave of dreaded Night, of
sleep,
Of troubling dreams he sailed
In his frail dark boat, the boat of himself,
Through the dangerous ocean of his vast
mother he sailed
From the distant cave where the threads of
men's lives are spun,
Then measured, and then cut short
By the Three Fatal Sisters, intent on their
gruesome handcrafts,
And the lives of women also are twisted
into the strand."
(Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad*)[1]

My study begins with Penelope's letter to Ulysses, which has been handed down to us as the first epistle of the *Heroides*.[2] Penelope is one of the most famous of the heroines and her story, which is first told in Homer's *Odyssey*, begins alongside the dawn of classical literature. Homer's Penelope is the main source of inspiration for Ovid's Penelope,[3] whose epistle is said to be just one of a long series of letters she wrote to Ulysses during his long absence (*Her*. 1.59-62).[4] As has been argued by Kennedy,[5] this letter can be imagined as having been written by Penelope at the very moment of Ulysses' arrival in Ithaca. Within the fictional universe of the *Heroides*, *Her*.

[1] Atwood 2005, 35.
[2] See Kennedy 2002, 217; Barchiesi 1992, 51-52; cf. also Jacobson 1974, 407-409; Knox 1995, 86-87.
[3] See Jacobson 1974, 243-276.
[4] See Drinkwater 2007, 370-372. On the unlikeliness that Penelope's epistle (and likewise the epistles of other heroines) could have actually reached their addressee, see Kennedy 1984, 417-419, and 2002, 220-222. At *Am*. 2.18.29-30, Ovid ironically alludes to the concrete difficulty of the letters' delivery by mentioning that both the recipients and the senders of the epistles could be located in many different and remote places (*quam cito de toto rediit meus orbe Sabinus / scriptaque diversis rettulit ille locis!*). For actual methods of letter delivery in the Roman world, particularly in the Augustan age, see e.g. Sarri 2017, 12-13.
[5] Kennedy 1984, 417; see also Barchiesi 1987, 63-64; Knox 1995, 18-19; 86-87; Casali 2017, 176.

1 is therefore written as the letter that is to be given by Penelope to Ulysses himself, who is disguised as a beggar, having recently arrived in Ithaca.

In terms of content, in her letter Penelope urges Ulysses to return to Ithaca as soon as possible, mentioning all the suffering that his prolonged absence is causing her (1-58), and complaining of the difficult situation she has to deal with: the suitors are trying to take control of the realm, while spoiling Ulysses' possessions (87-96); she is supported by neither the servants of the house nor the people of Ithaca (97-104); Ulysses' father, Laertes, is too old to oppose the suitors and has decided to retire to the countryside (105-106); her son, Telemachus, is still a *puer* (98) and is unable to rule without the protection and support of his father (107-112). In some respects, this letter can be read as part of the widespread literary and artistic tradition that views Penelope as the embodiment of an ideal faithful wife and devoted mother. In the view of some scholars, Ovid's Penelope merges previous epic tradition with the programmatic patterns of the *Heroides*: while still maintaining some of her Homeric and long-established epic features, the *faithful* Penelope is thus transformed into an elegiac lover.[6]

Building on this conflation, in the next sections I will show how Penelope's ambivalence is crucial to interpreting her motherhood within *Her*. 1 and to exploring the ironic content of her writing. Within the subjective narrative of her epistle, Penelope fluctuates across different roles: traditional *matrona*; elegiac *puella*; or, conversely, elegiac (male) poet, since Penelope represents the authorial voice of the epistle; and finally master of the house, as the (female) substitute for an absent Ulysses. This heterogeneity is particularly appreciable in the mother-son relationship between Penelope and Telemachus, which gives rise to certain peculiar intra-familial dynamics and psychological outcomes that will be explored within the following pages.

[6] Jacobson 1974, 243-276. On the originality of Ovid's (re)use of previous sources and mythological traditions in the *Heroides*, see Liveley 2008, 86-102; Barchiesi 1987, 63-90; Drinkwater 2007, 369, maintains that Ovid provides "fresh perspectives on mythological stories while respecting their original framework".

1.1. Sources and context: the epic Penelope and 'the distaff side'

Although the *Odyssey* is the main source for *Her.* 1,[7] the Ovidian version of Penelope departs in some instances from that of Homer, as noted by previous scholars.[8] In the Homeric poem, Penelope appears as the perfect paradigm of a devoted wife and mother, who manages to resist the proposals of her suitors and take care of the household. This account inaugurates a long literary tradition wherein Penelope is presented as an embodiment of female virtue.[9] At the same time, many scholars agree on the existence of a few (mainly Greek) deviant sources from this paradigm, which depict her as a degenerate and unreliable woman. In some of these accounts, she is portrayed as the mother of Pan, to whom she gave birth following an affair with Hermes;[10] some authors maintain that she either fell in love with Amphinomus, a suitor who was subsequently killed by Ulysses, or had sexual intercourse with all her suitors;[11] in other sources, Penelope is depicted as being unfaithful, and is said to have betrayed her husband and given birth while Ulysses was absent.[12]

Within Latin literature, by contrast, Penelope appears in most cases as a proverbial model of loyalty and virtue. Horace, for instance, compares his beloved's modesty with that of Penelope (*Carm.* 3.10.11) and Propertius contrasts Penelope with the shameless Roman girls (Prop. 2.6.23). Ovid himself refers to Penelope with varying tones: at *Ars* 1.477 (*Penelopen ipsam, persta modo, tempore vinces*), for instance, he relies on the

[7] Jacobson 1974, 243; see also Barchiesi 1992, 53; Knox 1995, 86.

[8] See e.g. Wilkinson 1955, 15; Baca 1969, 9-10; Jacobson 1974, 243-276; Barchiesi 1992, 53-55; for (the Ovidian) Penelope's manipulation of the *Odyssey*, see Casali 2017, 175-198.

[9] Cf. e.g. Thgn. 1126-1128; Eur. *Or.* 588-590; Ar. *Thesm.* 547-548; Prop. 2.6.23-24; 2.9.6-7; 3.12.23-37; Ov. *Am.* 3.4.23-30. For more complete references, see *RE* XIX 1.469-486 [Wüst]; for some hypotheses on other lost accounts of Penelope's narrative, such as Aeschylus' *Penelope*, a tragedy of Philocles and a comedy of Theopompus, see Jacobson 1974, 245-246.

[10] This account may have been influenced by the etymology of Penelope's name (note the assonance between 'Pan' and '*Pen*elope', which comes from the Greek word πηνέλοψ, "duck") and originates from very early Greek literature: see Pind. Fr. 100 Snell; see also Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.56; Hyg. *Fab.* 224.

[11] See, respectively, Duris of Samos (*FGrHist* 76F21) and Apollod. *Epit.* 7.39.

[12] Cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 7.35; Lyc. 771-773; 792; Comedy likely contributed to such a negative depiction of Penelope, but there is no substantial evidence in this respect.

chaste stereotype, while simultaneously undermining it with the ironic tone of seduction in which the poem itself is immersed; in the exile works, by contrast, Penelope is recalled as a positive comparison for his chaste wife.[13] By merging Homeric and non-Homeric aspects of Penelope, in the *Heroides* Ovid creates an extremely ambiguous character, giving rise to multiple interpretations of the epistle. Before focusing more specifically on Penelope's motherhood in *Her.* 1, it is worth mentioning some less traditional interpretations of the Homeric Penelope that have emerged, especially during the last two or three decades. Being informed by psychoanalytical as well as gender-based approaches, these readings can shed new light on Penelope's role as a wife and mother, as well as master of the house.

To begin with, the archetype of faithfulness and stability that Penelope provides has been read as being suitable to a male model of virtue, rather than a female.[14] This aspect emerges, for instance, from the similes Ulysses addresses to his wife during their first meeting at *Od.* 19.108-114 and 23.233-240: Penelope is, respectively, compared to a just king having ruled over his realm wisely and to a shipwrecked sailor finally approaching his homeland. These similes find their counterbalance in *Od.* 8.523-531, where Ulysses' weeping is linked to female mourning, and *Od.* 16.216-218, where Telemachus and Ulysses are said to lament at their reunion more than sea-eagles having lost their cubs.[15] According to Helene Foley, these kinds of similes generate a gender role reversal: Penelope's stability and strength in resisting the suitors can be considered to be a trial equally as demanding and challenging as the troubles and misfortunes

[13] Ov. *Tr.* 1.6.22; *Pont.* 3.1.113. The comparison with Ulysses is quite a recurrent topos in Ovid's exile works: in *Tr.* 1.2.9-16, for instance, Ovid refers to Ulysses' troubled journey, comparing it to a sea storm he experienced during his own journey to Tomis (on Ovid's use of epic models in *Tr.* 1.2, see Ingleheart 2006, 73-80).

[14] Penelope's fidelity finds its physical embodiment in the stability and fixity of the famous wooden bed Ulysses built, but even in this respect "a certain paradox remains in the unequal symmetry between identity and fidelity that dictates to each sex its defining terms" (Zeitlin 1995, 121).

[15] See Zeitlin 1995, 145: "Yet the theme of gender inversion recalls in turn the striking simile that described Odysseus' reaction to the bard's tale"; see also Morrison 2005, 73-89.

Ulysses underwent during his journey.[16] Therefore, the character of Penelope is placed at the same level as her husband, both with respect to the actual role they hold within the household and in terms of intellectual cunning and wisdom.

Other studies focus on Penelope's ambivalence,[17] defining it as an attitude that fluctuates between the constancy and determination associated with men,[18] and more traditional female features, such as her inability to make a definitive decision, her weakness and her lack of resolution.[19] Penelope's inconsistency is particularly denoted by her decision to remarry, choosing from among her suitors (*Od.* 18.250-258). This resolution appears justified by what Ulysses himself had suggested to his wife before leaving, namely that she should feel free to marry again once Telemachus has grown a beard (*Od.* 18.259-270; 19.571-581), and this is also encouraged by Athena's intervention (*Od.* 18.158-162). This change of mind, which occurs at the exact moment of Ulysses' return to Ithaca disguised as a beggar, has been also read as another trick planned by Penelope, after the more famous trick of the shroud (*Od.* 2.104-109), and before that of the marriage bed (*Od.* 23.174-180).[20] In this interpretation, having recognised her husband, Penelope prepares the ground for his successful revenge.[21]

[16] Foley 1978, 7-26; 1995, 93-115.

[17] See e.g. Katz 1991, 159.

[18] These aspects appear particularly exaggerated in, e.g. *Od.* 23.97-100, where Telemachus rebukes his mother, who is still hesitating to acknowledge Ulysses, for her ἀπηνέα θυμὸν ("cold/ungentle heart", 97) and for her τετληότι θυμῷ ("stubborn heart/mind", 100); on this, see Russo, Fernandez-Galiano and Heubeck 1992, 322-323. Mueller 2007, 337-362, interprets Penelope's constancy in her duties as a wife and mother as well as loyalty to Ulysses as examples of male *kleos*: this finds its main expression in Agamemnon's praise at *Od.* 24.192-202, which comes "near making our Odysseia a Penelopeia" (Finlay 1973, 3).

[19] In this respect, see e.g. *Od.* 2.126-127, where Telemachus remarks that his mother is not able to decide whether to remarry or not: Penelope's hesitation, however, can be also seen as a strategy for deferring the moment of her decision.

[20] The famous weaving trick in particular has been acknowledged to be a means for Penelope to express a "male's procreative capacity" and thereby supply her Freudian penis-envy (Bergen 1993, 13). According to Shoichet 2007, 24, the loom represents "female resistance to the mores of social patriarchy" and is connected with Penelope's ability to deceive.

[21] Foley 1995, 93-95, for instance, suggests that Penelope chooses remarriage in the best interests of her son; for some more recent observations on Penelope's remarriage, see Nünlist 2015, 2-24. Hölscher 1996, 137, argues that Penelope's fluctuation between remarrying and waiting for Ulysses articulates the coexistence of the cunning Penelope of the folktale and the faithful and sensible Penelope of the epic genre, as well as being an expression of the "interplay of consciousness and unconsciousness" (137).

Whether Penelope is aware of her husband's plans or not, in the aforementioned interpretations her cunning has been emphasised to a much greater degree than what is openly stated in the *Odyssey*, to the point that some scholars see her as the actual trickster of the poem, as well as a perfect female counterpart of Ulysses.[22] These interpretations anticipate the complexity of the Ovidian Penelope and pave the way to understanding her attitude towards her son in *Her.* 1, where certain features of the Homeric Penelope are either amplified or reshaped.[23]

At the beginning of the *Odyssey*, we find that Penelope, due to Ulysses' prolonged absence, is having a hard time dealing with her suitors and taking care of both the household and the realm. One of her main concerns is to protect her child from the suitors' claims to the realm, and from their subsequent attempt to murder him (*Od.* 4.816-823). Indeed, Telemachus still appears to Penelope as a little boy, a νήπιος (*Od.* 4.818), who is unprotected and inexperienced due to his father's absence – however, later in the poem Penelope does reluctantly admit that Telemachus has grown up (18.259-270; 19.530-534). In spite (or because) of Penelope's protective attitude, Telemachus behaves quite rudely towards his mother from the very beginning of the poem. In *Od.* 1.345-359, he rebukes Penelope for having complained about Phemius' song; he tells her to go back to her own work, i.e. spinning, and to refrain from interacting with the men who are banqueting, since speech (μῦθος) is something which pertains only to men (358-359).[24]

[22] Penelope is often depicted in terms of extraordinary mental abilities, which link her to Ulysses: the word *kleos*, "glory", is referred both to Ulysses (*Od.* 1.344; 9.20; 16.241) and Penelope (24.196-197); the adjective *empedos*, "steadfastly", usually attributed to men, is used both for Ulysses (*Od.* 11.152; 12.161), Penelope (11.178) and the marital bed, a symbol of fidelity (23.203). This affinity is exemplified in the kind of marriage Ulysses wishes for Nausicaa (*Od.* 6.181-185), based on *homophrosyne*; see Barnouw 2004, 25. Foley, 1995, 95, argues that Penelope "shares the value system of her man", but she can be deceitful and virtuous at the same time.

[23] For Telemachus' perspective on this relationship, see Felson-Rubin 1997, 67-91.

[24] On the episode, see Clark 2001, 335-354; see also Heubeck, West and Hainsworth 1988, 120-122; Heitman 2005, 34-5; for the Greek text, see Dimock 1919.

τὴν δ᾽ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα: 345
"μῆτερ ἐμή, τί τ᾽ ἄρα φθονέεις ἐρίηρον ἀοιδὸν
τέρπειν ὅππῃ οἱ νόος ὄρνυται; οὔ νύ τ᾽ ἀοιδοὶ
αἴτιοι, ἀλλά ποθι Ζεὺς αἴτιος, ὅς τε δίδωσιν
ἀνδράσιν ἀλφηστῇσιν, ὅπως ἐθέλῃσιν, ἑκάστῳ.
τούτῳ δ᾽ οὐ νέμεσις Δαναῶν κακὸν οἶτον ἀείδειν: 350
[...]
ἀλλ᾽ εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ᾽ αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε, 356
ἱστόν τ᾽ ἠλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· μῦθος δ᾽ ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ᾽ ἐμοί: τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ᾽ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

(Hom. *Od.* 1.345-350; 356-359)

This speech of Telemachus, which is an expression of the gendered spaces and roles within the *Odyssey*, is the most patent example of Telemachus' disrespectful attitude towards his mother.[25] Other examples include Telemachus' failure to notify his mother of his journey to Sparta and Pylos,[26] and his irreverent answer when Penelope announces she is willing to remarry and will set a bow contest to decree who is going to be her new husband (*Od.* 21.101-117).[27] This is in contrast to Telemachus' previous statement that he had neither dissuaded his mother from marrying again nor forced her to do so (*Od.* 2.129-145; 20.341-342). Telemachus' final reproach to Penelope is for not having welcomed Ulysses sooner after revealing his identity (*Od.* 23.96-103).

This attitude of Telemachus towards Penelope may appear problematic. Ulysses' son must be aware of the role played by his mother to protect him. However, Telemachus' rudeness towards Penelope is a signal that he is ready to take control, not only of his own life but also of the household and realm, while Penelope continues to refer to him as a νήπιος ("child"): in Telemachus' view, Penelope has thus suddenly become an obstacle to his self-development, rather than a supporter. Telemachus' hostility has been read as a consequence of his passage from adolescence to adulthood; attacking his

[25] See Doherty 1992, 165-167.

[26] This is an important difference between the *Odyssey* and Ovid's epistle: while in *Her.* 1 Penelope herself sends Telemachus to Sparta and Pylos in search of his father (63-65) and thereby shows her active agency, in *Od.* 1.280-305 Athena advises to him to go – with Penelope unaware of the journey.

[27] On gender role reversal in the archery contest, see Hoffer 1995, 515-531.

mother and making himself independent from her agency has been seen as part of Telemachus' *rite de passage*.[28] On Penelope's (i.e. the distaff) side, by contrast, Telemachus' maturity may represent, rather paradoxically, a threat to her authority and power of decision-making within the house, since it would lead to her losing the control (and independence) she had gained since Ulysses' departure.[29]

This veiled hostility is much more than a mother-son relationship issue. Telemachus seems to be aware of the fact that, as long as Ulysses is absent from Ithaca, his mother may represent an obstacle for him to take possession of his inheritance, since she has taken on a (male) role of command within the house and sees him as still too young to make decisions.[30] At the same time, if Penelope remarried one of the suitors, the person chosen would replace Ulysses as a king and master of the house. Thereby, Telemachus would entirely lose his right to Ulysses' inheritance and would no longer be able to assume his role as a king (*basileus*) of Ithaca.[31] This complex political and familial background posits an impasse to Telemachus, and explains his fluctuating attitude in encouraging or hindering his mother's control, authority, power and, particularly, un/willingness to remarry.[32]

Telemachus is thus prevented from performing his role as an adult male and accordingly master of *his* house, as well as king, not only by the claims of the suitors but also by Penelope's attitude. But what role does Penelope play in this delicate political and familial game? What kind of (im)balance does she find between her role as

[28] Felson-Rubin 1997, 67-91.

[29] "When compared with the position of a mistress of a normal *oikos*, Penelope's position is admittedly irregular" (Doherty 1992, 166; for some remarks on Penelope's independence, see Schein 1995, 24-25). Particularly during the bow contest, it seems as though Penelope fluctuates between her desire to protect Telemachus and a sort of challenge with her son for taking on the role of master of the house; cf. Hoffer 1995, 517.

[30] Clark 2001, 339.

[31] See, in this respect, the dialogue among Telemachus, Antinous and Eurymachus in *Od.* 1.386-404; see also Scodel 2001, 307-27.

[32] In *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood suggests that one possible solution to this situation would be Penelope's death; however, arguing that Telemachus' hidden desire is his mother's death seems, in this case, to be excessive.

a wife and as a master of the house within the Ovidian epistle? The struggle for Penelope to find her space in a highly male-based world and society, as well as an authoritative voice within her narration, articulates her complexity as an Ovidian character and a fictional author of her epistle. In the next sections, I show how this complexity emerges throughout her writing and culminates in the last part of her letter (98-116), when Penelope focuses on the difficult situation in which she finds herself, alongside Ulysses' father, Laertes, and her son Telemachus.

1.2. An Ovidian character: Penelope revisited

On a surface-level reading, *Her*. 1 presents Penelope as a colourless copy of her Homeric version, i.e. an abandoned lover and a powerless woman who is unable to take care of herself in the absence of her husband.[33] By contrast, the Ovidian Penelope enters into conversation with her epic *Doppelgängerin* and creates a new, subversive version of herself as a self-empowered character.[34] This new Penelope does not merely play the stereotypical role of the abandoned lover, as the subjective discourse intrinsic to the *Heroides* also allows the heroine to present herself as a renewed elegiac character and articulate her own perspective on the events.[35] As the examples provided in this section will show, *Her*. 1 amplifies the meanings of the epic heroine, making her elegiac characterisation complex, multifarious and ambiguous.

To begin with, in the opening of her letter, Penelope refers to Ulysses as *lentus* (*hanc tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixe*, 1),[36] an adjective that in the elegiac genre is usually

[33] Lindheim 2003, 37-51, reads Penelope's womanliness as a reason for her ineptitude.

[34] Ovid's Penelope has been described as *polytropos* and said to perform a *Trugrede*, which usually pertains to Ulysses (Jolivet 2007, 121-137).

[35] According to Kennedy 1984, 413-422, the epistolary form contributes to enhancing the subjective tone of the narration; Barchiesi 1992, 51-55, observes that the Ovidian heroine alters the objectivity of Homeric epic poetry in order to adapt her text to the features of the elegiac genre.

[36] Knox 1995, 45, prints *haec* instead of *hanc*, following Palmer's reading, and implies *verba* instead of *epistulam*, which he defines as an "awkward ellipse" (87). This choice, however, goes against the readings of other scholars: Barchiesi 1992, 66, for instance, defines the ellipse of *hanc* "tollerabile".

applied to the *puella* who is not willing or eager to engage in a relationship with a lover.[37] This line anticipates what Penelope will say later on, namely that she suspects that Ulysses has been delayed by another, illegitimate lover (75-76). The choice of such a word, however, also articulates, and forecasts, the gender role reversal which takes place in the epistle, as we shall see, since the programmatic role of the elegiac *puella* is here attributed to Ulysses instead of Penelope.

The ambiguity of Penelope's discourse also emerges at lines 9-10, where the heroine makes an extremely brief reference to her spinning by maintaining that she is accustomed to passing (*fallere*, 9) the long hours of the night (*spatiosam ... noctem*, 9) by working at the loom (*pendula tela*, 10) in which she exercises her *viduas ... manus* (10).[38] The use of the adjective *viduus* in conjunction with *manus*, though quite recurrent in elegy, is particularly ambiguous in this instance, since it alludes to the idea that not only her hands, but also Penelope herself is *vidua* of her husband.[39] The choice of the verb *fallo* and the reference to the *tela* hint at the famous web trick, which is mentioned very briefly, and only in this distich throughout the epistle. As Penelope's trick is at the core of her characterisation in the *Odyssey*,[40] the fact that the Ovidian heroine mentions the shroud only in these lines is very peculiar. What is the reason for such a significant difference?

Since the web trick is the best expression of the epic Penelope's cunning, the lack of emphasis on this element in *Her*. 1 seems to reduce the complexity, as well as the agency, of the elegiac version of this character.[41] By contrast, the lack of stress on this

Although the omission of either *epistulam* or *salutem* may appear odd, *hanc* is suggestive as the first word of the collection, since it alludes to the concrete materiality of the letter as well as letter writing itself.

[37] Cf. e.g. Prop. 1.16.12; 3.8.20 (*hostibus eveniat lenta puella mea*); Ov. *Am*. 2.19.31; see Knox 1995, 88; Barchiesi 1992, 66; cf. also *Her*. 2.23, where Phyllis uses this word to refer to Demophoon.

[38] Ovid uses the verb *fallo* to refer to the web trick also at *Pont*. 3.1.108; a similar expression (*fallere ... noctem*) occurs also in Verg. *Aen*. 1.683-684.

[39] For this use of *viduus*, see Prop. 4.3.6; 4.4.22; Ov. *Ars* 2.216.

[40] See above, 1.1.

[41] Cf. Lindheim 2003, 46: "[...] the Ovidian Penelope actively plays down the importance of her own character even in her self-representation".

topos articulates Penelope's strategy of self-representation within the epistle. In the *Odyssey*, the web trick equated Penelope to Ulysses in terms of cunning and initiative, making her play an active role. The lack of emphasis on the weaving trick in the letter may be read as Penelope's reaction to Ulysses not revealing his identity to her as soon as he arrives, but only after having slain the suitors. As *Her.* 1 is imagined to be addressed to Ulysses, Penelope's short, unmarked, mention of the weaving trick suggests that the heroine is concealing her own plans from her husband. This lack of specificity serves as a sort of *contrappasso* for not having been informed of Ulysses' plans and disguise. Arguably, the lack of a more detailed mention of the weaving trick enhances Penelope's status as a female trickster and counterpart to Ulysses.[42]

In *Her.* 1, the spinning, the 'distaff side', is replaced by writing, the creation of a web through the literary creation of a poem; ultimately, a very traditional female task within an activity usually attributed to men.[43] Thus, the result of Penelope's creativity is no longer the web but the poem itself, *Heroides* 1. By playing with the widespread metaphor of writing as weaving, Ovid has Penelope replace the distaff with her letter: it is through writing, not weaving, that the Ovidian Penelope expresses her "male's procreative capacity".[44] Furthermore, in *Her.* 1 writing becomes a privileged means of expression for Penelope, who in the *Odyssey* was prevented from speaking by her own son, Telemachus, as we have seen (1.345-359). Writing thus allows the Ovidian heroine to amend the lack of speech and free expression that her epic counterpart experiences,

[42] According to Murnaghan 1986, 103-115, the epic Ulysses chooses to not reveal his identity to his wife as a consequence of Athena's warning at *Od.* 13.333-338: it is not Penelope's fidelity in question in this case, but Ulysses' heroic actions, for which his "wife can represent a threat" (106). Conversely, in *Her.* 1 Penelope's actions could have been jeopardised by a premature discovery of the web trick. Accordingly, Ovid's Penelope cautiously does not confess, whether to the internal reader (presumably Ulysses disguised as a beggar) or the external reader/audience, what she is doing with the shroud, making just a vague reference to the *pendula ... tela* (10).

[43] Besides Telemachus' words at *Od.* 1.346-359, see Friedman 1987, 49-82.

[44] Bergen 1993, 13.

and to overcome the prohibition thrust upon her by Telemachus, who is a hypostasis of androcentric norms and limitations.

Penelope's male creative potential proliferates and produces a large number of letters which, as Penelope herself claims, are given to travellers stopping in Ithaca with the hope that they will somehow be able to deliver these letters to her husband (59-62).[45] The epistolary genre, which reflects the awareness of an absence "whilst simultaneously working to eliminate it",[46] allows Penelope to create a sort of fictional bridge between herself and her husband. Through her creative, literary work, Penelope manages to communicate *in absentia* with Ulysses, at least in the fictional suspension generated by letter writing.[47] By contrast, it seems as though she fails to clearly communicate and interact with her son, Telemachus, *in praesentia*, as we will see in the next section. In *Her*. 1, Penelope's writing, a stereotypically male activity, thus functions as a substitute for her spinning, a female task, denoting an instability of stereotypical gender roles.

In the following lines of the poem, Penelope continues to shape her subjective version of the story: she reports her fear upon hearing about the Trojan war from others (11-22) and gives her own view of the accounts concerning events taking place in other households, in which, more luckily, their masters have returned (23-36).[48] Penelope's perspective on the Trojan narrative contrasts with the (alleged) scarcity of news she receives about her husband from other people, such as Nestor, who does not speak with her directly, but rather with Telemachus (37-38): Penelope is thus the third in line to receive news about Ulysses. Ulysses' deeds in the Trojan war are reported with a high degree of emphasis on his heroism. However, this is so excessively exaggerated as to

[45] See above, p. 1, n. 4.

[46] Kennedy 2002, 221.

[47] "Epistolary language is preoccupied with immediacy, with presence, because it is a product of absence" (Altman 1982, 135).

[48] On Penelope's imagination and reconstruction of reality, see Stroh 2007, 206-208; for some examples of Penelope's correction of the Homeric narrative, see Casali 2017, 174-198.

appear sarcastic (39-46).[49] At 41-43, for instance (*ausus es [...] / Thracia nocturno tangere castra dolo / totque simul mactare viros, adiutus ab uno!*),[50] Penelope appears to report Ulysses' actions with a high degree of pathos, but she emphasises their deceptive nature (*nocturno ... dolo*, 42) and chooses the verb *macto* to mean "to kill men" (*viros*, 43): as this word is used regularly to indicate the killing of unarmed animal victims during sacrifices, not of human warriors, it sounds derisive in this context.[51]

In this passage, rather than simply focusing on Ulysses' actions, Penelope's irony seems to be directed precisely against the one reporting these actions so enthusiastically – Telemachus. These lines suggest that Penelope ventriloquises (and mocks) Telemachus' speech, pointing out his naivety in believing that his father is among the greatest warriors of the Trojan war, when in fact he is not. In other words, Penelope is questioning the image of Ulysses that Telemachus created for himself as a result of the projection of his own identity in a sort of super-ego, represented by the father he has never met. While supporting this fictional construction, Penelope is simultaneously trying to demolish it by replacing the un/heroic Ulysses with her own active agency within her storytelling.

Penelope's agency also emerges from lines 63-65, where the heroine states that she sent her son Telemachus to Nestor, in Pylos, and to Sparta in search of Ulysses. This is one of the most significant differences between the account of the *Odyssey* (where Penelope is unaware of her son's travels: cf. *Od.* 2.373) and *Her.* 1, and is proof of the more active role that Ovid's Penelope plays in the story. The vagueness concerning the degree of Penelope's involvement in Telemachus' mission is also present in the rest of the passage, as shown by lines 64-65 (cf. *incerta est fama remissa Pylo*, 64; *Sparte*

[49] Jacobson 1974, 256-7, defined these lines "bitingly sarcastic, even insulting", while Housman thought that 37-40 were a "stupid interpolation" (cf. Diggle and Goodyear 1972, 479). Other scholars are more cautious about these lines: Barchiesi 1992, 80-81, for instance, states that only 39-40 could potentially be spurious; see also Knox 1995, 97-98; Bessone 2000, 139-153.

[50] Cf. the *Doloneia* at *Il.* 10.331-502.

[51] See *TLL* VIII 21.39-23.33, *s.v.* "macto" [Bulhart]; Barchiesi 1992, 82; Knox 1995, 98.

quoque nescia veri, 65).[52] In both cases, the uncertainty surrounding Ulysses' destiny is emphasised, but the statements do not correspond to the story told in the *Odyssey*, particularly concerning the journey to Sparta, where Menelaus informs Telemachus that his father was kept by Calypso (*Od.* 4.555) and Telemachus subsequently tells Penelope what he learnt (*Od.* 17.142-149).[53] The ambiguity and revision of the Homeric model implied in these lines anticipate Penelope's development in the following sections of the epistle, where she accomplishes other gender role reversals, as well as her own self-empowerment, through an instrumental use of her motherhood.

As a fictional author of her epistle, as well as a skilled elegiac poet, Penelope merges the pre-existing tradition with her subjective (re)interpretation of her own story, thus recasting it. Through her ironic discourse, Penelope plays with the previous tradition by pretending to align herself to it, while in fact undermining and scorning its main patterns. Although superficially Penelope's attitude seems to express her typicality, this simplicity is part of her sophisticated use of previous sources, which are filtered through her perspective on the story. In other words, the heroine builds a new persona, who subverts the stereotypical role of the abandoned lover and weak female character precisely by pretending to perform and endorse it. This subversion is particularly evident from line 81 until the end of the epistle, when Penelope focuses on her role within the house, and her relationship with the members of her *familia*, including Telemachus.

1.3. Mother or *matrona*: implications of motherhood

The section of the epistle focusing on Penelope's household and family starts with a reference to her father, Icarius, who is allegedly urging her to quit her marital home,

[52] Bentley read *vestri* instead of *veri* (cf. Goold 1977, 14), in which case the translation would be: "Sparta also does not know anything about you" (with the pronoun *vester* to be intended as a *pluralis maiestatis*).

[53] See Casali 2017, 175-198.

presumably to make her remarry (81-82):[54] *me pater Icarius viduo discedere lecto / cogit et immensas increpat usque moras*.[55] The adjective *viduus*, which we saw linked to the *manus* at line 10, here refers to the *lectus* and emphasises Penelope's abandonment.[56] Some passages from the *Odyssey* (e.g. 1.274-278; 2.50-59; 14.130) hint at the role that Icarius would eventually play in a new marriage for Penelope, but do not appear to delineate a consistent and clear picture. Given the Roman context of *Her*. 1, the dialectic between Penelope and her *pater Icarius* may be resituated and (re)interpreted in light of the developments in family law that occurred under Augustus at the time Ovid was presumably writing the *Heroides*.[57]

Father Icarius, accordingly, may embody a Roman *paterfamilias*, who could have benefited from his daughter's *divortium* if she had married *sine manu*, i.e. remaining *in patria potestate*.[58] According to Roman laws, if a woman had divorced in agreement with and under the *potestas* of her father, this separation would have entitled the father to receive the dowry back (cf. *Dig*. 24.3.66.2: *filia familias divortio facto dotem patri reddi iusserat*).[59] In this hypothetical Roman *divortium*, Icarius would thus function as the *paterfamilias* asking for a *repudium* of his daughter's partner.[60] Ovid, who was trained in Roman Law (cf. *Tr*. 4.10.15-40), and who also plays with contemporary legal

[54] See Barchiesi 1992, 92: "[...] le pressioni di Icario verso nuove nozze sono, nella prospettiva suasoria della Penelope ovidiana, un forte elemento di pressione su Odisseo".

[55] For other mentions of Icarius as Penelope's father within Latin literature, cf. Prop. 3.13.10; *App. Verg*. 265 (in the form of an adjective related to Penelope, *Icariotis*); Ov. *Ib*. 391 (*Icaridos*); more often, Icarius appears as Erigone's father (see *RE* IX 973-978, *s.v.* "Icarios" [Bürchner]).

[56] For some other occurrences of a similar expression, see Ov. *Her*. 5.106; 10.14; 16.318; *Tr*. 5.5.48; Prop. 2.9.16.

[57] See above, Introduction, IX-XIX.

[58] Treggiari 1991, 441-446; Mastrorosa 2002, 171; see Paul. *Sent*. 5.6.15; *Cod*. *Just*. 5.17.5. Such a power, however, seems to have started being reduced from the Augustan Principate onwards (see below).

[59] *Dig*. 24.3.66.2, Iavolenus *vi ex posterioribus Labeonis*; *Dig*. 24.1.57 pr.; 24.2.4, 24.3.38; Gai. *Inst*. 1.137a. For the relation between Ulysses' estate, Telemachus' inheritance and the claims of the suitors on Penelope in the *Odyssey*, see Heitman 2005, 39-43.

[60] The distinction between *divortium* and *repudium* is not clear, though it is probable that the former was used for married couples and the latter for those who were only formally or informally engaged. According to Treggiari 1991, 439, however, this distinction starts to become less significant from the Augustan age onwards (cf. *Dig*. 50.16.101.1, Modestinus *ix differentiarum*).

discourse in other works, may have been implying a reference to the current legal practice with Penelope's mention of her father.[61]

However, Penelope's legal discourse is as ambiguous as many other passages of *Her.* 1. By stating her willingness to remain faithful to Ulysses (cf. *Penelope coniunx semper Ulixis ero*, 84), Penelope opposes both her father and the decision to remarry that she eventually makes in the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 18.250-258).[62] This inconsistency raises questions on the reliability of her utterance (i.e. that she will be forever Ulysses' *coniunx*), which seems an ironic provocation to knowledgeable readers, rather than a convincing assertion. The Ovidian heroine does not simply perform the role of elegiac lover, but also mocks the topos of the faithful wife that she embodies in the Homeric epos through her rhetorical exaggeration. At the same time, Penelope also expresses a sort of independence from her father by showing her dissent. This attitude conforms to the development of Roman legal practices, according to which the daughter's consent both for marriage and divorce started to become necessary from the late Republic or early Principate onwards.[63] By playing with the contemporary legal context, Ovid's Penelope appears to taunt the new legislation concerning marriages, family and parenthood brought forth by Augustus, who was certainly not pleased with divorce, the changing of partners, or adultery.[64] Penelope's independence and agency emerge more clearly from the final part of her epistle (97-116), which mainly focuses on Telemachus.[65]

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[61] For a survey of legal discourse within Ovid's poetry, cf. Ziogas 2021, forthcoming (see above, IX-XIX).

[62] For an example of a daughter's refusal to break up her marriage by the order of her father, cf. e.g. Sen. *Controv*. 2.2.

[63] *Dig*. 24.3.34; Ulp. 6.6.

[64] For other examples of a similar interplay with the contemporary legal contexts within the *Heroides*, cf. e.g. *Her*. 4.34 (*turpis adulter*), 123-124; *Her*. 9.13-18 (Casali 1995a, ad loc.). For an analysis of the relationship between Ovid's poetry (with a focus on *Ars* and *Her*. 20) and Augustan legislation, cf. Ziogas 2016, 213-237; 2021, forthcoming.

[65] The sequence of lines in this passage is confused and the editors have suggested various solutions: in particular, lines 99-100 were considered spurious by Bentley, while 103-104 have often been transposed to 96 (e.g. Ehwald 1907); see Goold 1977, 18; Knox 1995, 108.

tres sumus inbelles numero, sine viribus uxor
    Laertesque senex Telemachusque puer.
ille per insidias paene est mihi nuper ademptus,
    dum parat invitis omnibus ire Pylon. 100
di, precor, hoc iubeant, ut euntibus ordine fatis
    ille meos oculos comprimat, ille tuos!
hac faciunt custosque boum longaevaque nutrix
    tertius inmundae cura fidelis harae;
sed neque Laertes, ut qui sit inutilis armis, 105
    hostibus in mediis regna tenere potest—
Telemacho veniet, vivat modo, fortior aetas;
    nunc erat auxiliis illa tuenda patris—
nec mihi sunt vires inimicos pellere tectis.
    tu citius venias, portus et ara tuis! 110
est tibi sitque, precor, natus, qui mollibus annis
    in patrias artes erudiendus erat.
respice Laerten; ut tu sua lumina condas,
    extremum fati sustinet ille diem.
certe ego, quae fueram te discedente puella, 115
    protinus ut veniat, facta videbor anus.

(Ov. *Her*. 1.97-116)

At lines 97-98, Penelope remarks on how her weakness in the household is enhanced by her lack of strong supporters, as well as her isolation. The *iunctura* of *sine viribus* (97) is usually linked to the word *uxor* to balance the *tricolon* (*sine viribus uxor* / *Laertesque senex* / *Telemachusque puer*), and may also have a sexual nuance, implying that Penelope lacks a male partner.[66] However, *sine viribus* can also be read as being attached to *numero* and the comma can be placed after *viribus* itself, so that *uxor* remains absolute: *uxor / Laertesque senex Telemachusque puer*. However, this alternative interpretation is in fact unnecessary to justify why Penelope refers to herself as being "without strength" and emphasises her weakness. The marked expression *sine viribus uxor* contributes to increasing the pathos of these lines, while the hyperbolic accents give it an ironic inflexion. This ironic exaggeration is also implied in the emphasis of Laertes as a *senex*, likewise the reference to Telemachus as a *puer*, while he

[66] Jacobson 1974, 273-274; Stroh 2007, 204.

would have been almost twenty at the time of Penelope's writing.[67] The choice of the word *puer* is an indication of Penelope's wish to maintain her control over her young son: this marked word conveys the idea that the absence of Ulysses hindered Telemachus' passage into adulthood, which in Roman society was sanctioned by the achievement of the *toga virilis*.[68] If read in this way, Penelope's insistence on Telemachus' *puerilitas* may be seen as a means of underlining her role as the sole master of the house, as well as diminishing Telemachus' agency and status, as long as Ulysses is absent.[69]

Telemachus' boyhood is what grants the heroine her power, but as soon as her son is recognised as an adult, Penelope will no longer be able to claim her position within the household. The acknowledgement of Telemachus' adulthood, moreover, would make him independent, thus reducing the significance of Penelope's role as a mother. Being the mother of a *puer* is for Penelope the *condicio sine qua non* to have her motherhood acknowledged *tout court*. In other words, only as the mother of a son who still remains a *puer* is she allowed to exercise her power over the household and the realm. Motherhood is thus a key element for Penelope's prominent role, but is determined by her being the mother of someone who still relies on and is dependent upon her.[70] This reading would explain why Penelope uses the word *puer* in reference to Telemachus,

[67] See Knox 1995, 109; for Telemachus' lack of maturity and weakness within the *Odyssey*, see Heitman 2005, 50-62.

[68] For the *toga virilis*, cf. Cic. *Tusc*. 3.59; Sen. *Marc*. 9.2; see also Treggiari 1991, 398.

[69] It has been acknowledged that there was a certain fluidity in terms of ages in Roman culture: *puella*, for example, appears to have referred both to young girls before puberty and young women after puberty and before motherhood. However, the meaning of *puella* in elegiac poetry is noticeably different, since it mostly indicates a married beloved (Harlow and Laurence 2002, 37). As for boys, the passage from childhood to youth, that is from the *bulla* to the *toga virilis*, appears to have occurred at the age of seventeen, as remarked in Gell. *NA* 10.28 (Harlow and Laurence 2002, 67-78); see also Laurence 2000, 442-455.

[70] About two thousand years later, Adrienne Rich (*Of Woman Born*) also stresses how the power of a woman, as well as the construction of her subjectivity, is affected by the way she projects her own aspirations onto her son, who embodies the mother's desire to actively participate in the world. "She exists for one purpose: to bear and nourish the son [...] Giving birth to sons has been one means through which a woman could leave 'her' mark on the world"; "What do we want for our sons? Women who have begun to challenge the values of patriarchy are haunted by this question. We want them to remain, in the deepest sense, sons of the mother, yet also to grow into themselves, to discover new ways of being men even as we are discovering new ways of being women" (Rich 1977, 186; 193; 210-211).

why she is aware (and seems to be the principal actor) of his mission (cf. lines 64-65, above), and ultimately why she depicts him as being in danger (99-100): in brief, the heroine wishes her son to remain a small boy in need of his mother.

The vacuum produced by Ulysses' absence (and filled by Penelope's active agency) emerges clearly at lines 107-108, where Penelope again refers to Telemachus. By wishing for him to be able to attain a *fortior aetas*, she implies that he has not yet reached his adulthood, or at least not from her point of view.[71] Ulysses' support is here depicted as necessary not only to ensure that Telemachus will stay safe and alive (and protected from the suitors), but particularly for Telemachus' development towards adulthood (108): *nunc erat auxiliis illa tuenda patris*.[72] The gerundive *tuenda* recalls the technical, and juridical, word *tutela* (*tuor* and *tutela* are etymologically related)[73] and may have a legal connotation, hinting at the Roman norm of the *tutela impuberum.* In the absence of the father, the *tutela impuberum* is usually taken on by the *adgnatus proximus* or, alternatively, by whoever is named by means of the *tutela testamentaria*.[74] In this case, (Ovid's) Penelope may imply that this *tutela impuberum*, pertaining to the father but not undertaken by Ulysses (111-112) or any other male relative, has been taken on by someone else, namely the mother, Penelope herself, since she appears to exercise control over Telemachus, thereby occupying a very active (and somewhat 'male') role within the household.[75]

These lines articulate Telemachus' problematic, precarious manhood.[76] Ulysses' absence has frozen him in a perennial childhood, which is deliberately enhanced, and

[71] The sequence of these lines is quite confused: Bentley, for instance, suggested moving them to 109-110; see Barchiesi 1992, 101.
[72] For the mother and father's different tasks, as well as traditional roles in the education of a child in Roman society, see e.g. Carroll 2014, 159-178.
[73] See Valpy 1828, 486-492; de Vaan 2008, 632.
[74] See Treggiari 1991, 383-386.
[75] Cf. Vuolanto 2002, 214.
[76] For the contemporary sociological and psychological concept of precarious manhood cf. e.g. Bosson, Burnaford, Cohen, Vandello and Weaver 2008, 1325-1339; Walsh 2010, *passim*.

instrumentalised, by Penelope: this combination hinders his passage into adulthood.[77] It can be said that Telemachus has built his personality, and particularly what we can call in Freudian terms the 'super-ego', on a constructed image of his father. However, it would appear difficult to see Ulysses, who has been physically absent for his son's entire life, as the person responsible for the construction of Telemachus' super-ego.[78] Telemachus has grown up with a singular parental figure, his mother. This circumstance has determined a peculiar outcome in Penelope's perception of her motherhood, as well as in their mother-son relationship, where Telemachus' independence appears to be denied.

The depiction of a helpless Telemachus is further developed in lines 111-112,[79] where he is indicated once more as an unarmed and unprotected child (*mollibus ... annis*, 111) in need of his father's help: *in patrias artes erudiendus erat* (112).[80] The adjective *patrius* both enhances the legal framing of the passage by hinting at the *patria potestas*, and also alludes to the actual *patria* (in its meaning as "pertaining to the fatherland").[81] Even if in this particular context it is clear that *in patrias artes* should be translated as "in father's ways" (Showerman)[82] and refers to something "pertaining to the *pater*", the overlap between *pater* and *patria* is not incidental.[83] As Ulysses is the king of Ithaca and Ithaca represents the realm over which Telemachus would potentially rule at some point of his life, having not been educated *in patrias artes* may also allude to the fact that Telemachus is not ready, or even able, to rule. This expression is thus

[77] For the idea of liminality concerning rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, see Turner 1987, 99-122.

[78] As will be explained in more detail in the next pages, from her being the first love object for her son (cf. Kristeva 1982, 32-33), Penelope turns into a sort of patriarchal/paternal figure, while still maintaining certain typical female attributes.

[79] Together with 113-114, these lines were considered spurious by Bentley; see Goold 1977, 19.

[80] For another occurrence of *erudio* in a more ironic, but also programmatic, context, cf. *Ars* 3.48: *haec quoque pars monitis erudienda tuis*.

[81] Cf. Sil. 11.422; Stat. *Theb*. 6.770; Tac. *Ann*. 12.44.3; Claud. 24.112; see also Ov. *Fast*. 1.571; 2.508, *patrias artes militiamque colant Quirites*; see *TLL* X 1.757.55-772.53, *s.v.* "ars" [Teßmer]: the nexus *patria ars*/*patriae artes* never occurs before *Her*. 1.

[82] Goold 1977, 19.

[83] See *TLL* X 1.757.57: "sed melius a patria, nam et pater a patria dicitur".

another highly effective way for Penelope to point out Telemachus' immaturity and lack of experience, and consequently to underscore her own dominant role.

Penelope's emphasis on her central role goes hand in hand with the development of her persona as well as her subjective voice, which culminates in the last two lines of her epistle: *certe ego, quae fueram te discedente puella, / protinus ut venias, facta videbor anus* (115-116). By establishing a contrast between *puella* and *anus*, with both terms at the very end of each line, this couplet represents Penelope's last rejection of another elegiac pattern.[84] The heroine claims that she has changed from what she was and what she was supposed to be, namely something between the conventional good wife/mother of the epic tradition and the abandoned lover of Ovidian elegiac poetry, into an *anus*, i.e. an old woman. The substantive *anus* identifies what Penelope has become throughout her twenty-year journey, and conveys a higher degree of realism and materiality to her self-depiction. Such concreteness is antithetical to the stereotypical, abstract and de-personalised depiction of the traditional *scripta puella*.[85]

In this respect, the fact that Ulysses is twice qualified with the adjective *lentus* (1; 66), while Penelope's self-development appears to be emphasised, points towards a form of reversal in the opposition between female immobility and male mobility that some scholars have remarked upon throughout the *Heroides*.[86] Arguably, attributing the concept of immobility to Ulysses, who has wandered for almost twenty years, may appear questionable, just as it may be questionable to attribute mobility to Penelope, who has fixedly remained in Ithaca. The im/mobility I refer to, however, is not physical but rather a psychological attitude. Penelope's letter thus articulates her evolution and

[84] For a similar use of *anus* in reference to a grown-up *puella*, see *Ars* 3.70.

[85] Cf. Wyke 1987, 47-61.

[86] Spentzou 2003, 97-98, for instance, claims that this sort of immobility of the heroines is determined by the restraints dictated by the Lacanian Law of the Father. For some remarks on the dichotomy between mobility and immobility which characterises female figures across Greek mythology, see Konstantinou 2018, who concludes that female mobility (when it exists) "confirms male authority" (153).

depicts her as a more 'real' and multidimensional character; (Penelope's) Ulysses, by contrast, is fixed in his timeless absence, vacuum, and remoteness.

Penelope's self-development towards a more active and self-conscious version of her own character is a result of the (re)interpretation of her motherhood, whose meaning is reshaped and subverted throughout her epistle. *Her.* 1 may be thus said to articulate an Ur-form of *écriture feminine*, which finds in the use of metaphorical writing a way to subvert polarities and deconstruct pre-existing concepts.[87] Hélène Cixous defined female writing as "the endeavour to 'write the other' in ways which refuse to appropriate or annihilate the other's difference in order to create and glorify the self ...".[88] Such a definition can also be trans-historically applied to the writing of Penelope, who seems to deconstruct and demolish herself by continuously pointing out her uselessness and weakness, only to recreate a new, more powerful self-image. Penelope's manipulation of her motherhood increases this process of subverting roles.

Although being or becoming a mother has been seen – throughout time and across different cultures – as a condition that intensifies the separation between gender roles in society by limiting woman's space to mere procreation and the care of children,[89] Penelope's motherhood nonetheless appears to place her in a position of predominance. This predominance would derive from the peculiar situation in which Penelope finds herself: having been left in Ithaca by Ulysses, she is responsible not only for Telemachus but also for other members of the household (e.g. Laertes), her servants and the entire realm.[90] It is motherhood that has made Penelope master of her house and

[87] Cf. Cixous 1976, 875-893; for further remarks on metaphorical writing as an expression of the feminine sphere, see Derrida 1976, 207-271.

[88] Cf. Sellers 1991, 142.

[89] Rich 1977, 42: "Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self". The patriarchal imposition of the so-called Law of the Fathers (cf. Lacan 1997, 218-220) intended for women to assume most of the burden of perpetuation and care of the species.

[90] Cf. lines 103-104: *hac faciunt custosque boum longaevaque nutrix, / tertius inmundae cura fidelis harae*.

sovereign of her people; Penelope is the person that each of the suitors intend to marry, and to whom they refer to gain a quasi-legitimate rule (*Her*. 1.87-96).

Penelope's insistence on Telemachus' immaturity, as well as her allusions to the fact that she alone has brought him up and taken care of his education, creates a more complex situation. Maternity has been described as a circumstance which breaks the rules of temporality and places women within a more cosmic cyclical time, making them experience the *jouissance* of interrupting everyday obligations and tasks.[91] Due to Ulysses' sudden departure shortly after she gave birth, Penelope subverts the unwritten rule of maternal experience, as she is projected towards prominent participation in historical time, in which it is normally only men that play a dominant role.[92] By taking on a masculine role, Penelope breaks conventions and subverts what Lacan would define as the rules of the symbolic space.

In the linguistic realm of letter writing, Penelope thus fights against the patriarchal symbolic language by pretending to endorse it, whereas she eventually changes its meaning: through this particular kind of writing, the heroine overcomes the exclusion of women from the spoken language as a social and historical expression, and (re)positions herself as the main actor within her story.[93] The results of, and evidence for, the subversion that occurs in Penelope's epistle can be found in the constant references to her son, particularly in the final lines of her letter (*Her*. 1.97-116): the existence of Telemachus or, more specifically, of Telemachus as a *puer*, is what legitimates Penelope's power. This power, however, generates a deep conflict between the two parties involved, i.e. Penelope as a mother and Telemachus as a son, which is articulated by Penelope underpinning Telemachus' weakness. At the same time, this conflict also

[91] Cf. Moi 1986, 152-159.

[92] Kristeva posits a difference between female time, characterised by repetition (cyclical time) and eternity (monumental time), and male time, characterised by an intervention in history and linearity; see Moi 1986, 187-213.

[93] Cf. Moi 1986, 195-198; for the relationship between symbolic-paternal sphere and motherhood, see Kristeva 1980, 237-243.

produces some more hidden psychological outcomes at the level of the mother-son relationship.

1.4. A struggle for heroism: who is the master of the house?

The tension in the mother-son relationship between Penelope and Telemachus develops as a consequence of the instability of intra-familial, as well as gender, roles that takes place in *Her*. 1. As we have seen, the abrupt departure of Ulysses causes a sort of break within the traditional tasks which Penelope's role as a mother would require her to perform. On Telemachus' side, by contrast, the dependence on his mother represents a barrier for his development as a man. Because of the absence of his father, Telemachus bases his (super-)ego on the only parental figure that remained to him, i.e. his mother, who has taken on a proper, leading, *male* role within the household and the realm of Ithaca.

Having initially represented a projection into another 'self' of Penelope's own masculinity, Telemachus has also become a guarantee of, and at the same time a threat to, her power in more actual terms: his boyhood is what safeguards her dominant role, but his achievement of maturity and adulthood would cause her to lose this prominent position. Having (intentionally) avoided encouraging her son towards independence, Penelope continues to reject his adulthood in *Her*. 1, as we have seen. In the epic tradition, Telemachus tried to get his status – and independence – acknowledged, not only by the suitors but primarily by his mother. To this attempt should be attributed his travels in search of his father, as well as the rudeness towards his mother that we see in the *Odyssey* (cf. above). In *Her*. 1, however, Telemachus' mission seems to have been undertaken under Penelope's control, or even her orders (64-65), while his personality and feelings appear to be ignored or trivialised by his mother, who insistently refers to him as a *puer*, unarmed or in need of protection (97; 99-100; 107-112).

Penelope thus represents a sort of Janus-figure with respect to Telemachus, a mother and anti-mother at the same time.[94] From her perspective, Telemachus is both a part of herself, one she gave birth to, but also a contender for predominance.[95] To Telemachus, his mother represents not only his earliest contact with the world and the person who has protected him, but also a rival, 'the Father' he has to kill (to put it in Freudian terms), since she has taken on the role that would normally have belonged to Ulysses. In other words, from a psychoanalytical point of view, Telemachus has identified himself with his mother, instead of the other parental (male) figure of his family, and he is ready to fight against her both to rule the realm and to develop himself. Penelope may be said to be the "first love object" that Telemachus loses and, then, encounters again as the hypostasis of the authority he fails to overcome, or even imitate.[96]

Accordingly, the implied disrespect and ironic tone that Penelope uses to refer to Ulysses' deeds in 41-46 intends to undermine the fictional paternal, heroic figure Telemachus has created for himself. At the same time, this subtle irony emphasises the heroine's prominent position within the family, which has been created with readiness and effectiveness, in opposition to her lacking, absent and *lentus* counterpart, Ulysses. Telemachus' conflict against 'the Mother' is also due to his attempt to mythologise 'the Father' that he has never met in person. In *Her*. 1, this tension is illuminated from Penelope's perspective, who stages a two-level discourse: while superficially depicting herself as a traditional wife and elegiac abandoned heroine, she blurs the contours of expected (binary) family roles and accomplishes her self-empowerment.

[94] For this kind of ambivalence of the maternal figure in most recent feminist writings, cf. Rich 1977, 190-191.

[95] For the corporal relationship between the mother's body and child, see Moi 1986, 160-186.

[96] This situation recalls an *avant-lettre* (distorted) oedipal complex; see Freud 1975, 73-109.

Conclusion: a subversive Penelope

As the *Heroides* are often concerned with familial relationships (and Penelope's letter is no exception to this), it may be somewhat surprising to find only a few references to female members of the family or household in *Her.* 1: apart from Penelope, the only one cited is the *longaeva nutrix*, Eurycleia (103). Penelope does not mention any other female servants, whether her own or Ulysses' mother, but does refer to both her own father Icarius and Ulysses' father Laertes, as we have seen. The scarcity of references to other female characters reveals that the world Penelope inhabits is made up almost entirely of men. Being surrounded by men, the heroine must take on the role of her male partner to be able to overcome the threats these men pose to her. As demonstrated, this appropriation of a male role can be gathered from the implied irony of Penelope's writing: while seemingly restating the existence of traditional roles, Penelope undermines them with a subversive discourse. In particular, Penelope's motherhood has been crucial to describing and interpreting this subversion, which articulates the developmental process of the heroine throughout the epistle.

In *Her.* 1, Penelope's relationship with Telemachus is a *simple* mother-son relationship. By contrast, the two mothers/heroines who will be examined in the next chapter are related to their children in a more complex way. Phaedra falls in love with her stepson, Hippolytus, in *Her.* 4, while Canace, who has a relationship with her brother Macareus, is both the mother and the aunt of her child (*Her.* 11). These circumstances, together with the more general peculiarities that characterise the *Heroides* (e.g. the instability of gender categories; ambiguous discourse; the dialogue with, and challenge to the previous literary tradition), complicate the mother-son dialectic that features in these two epistles. Phaedra and Canace's incestuous, or semi-incestuous, relationships will lead them to an initial rejection and then a subsequent re-appropriation of their motherhood.

Chapter 2

Incest, rebellion and the 'Law of the Mother': Phaedra and Canace

"Quand ma bouche implorait le nom de la déesse,
j'adorais Hippolyte, et le voyant sans cesse,
même au pied des autels que je faisais fumer,
j'offrais tout à ce dieu, que je n'osais nommer.
Je l'évitais partout. Ô comble de misère!
Mes yeux le retrouvaient dans les traits de son père.
Contre moi-même enfin j'osai me révolter."

Jean Racine, *Phèdre* (285-291)

In the previous chapter, we saw how motherhood contributed to Penelope's rejection of her traditional tasks and roles. The exploration of *Her*. 1 vis-à-vis Ovid's contemporary legal context has been combined with the (re)interpretation of Penelope's motherhood through the lens of gender theory, as well as feminist reception of Freudian psychology and Lacanian theory. By demonstrating how (Ovid's) Penelope changes from the stereotypical abandoned wife (and mother) of tradition into the cunning *weaver* (that is, author) of her own story, such a trans-cultural and trans-historical perspective has posited a different interpretation of the male-female (and mother-son) relationship within *Her*. 1, thereby enriching our understanding of the epistle. This second chapter focuses on two other mothers within the *Heroides*, namely Phaedra (*Her*. 4) and Canace (*Her*. 11), who share the incestuous nature of their motherhood. Canace's relationship with her brother Macareus, alongside her subsequent childbirth (37-54), is truly incestuous,[1] whereas Phaedra and Hippolytus are, respectively, stepmother and stepson. Although an erotic relationship between them cannot be said to be exactly incestuous in

[1] See Jacobson 1974, 162-163; Viarre 2007, 81-91; Casanova-Robin 2009, 53-66.

the sense the modern word implies,[2] it would have appeared incestuous, and adulterous, from a Roman point of view, as well as morally execrable.[3]

Phaedra's epistle to Hippolytus is the only one of the *Heroides* that is written to seduce the beloved and has thus been seen as peculiar with respect to the other letters;[4] *Her*. 11 is no less unique or complex. Although *Her*. 11 is staged as an epistle written by Canace to Macareus, her lover and brother, before the heroine resolves to kill herself, some passages suggest that its implied addressee is in fact Canace's and Macareus' father, Aeolus.[5] The reference to Canace's father (i.e. the implied reader) alongside the explicit addressee, Macareus, affects the content of the entire epistle and culminates in the murder of Canace's child (65-86), which is carried out by order of Aeolus himself (83-92).[6] Canace's incestuous motherhood is a pivotal issue in the epistle and her childbirth is also described in detail (37-54).[7] The heroine's first-person description of her own body during her pregnancy and childbirth that follow her sexual intercourse with Macareus will be interpreted according to Kristeva's definition of abjection.[8] As we shall see, Canace seemingly perceives her child as an impure part of herself: accordingly, her suicide not only represents a means to pursue her father's will, but also

[2] The substantive *incestus* had a legal and religious meaning in classical Latin that is not always conveyed by the modern word "incest". For instance, Clodius presumably was charged with *incestus* when he dressed up as a woman and interrupted the rite of the Bona Dea; cf. Moreau 1982, 83-98; 2002, 137-144; Campanile 2017, 54. However, the word could also refer to "incest" proper: "i. q. stuprum inter cognatos et affines commissum (de religione adulterio laesa)"; cf. *TLL* VII 1.896.36-896.73 [Prinz]. As an adjective, *incestus* seems to be attested more widely, but its primary meaning is "unchaste" or "impious", "*ab* in *et* castus". This broader meaning coexists with a more specific one, from which the modern word "incest" derives: "strictiore sensu de conubio sive coitu cognatorum et affinium" (*TLL* VII 1.893.47-896.35 [Prinz]).

[3] See e.g. *Dig*. 23.2.17, 55; Gai. *Inst*. 1.59-61; Ulp. 5.2.6; Dixon 1988, 155-159; Moreau 2002, 259. For a parallel, cf. the relationship between Anchelomus and his stepmother in Verg. *Aen*. 10.389 (*Anchelomum thalamos ausum incestare novercae*), where the use of the infinitive form *incestare* indicates the incestuous relationship between the two of them (cf. *TLL* VII 1.893.25 ff. [Prinz]: "stuprare, dehonestare [...] propinquos"; see Bettini 2002, 88-99). For illegitimate relationships within the family, see Treggiari 1991, 36-39; cf. also Gardner 1986, 125-127.

[4] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 150-151; Casali 1996, 1-15; Landolfi 2000, 42-43; also Rosati 1985, 114: "Quella di Fedra è una lettera di seduzione, la sola lettera di seduzione delle *Heroides*".

[5] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 166: "One cannot but discern that somehow Aeolus' importance is all-pervasive, that it is almost Aeolus to whom this letter is addressed and around whom it revolves"; Philippides 1996, 428.

[6] Cf. Reeson 2001, 74-83.

[7] Cf. Casali 1998, 702-703.

[8] Kristeva 1982, 56-89.

a rebellious act aimed at purifying herself and restoring control over her own body, which she previously lost during pregnancy.

Whilst Kristeva's writings (and, more particularly, *Powers of Horror*) represent the main theoretical frame for the interpretation of Canace's motherhood in *Her*. 11, Phaedra's letter (*Her*. 4) is mainly investigated through narratology (Cavarero) and visual theory (Mulvey), alongside Kristeva's and Irigaray's feminist re-interpretation, and re-adaptation, of the Lacanian concept of Symbolic. The use of this theoretical frame aims to demonstrate how Phaedra and Canace establish a discursive (and somehow ontological) 'Law of the Mother' within their epistles, which subverts well-established and heteronormative gender dichotomies. To navigate the heroines' challenge to the Lacanian 'Realm of the Fathers', it has proved beneficial to divide this chapter into two parts, with the first three sections focusing on *Her*. 4 and the last two on Canace's epistle (*Her*. 11); the conclusion summarises the main argument of the chapter and outlines the intertextual relationship between the two heroines, whose stories are both characterised by incest and the motif of suicide.[9] By challenging, subverting and reinterpreting their motherhood, the two (Ovidian) heroines are empowered to produce a sort of legislative act, i.e. a regulation or 'law', for their own (life-)stories. Motherhood enhances their capability to play an active role within their stories, as well as to escape the constraints imposed on them by the patriarchy.

2.1. Sources and context: Phaedra, storytelling and writing

Aside from Ovid's *Her*. 4, the myth of Hippolytus and Phaedra is rather well-known in Antiquity,[10] and is fully attested by the tragedies of Euripides and Seneca. It is widely acknowledged that there once existed at least two other plays focusing on Hippolytus'

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[9] Since the intertextual links between Phaedra's and Canace's epistles have been noticed already by, e.g. Philippides 1996, 426-439, and Casali 1998, 700-710, these will not be the main object of this chapter. The two heroines are mentioned one after the other by Ovid at *Tr*. 2.383-384.

[10] See e.g. Barrett 1964, 1-15; *RE* XIX 1543-1552, *s.v.* "Phaidra" [Wotke].

myth, i.e. Sophocles' *Phaedra* and Euripides' *First Hippolytus* (or *Hippolytos Kalyptomenos*), of which only a few fragments are extant.[11] The main points of the narrative can be easily summarised: Phaedra, Theseus' wife, falls in love with her stepson Hippolytus, who rejects her love; as a consequence of this, Phaedra kills herself; before committing suicide, however, Phaedra accuses Hippolytus of rape or attempted rape; Theseus thus curses his son, causing his death.[12] Scholars agree that the main variation between the two Euripidean tragedies lies mostly in the different depictions of Phaedra, who is more virtuous and concerned with *sophrosyne* in the *Hippolytos Stephanophoros* (a play performed in Athens in 428 BC and the only extant Euripidean version), whereas she would have been more audacious and provocative in the previous play, which is now lost.[13] In the *First Hippolytus*, it seems that Phaedra confessed her love openly and directly to Hippolytus who, ashamed, covered his face with a veil: due to this act, the play is known as *Hippolytos Kalyptomenos*, or "Hippolytus Veiled". Because of the shock that Phaedra's open confession and Hippolytus' self-covering caused the audience, Euripides reportedly had to rewrite the play into a rather different version, the *Hippolytos Stephanophoros* ("the wreath bearer") or *Stephanias* ("crowned"), where the most shameful content was expunged.[14]

There is also agreement on the fact that Ovid mainly drew his own Phaedra from the *First Hippolytus*, particularly with respect to the attitudes of the heroine, who does not seem excessively concerned with morality or public opinion.[15] However, it has also been recognised that certain elements of *Her*. 4 may have been drawn from the extant *Hippolytus*, such as the ironic reference to Phaedra's writing as an *epistula* (3), which

[11] Cf. Barrett 1964, 15-45; for Sophocles' *Phaedra*, see *TGrF* 4.477-481.

[12] For an overview, see Barrett 1964, 1-2.

[13] Barrett 1964, 10-15; Halleran 1995, 25-27.

[14] The existence of a direct dialogue between Phaedra and Hippolytus may be gathered from three fragments: Fr. D [Barrett] = 434 N, G [Barrett] = 435 N, H [Barrett] = 436 N; cf. Barrett 1964, 29-45; Halleran 1995, 26-27.

[15] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 144.

may be read as an allusion to the tablet mentioned at *Hipp*. 856. In the extant *Hippolytus*, Phaedra's writing played a very crucial, yet different, role: through a δέλτος (856), i.e. the "writing tablet" that Phaedra left as a *post mortem* message to Theseus before killing herself, the heroine set out her accusation against Hippolytus, who, she claimed, had raped her – while, as the audience knows, Phaedra herself had fallen in love with him.[16] Having seen the tablet, Theseus at first understood that it might contain the ἐπιστολὰς (858), "the instructions" (note the similarity with the Latin word *epistula*), that Phaedra had left to him for the care of their children and household before committing suicide. By contrast, the Euripidean tablet reported the false charge against Hippolytus, provoking Theseus' anger and causing Hippolytus' death.[17]

The mention of the written message at *Hipp*. 1311-1312 (ψευδεῖς γραφὰς ἔγραψε καὶ διώλεσεν / δόλοισι σὸν παῖδ', ἀλλ' ὅμως ἔπεισέ σε) can be read vis-à-vis *Her*. 4. The opposition between Ovid's emphasis on reading at 4.3 (*epistula lecta*) and Euripides' emphasis on writing (γραφὰς ἔγραψε, 1311, with a figura etymologica) articulates the antitheses 'speech vs silence' and 'writing vs reading' that are pivotal in *Her*. 4. Moreover, the reference to the tragic consequences caused by the reading of the *deltos* at 1312[18] is ironically recalled by the future indicative *nocebit* in the expression *quid epistula lecta nocebit?* (*Her*. 4.3): *epistula* indicates the material and concrete letter that the Ovidian Phaedra is writing, while also activating an intertextual link with the Euripidean ἐπιστολὰς (858).[19] Such ambiguity creates a moment of dramatic irony, since educated readers know that it is precisely the written message contained in the

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[16] For the function of the δέλτος in this passage, see Mueller 2011, 148-177; cf. also Barrett 1964, 326-335; Halleran 1995, 221-225.

[17] See Mueller 2011, 151-152; on ἐπιστολὰς, cf. Barrett 1964, 327: "a message, whether written or verbal; esp. one giving instructions"; Halleran 1995, 222.

[18] For Phaedra's ambiguity in Euripides, cf. McClure 1999, 112-157.

[19] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 146; Davis 1995, 41-55.

deltos that determines Hippolytus' death in Euripides' *Hippolytos Stephanophoros*.[20] By hinting at Euripides' *deltos*, moreover, Ovid's Phaedra plays with the metapoetic and *transpoetic* (that is, intertextual) value of her writing, since she refers both to her Euripidean message to Theseus and to the (Ovidian) epistle she is writing.[21]

In light of these cross-references, *Her*. 4 can be said to constitute a sort of performative act by Phaedra,[22] who instead of confessing her love openly (as in the *First Hippolytus* and, to a certain extent, in Seneca's later *Phaedra*)[23] entrusts her words to the written text. The letter functions as an intermediary between Phaedra and Hippolytus, and is therefore a proxy for the Euripidean nurse, who confesses Phaedra's love to Hippolytus in the *Hippolytus Stephanophoros* but is not mentioned by (Ovid's) Phaedra.[24] This sort of absent referent (i.e. the nurse) encourages us to view the epistle as both a personification of Phaedra's speech and a sort of performance of it, which on the Euripidean stage would have been spoken either by Phaedra herself or by the nurse.[25] The blurring of boundaries between fictional persona, or writer, and the literary object can be found in other passages of the *Heroides* (e.g. *Her*. 15. 1-2, 217-220), as well as Ovid's exile works (e.g. *Tr*. 3.1; 3.7.1-2), and lends a quasi-human agency to Phaedra's epistle (and Ovid's literary creation).[26] This letter thus conforms (more than the others) to the definition of "dramatic monologues" that has been given to the

[20] After having read the tablet and realised that Hippolytus had raped Phaedra, Theseus engages himself in a violent dialogue with his son (856-1101), who does not reveal the truth, since he previously swore to the nurse that he would keep the secret (601-615). Theseus therefore curses his son, causing him a horrible death (*sparagmos*), which is described by the messenger (1173-1254); cf. Barrett 1964 and Halleran 1995, ad loc.

[21] For the theatrical potential of the *Heroides*, see Curley 2013, 25: "Each letter serves as an epistolary *theatron*, wherein heroines and heroes give themselves over to displays of emotion, as they open their innermost feelings to scrutiny, or displays of exposition, as they contextualize the moment of writing by setting the scene".

[22] For the performative power of the *deltos*, see Mueller 2007, 172-174.

[23] For a survey of the extant fragments of the *First Hippolytus*, as well as evidence of other lost plays, see Barrett 1964, 15-45; Halleran 1995, 25-37. For Phaedra's confession to Hippolytus in Seneca (*Pha*. 646-671), cf. Coffey and Mayer 1990, 148-151; Casamento 2011, 198-200.

[24] Cf. Landolfi 2000, 19.

[25] At *Hipp*. 877 (βοᾷ βοᾷ δέλτος ἄλαστα. πᾷ φύγω), Euripides already blurred the lines between speech and written text; for the agency of the *deltos* in Euripides' drama, cf. Mueller 2011, 148-177.

[26] Cf. Martorana 2021a, forthcoming.

Heroides and literally speaks in the place of the heroine.[27] Beyond being the result of a mixture of previous sources, Phaedra's letter also represents an expression of Ovid's poetic agenda in the *Heroides*, where a tragic heroine is changed into an elegiac one (whereas in the previous chapter we saw Penelope's metamorphosis from an epic into an elegiac character).[28]

In the letter's opening couplet, for example (*quam nisi tu dederis, caritura est ipsa, salutem / mittit Amazonio Cressa puella viro*; 1-2), the expression *Cressa puella* establishes an intertextual, dialectic, relationship with Euripides' παῖ Κρησία (372). The chiastic construction *Amazonio Cressa puella viro* not only points at the elegiac liaison between the *puella* (a word which is an "index of elegiac love")[29] and the *vir*, but also presents a further implication.[30] By referring to herself as *Cressa puella* and to Hippolytus as *Amazonius*,[31] which represent, respectively, geographic provenance and lineage, Phaedra seems to completely forget or, rather, to strategically ignore the fact that the most direct way to address Hippolytus would be as "son".[32] The heroine rejects her actual familial, quasi-maternal, relationship with Hippolytus and establishes from the very beginning of the epistle an ironic discourse, in which her words are

[27] See Steinmetz 1987 ("Als solche Monodramen können diese Gedichte gelesen ...", 140); Rosati 1989, 5-9; Auhagen 1999 ("Die *Heroides* sind Monologe par excellence", 12). For the theatricality of the *Heroides*, code-switching within Ovidian works as well as the definition of Ovidian poetry as *Kreuzung der Gattungen* (Kroll 1924, ch. 9), see Curley 2013, 5-14.

[28] For the depiction of Phaedra as "forma elegiaca di un simbolo letterario", see Rosati 1985, 113-131; see De Vito 1994, 312-330.

[29] Casali 1995a, 2. The words *puella* and *vir* are often employed at the end of the pentameter in elegiac poetry: cf. Prop. 3.14.4; 3.3.20; Ov. *Am.* 1.7.35; *Rem. am.* 549; *Ars* 1.54; 1.681.

[30] Some manuscripts (K and Pa) report *non est habitura* instead of *caritura est ipsa* (1): this *varia lectio*, however, may be the result of a corruption from *Met.* 9.530, the opening of Byblis' letter (*quam nisi tu dederis, non est habitura salutem*); see Dörrie 1970, 73; Davis 1995, 41-42; Nanni 2007-2008, 39-40. The word *Cressa* (for this form, see Barchiesi 1992, 148) is attributed also to Pasiphaë, Phaedra's mother, and recalls her unnatural love for a bull: cf. e.g. *Am.* 1.7.16; *Her.* 2.76; *Ars* 1.327. For *Amazonio viro*, cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 10; 351: ὅστις ποθ᾽ οὗτός ἐσθ᾽, ὁ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος.

[31] The formula *Amazonio ... viro* sounds rather oxymoronic: although the opposition between Amazons and men must have been a quite widespread cultural topos (*sane Amazones dictae sunt vel quod simul vivant sine viris*; Serv. *Aen. ad vers.* 490), the Ovidian line seems to be the only occurrence of this antithesis.

[32] Through this generic indication, which overlooks Phaedra's stepmotherhood (Jacobson 1974, 147), the relationship between Phaedra and Hippolytus seems to be "priva di apparenti contatti" (Rosati 1985, 115).

characterised by double meaning and allusivity. While the phrasing *Cressa puella/Amazonio viro* is not exactly what knowledgeable readers would expect from the letter opening, Phaedra does not actually state anything false. By means of omission and allusion, the heroine simply distorts the truth to present herself as an elegiac *puella* addressing her lover.[33] Concurrently, her phrasing also brings motherhood to the fore, as *Amazonio* is a way of referring to Hippolytus' mother. A highly Ovidian character from the outset of her letter, Phaedra is endowed with a double, ambiguous role and skilfully juggles two balls at the same time: she is both the elegiac *puella* and the elegiac poet, that is, the fictional author of her epistle. As the next section will show, the blurring of boundaries between writing and being written, elegy and tragedy, makes us reflect upon the interplay between literary creation and (pro)creative potential, erotic passion and maternity within the epistle.

Before diving into a close reading of *Her*. 4, it is beneficial to focus on certain scholarly interpretations of Phaedra's and Hippolytus' incestuous relationship, which are relevant to my argument. As mentioned, the coexistence of speech and silence is a *trait d'union* between Ovid's epistle and Euripides' play. As speech has been considered a marker of agency and free expression for women, who are confined to passivity within a patriarchal society, female silence articulates women's reification and subordination to the 'Law of the Father(-s)', to put it in Lacanian terms. Moreover, female speech and expression were specifically related in Antiquity to a malicious attitude and a sexually active role.[34] Accordingly, speaking or voicing their expressions out loud is for women both a means of empowerment and a danger, insofar as it leads to a displacement of their traditional function (i.e. passive and merely procreative) within

[33] "So too *puella uiro* is calculated to distort relationships" (Jacobson 1974, 147).

[34] "In Hippolytus' view, women are counterfeit coin, they are oversexed, and they talk too much"; cf. Rabinowitz 1986, 128, who also asserts that Phaedra fails in controlling her activity, speech and sexuality (132-133). As for the Roman world, talkativeness and initiative in women were linked to sexual desire, which was considered to be a sign of corruption and lasciviousness (see e.g. Plaut. *Aul*. 168-169); cf. Dixon 2001, 36-40.

the realm of the Symbolic, and therefore results in their marginalisation. Given this significance of female speech (and silence), the confession of the Euripidean Phaedra articulates both her self-empowerment and debacle, which begins with the loss of her honour and culminates with her suicide.

In *Her*. 4, the oral speech that women are prevented from voicing is replaced by the written text which, as we have seen, ambiguously refers both to the actual letter Phaedra is writing and to the letter the heroine leaves to Theseus in the *Hippolytus*. By building on this *transtextual* level of allusions, *Her*. 4 can be read as either another, different letter that Phaedra wrote before the Euripidean *deltos,* or as the same letter that we find in Euripides' play. If the latter is true, however, then it contains a completely different text, which varies in its aims, addressee, perspective and focus. By playing with Euripides' drama and presenting the letter as a sort of rewriting of the *deltos*, (Ovid's) Phaedra posits a challenge to her Euripidean *Doppelgängerin*, thereby empowering herself to recast her own narrative.[35] Phaedra's decisional power and self-determination therefore appear significantly increased in *Her*. 4, which allows the heroine to completely rewrite her story. If the letter is a substitute for the Euripidean nurse, then the absence of this intermediary figure empowers Phaedra to take on a more central role: on the 'Ovidian stage' that the epistle itself represents (as opposed to the Euripidean stage), the heroine is the only one responsible for her acts as well as performance.

The voice of (Ovid's) Phaedra thus appears amplified by her *écriture féminine*. Through her writing, Phaedra can tell and reshape her own narrative without pronouncing a single word aloud, without truly breaking the patriarchal prohibition to speak. Through her epistle, the heroine manages to escape the death that, in the literary

[35] Torresin 1998, 163-173. "Phaedra is a character who (in literary history) has *already* written a famous letter" (Casali 1996, 1).

tradition, would follow her speech by securing the perpetuation of her existence on a literary and narrative level. This equivalence between the continuation of a story (i.e. the written text) and the perpetuation of life is certainly not unique to Phaedra's epistle. Being both the author and a character within her own story, Scheherazade (the narrator of *One Thousand and One Nights*) is another, quintessential, example of how storytelling allows a female narrator to survive, both within her narrative and within literary history: by being a "narratable self", Scheherazade claims her subjectivity through her storytelling, "she becomes, through the story, *that which she already was*", i.e. a material identity within the world.[36] Like Scheherazade's storytelling, Phaedra's epistle is also aimed at reshaping the heroine's "worldly and relational identity",[37] not as a result of a 'self' constructed by others, but as a consequence of her own reflection on her role. The poetic space of *Her*. 4 is an expression of how Phaedra actually looks at, and builds, her own identity. In this (re)construction of a self-identity, Phaedra's repression and subsequent re-embrace of her maternal experience play a pivotal role, since the subjective re-interpretation of her (step-)motherhood is what catalyses the process of self-determination, as well as the re-invention of her narrative.

Besides the relationship between speech, silence and writing, it is worth focusing on the motif of hunting, which characterises both Euripides' Hippolytus and *Her*. 4. As hunting is usually performed outside the city and is conceived as a marginal activity, it is suitable for a temporary stage of life, and plays a crucial role in the performative rites of passage to adulthood.[38] Hippolytus' extreme passion for hunting articulates his marginality with respect to civic habits and norms, as well as his incapability to

[36] Cavarero 2000, 36, who quotes Heilburn 1988, 36.

[37] Cavarero 2000, 36.

[38] One example is the final rite of passage young aristocratic Spartans performed to become adult Spartiates, which consisted of kidnapping and killing one or more helots in nightly hunting: this practice was defined as *krypteia* (see e.g. Plut. *Lyc*. 28; Jeanmaire 1913, 121-150; Vidal-Nequet 1968, 49-64; Cartledge 2001, ch. 7). For the isolation and dangerous purity of the woodland, see Segal 1986a, 165-221; for hunting as a rejection of sexuality and expression of isolation, see Goldhill 1986, 120-121.

overcome a transitional stage of his life and participate in social activities. Having lost his mother, he seems dependent on a sort of 'Great Mother', who is embodied in this case by the goddess Artemis/Diana – a superior principle governing his life and attitudes. Being a follower of Diana means, for him, a rejection of women and the pursuit of abstinence to an extreme extent, one that determines his isolation from human society, as well as social life. By preventing him from entering a more definitive stage of his life, Hippolytus' alterity, as exemplified by his extreme devotion to hunting and chastity, makes his status as a man appear precarious and challenges his masculinity.[39]

This precarious masculinity is also conveyed by Hippolytus' stays in wild places, such as woodlands, which have been interpreted as spaces pertaining to the feminine sphere, where men are perceived as intruders.[40] Wilderness is also a prominent feature of the Cretan, proto-Greek and almost primitive context of savagery and violence, to which Phaedra's family belongs.[41] Accordingly, *Her*. 4 and, more specifically, Phaedra's erotic drives towards her stepson, must be re-situated in this border space, which is suspended between the realm of the Symbolic and a sort of 'other-world', where, as Phaedra states (cf. 129-140), incestuous relationships are permitted and sanctioned by the gods. In this light, Phaedra's desire to go hunting with Hippolytus (cf. e.g. Eur. *Hipp*. 215-237; *Her*. 4.36-50), which expresses her wish to follow Hippolytus and enjoy his company, is also an actual attempt to construct a sort of upside-down world, thereby relocating herself beyond the borders of the androcentric, Greek culture-based and Olympian system. Moreover, by showing her willingness to go hunting, Phaedra expresses her desire to be similar to Hippolytus. Equally, Phaedra's inclination to hunt articulates her rejection of the isolation that her femininity implies and her attempt at a form of self-definition by means of a different notion of masculinity, i.e.

[39] For Hippolytus' failure to achieve adulthood, see Segal 1986b, 106-110.
[40] Cf. Fabre-Serris 2014, 281.
[41] Cf. Armstrong 2006, 71-108.

Hippolytus' subversive masculinity, which lies outside the established patterns of phallocentric discourse (cf. lines 41-50, below).[42] In this new universe, the 'Realm of the Mother(s)', Hippolytus' status as an adult male appears to be restored, but his masculinity is appropriated by Phaedra, who fully embraces a dominant role.

The last motif that is worth introducing at this stage is Phaedra's death, which in Euripides is accomplished through self-hanging, but in *Her.* 4 is not even mentioned or implied by Phaedra. While hanging is the most common way that women killed themselves or were killed in the Greco-Roman tradition, death by sword was conceived as a male, heroic and epic way to die.[43] The lack of any references to Phaedra's suicide, which was a central element in the previous sources, creates a narratological vacuum within Ovid's letter. This omission contributes to Phaedra's departure from previous traditions, as well as stereotypically feminine traits, and would be developed in a different version of the heroine's self-murder by Seneca,[44] who gives Phaedra a heroic and masculine death as she commits suicide with a sword, perhaps due to the influence of Ovid's Dido (*Her.* 7) and Canace (*Her.* 11).[45] This blurring of boundaries between genders and genres, speech and writing, tradition and irony, is articulated by Phaedra's rejection and re-interpretation of her (step)motherhood in *Her.* 4, which contribute to her self-empowerment and agency.

2.2. (Ovid's) Phaedra and the rejection of (step-)motherhood

As we have seen in the previous section, *Her.* 4 begins with Phaedra's rhetorical self-presentation as a *Cressa puella* (2), instead of a *noverca* or, at least, the adult woman

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[42] See Goldhill 1986, 125.

[43] Cf. Jocasta and Penelope's maidens, who also died by hanging (Soph. *OT* 1068-1073; Hom. *Od.* 22.465-472). For feminine deaths in tragedy, see Loraux 1987, esp. ch. 1; see also De Lazzer 1997, *passim*; Doria and Giuman 2016, 1-34.

[44] Many parallels between Seneca's Phaedra and Ovid's *Her.* 4 have been acknowledged and reported by the various commentators: Grimal 1965; Coffey and Mayer 1990; Casamento 2011. For a wider discussion about Ovid's influence on Seneca's writings, see Trinacty 2014, 67-95.

[45] See Segal 1986b, 130-179.

she is.[46] By maintaining that an *epistula lecta* (“the reading of a message”, 3) cannot be dangerous for Hippolytus, but that he may even find something pleasant in it (*te quoque in hac aliquid quod iuvet esse potest*, 4),[47] the heroine ambiguously hints at the Euripidean drama, where the *deltos* is what caused Hippolytus’ death. Through the emphasis on the effects of *amor* and the strength of her passion (9-20), Phaedra continues her allusive discourse, as well as enhancing the dialectic between speech and silence, and speech and writing.[48] The blurring of boundaries between spoken and written words is linked to the antithesis between *pudor* and *amor* at lines 9-10:[49] *qua licet et sequitur, pudor est miscendus amori; / dicere quae puduit, scribere iussit amor* (note the epanalepsis between *amori* and *amor*, as well as the figura etymologica).[50] By addressing, re-interpreting and reshaping a pivotal motif of the Euripidean drama, (Ovid’s) Phaedra seeks to persuade Hippolytus that *pudor* and *amor* are compatible.[51] Although *pudor* prevents Phaedra from expressing her passion aloud (cf. *dicere*, 10), as she noticeably does in the *First Hippolytus*, this prescription concerning the spoken language is overcome by the use of the written text, i.e. the epistle (cf. Penelope above, 1.3.).

As it breaks the taboo of incest, her love cannot be confessed openly through her voice, but finds expression in Phaedra’s writing. According to a widespread topos in

[46] Cf. the opposition between *puella* and *anus* at *Her*. 1.115-116 (see above).

[47] For the *lecta epistula* as a reference to Euripides’ writing tablet, see Casali 1996, 1; for the opposition between *iuvo* and *noceo* within Ovid, see e.g. *Ars* 1.597; *Her*. 3.116, *pugna nocet, citharae voxque Venusque iuvant*; *Tr*. 2.270; 4.10.44; also Luc. 4.253; Sen. *Ep*. 45.8; Stat. *Theb*. 3.354; *Silv*. 1.1.15.

[48] For the personification of *amor* as an elegiac advisor, see e.g. Ov. *Am*. 2.1.3, but especially *Her*. 20.230, *haec tibi me vigilem scribere iussit Amor* (cf. Fulkerson 2005, 135-137, on the links between the two epistles).

[49] For the dialectic between speech and writing, cf. Pl. *Phdr*. 274c-275b; see Spentzou 2003, 140-141.

[50] As mentioned, the opposition between *pudor* and *amor* was a central theme in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*; see Craik 1993, 45-59; Cairns 1993, 314; cf. also *Am*. 3.10.28-29; *Her*. 15.121; *Met*. 1.618-619; but, especially, Byblis’ episode, which presents many analogies with Phaedra’s letter (*Met*. 9.515-916, *coget amor, potero; vel, si pudor ora tenebit, / littera celatos arcana fatebitur ignes*).

[51] By contrast, Phaedra’s capitulation to *amor* will end up in a tragedy: “even when the expressive code is changed the story does not change” (Casali 1996, 5).

elegy, Phaedra's verses are dictated by *amor*,[52] who appears personified and is addressed as a ruling god, even among the gods themselves (11-12).[53] By attributing the responsibility of letter writing to *amor*, Phaedra seems, in the first instance, to reject her active role as the author of her letter (*ille mihi primo dubitanti scribere dixit: / scribe! dabit victas ferreus ille manus*, 13-14):[54] *amor* made Phaedra write, ventriloquising her. This attribution of the poetic composition to *amor*, however, does not exclude Phaedra's poetic persona from the shaping of her story: in fact, it aligns the heroine to the programmatic depictions of the elegiac poet who is advised or compelled to write precisely by *Amor/amor*.[55] By making her own voice speak via *amor*, Phaedra performs a sort of self-investiture as an elegiac poet, thereby creating an overlap between the fictional female persona and the male poet, as well as enhancing the polyphony intrinsic to her entire epistle.[56]

The relationship between Phaedra's authorial voice, her literary creation and her motherhood can be further investigated through the analysis of narrative processes within female storytelling. By allowing women to report their subjective experience of reality, female writing challenges the reification brought forth by patriarchal discourse; through the adoption of a programmatic elegiac language, as well as the perspective of the male poet, Phaedra accomplishes a process of self-definition and self-determination, and expresses her subjectivity through her literary creation.[57] As a literary production,

[52] The possible capitalisation of the word *Amor* is a matter of editorial choice rather than a substantial difference: the form *amor*, which is preferred by, e.g., Goold to *Amor*, does not deny the personification of *amor* as an agent and/or god of love.

[53] For the topos of love's power, see e.g. Soph. *Ant*. 781-782; *Trach*. 497, but, especially, Eur. *Hipp*. 1-2, as well as a fragment 430 N of *Hippolytos Kalyptomenos*; cf. Casali 1996, 5.

[54] Cf. Ov. *Her*. 21.240; *Tr*. 1.3.88. The adjective *ferreus* often has a negative connotation within an elegiac context (see e.g. Tib. 1.2.67-68; Prop. 2.8.12; *Her*. 1.58; 3.138; 10.107; 12.183; 17.136-137) and may rhetorically anticipate the *rustica regna* of Saturn mentioned later in the epistle (132), which are usually linked to a sort of Golden Age (*aurea aetas*), as we shall see below.

[55] One of the most famous examples of Amor-Cupid's agency in the poetic creation is *Am*. 1.1.1-4; for the personification of *Amor* and/or *amor* as a divine entity (cf. the Greek *Eros*), see *TLL* I 1973.24-1973.77, *s.v.* "Amor".

[56] For Phaedra as an elegiac poet, cf. Michalopoulos 2006, 12-16.

[57] Cf. Spentzou 2003, 140-141; Cavarero 2000, 70.

writing parallels actual (re)production and replaces (pro)creation with a different kind of childbirth, one that is literary and fictional.[58] By displacing the normative procreative function of women, female writing threatens the delicate balance sanctioned by the patriarchal system between social roles and sexual tasks.[59] Therefore, on a first-level reading, the heroine's initial rejection of her (step-)motherhood is certainly a rhetorical strategy that aims at denying her incestuous relationship and facilitating her love. Concurrently, the lack of an open reference to her quasi-parental relationship with Hippolytus, as well as the insistence on *amor* as a guarantee of her *elegiac* love, suggests that (step-)motherhood is seen by the heroine as a potential obstacle to the expression of her passion and her (pro)creative capability as the author of a literary text.[60]

While Phaedra constructs herself as an elegiac poet, *Her*. 4 is characterised by the continuous overlap between her words and Ovid's ironic voice. For instance, at lines 17-18 (*non ego nequitia socialia foedera rumpam: / fama, velim quaeras, crimine nostra vacat*), Phaedra states that she does not intend to break the *socialia foedera* through *nequitia*. The translation of line 17 appears rather complex. The *non* can be linked either with the main verb, *rumpam*, or with *nequitia* itself, so that the translation would change into: "Not because of wickedness I will break the *socialia foedera*".[61] The very expression *socialia foedera* is somewhat peculiar and ambiguous, as the adjective does not appear in poetry before Ovid, whereas the substantive *foedus* has a

[58] The imagery of books as children is a recurring motif in Ovid's exile poetry: cf. e.g. *Tr.* 1.1-4, 115-116; 1.7.35-40; 2.1-2; 3.1.1-10, 65-68.

[59] For the ambiguity of literary (pro-)creation within the *Heroides*, cf. Spentzou 2003, 154-159.

[60] For an opposition between traditional female tasks (or identification with the mother) and writing, see Moi 1987, 17-32: "[...] that, in the case of most of the women who have had a vocation to write they have been spared the identification with the mother" (26).

[61] The first solution is adopted by Showerman (see Goold 1977, 45) and Rosati 1989, 113, but other passages of the *Heroides* would suggest understanding it the second way: see e.g. *Her*. 6.43, *non ego sum furto tibi cognita*; 20.25-26; see Nanni 2007-2008, 64.

highly programmatic value in elegy.[62] While *foedus* indicates sexual union, the adjective *socialis* can refer both to a kind of political alliance (*societas*) and an erotic relationship.[63] In this context, (Ovid's) Phaedra seems to play with the conflation of the two meanings and point out the contractual nature of her marriage, rather than her genuine erotic engagement with Theseus. By choosing the adjective *socialis*, the heroine hints at the contemporary systematisation of family unions and marital relationships, which were fostered by Augustus' family policy.[64] Through this peculiar *iunctura*, Phaedra dismantles and re-interprets the meaning of the marital 'contract' within Roman society and masks Ovid's mockery of contemporary Augustan legislation. The coexistence of the voices of the (male) poet and (female) heroine that characterises this passage conflates a similar aim, namely the subversive deconstruction of existing norms and regulations, whether it is the taboo of incest or Augustan family policy.

This deconstruction is further developed in the following lines of the epistle and finds expression in Phaedra's distorted (re-)interpretation of the concept of virginity (21-36). In *Her.* 4, Phaedra seemingly forgets, or pretends to forget, her previous relationship with Theseus, as well as the children she had with him.[65] Moreover, by addressing the idea of virginity, she shapes herself as being similar to the virginal

[62] For *foedus* as a marital relationship, see *Her.* 5.101. In Catullus, *foedus* holds both a juridical value and "il legame etimologico con *fides*" (Traina 1998, 25), while in elegy it is widely used to point at the agreement between two lovers or to indicate a sexual liaison: see e.g. Tib. 1.5.7; *Her.* 4.147; 20.188; 21.241; cf. La Penna 1951, 187-209.

[63] Within Ovid's poetry, *socialis* seems to be equivalent to *coniugalis*, except, perhaps, in one case, namely Ov. *Am.* 3.11.45, *lecti socialia iura*: the *lectus* should not necessarily be understood as a marriage bed (see *OLD* 1778, *s.v.* "socialis": "of or belonging to marriage partners, conjugal"); see also Treggiari 1991, 250: "Ovid frequently uses the idea of partnership. *Socius* is a favourite adjective, applicable to any sexual union but especially to the marriage bed". For different forms of contracting marriage in Rome, *conferreatio*, *coemptio* and *usus*, see Rawson 1987, 20-21.

[64] For the possibility that Augustus encouraged marriages *in manus*, cf. Rawson 1987, 20. Treggiari, by contrast, states that, from the Augustan Principate on, there was an increase in marriages *sine manu* (Treggiari 1991, 441-446). In any case, under Augustus, marriage legislation, concerning also divorce and adultery, started to become less informal and more regulated (cf. Rawson 1987, 33-35; Moreau 2002, 344-348).

[65] "Theseus, it appears, never appealed to her at all!" (Jacobson 1974, 148). On Phaedra's (fictional) construction of her own virginity, see Pearson 1980, 112-120; Armstrong 2006, 269-271.

Hippolytus (cf. the metaphor at lines 21-23, which hints at both the actual fierceness of young bullocks, but also at Hippolytus' inexperience in love)[66] and aligns her condition, as well as her identity, with her stepson.[67] Phaedra's mention of the *libamina nova* of a *servata fama* (27), alongside the allusions to her good reputation as a sort of offer that she wants to devote to her stepson,[68] suggests that the heroine's alleged virginity (and purity) pertains not only to her body, but also signifies a moral value. The end of this professed virginity would destroy both Phaedra's and Hippolytus' purity, as well as honour: line 28, *et pariter nostrum fiet uterque nocens*, alludes both to Phaedra's awareness of the consequences of her relationship with Hippolytus and to Ovid's, and the educated reader's, (fore)knowledge of their tragic destiny, which is foreshadowed through the verb *nocens*.[69]

After having further emphasised her purity through the depiction of her passion as an untouched love (29-34), the heroine mentions that she would not prefer even Jupiter to Hippolytus (35-36). Beyond playing with a topos from love poetry,[70] this couplet contains a reference to the incestuous relationship between Jupiter and Juno (*fratremque virumque*, 35), which foreshadows the *excursus* on the *regna* of Saturn and the following age (131-140), where incest is depicted as a legitimate and normal practice.[71] Although Phaedra still does not openly acknowledge the incestuous nature of her

[66] Cf. Armstrong 2006, 267-269. Inexperience in love is a central theme in the *Ars amatoria* (e.g. 1.766; 2.624): the experience in love is gained by reading the *Ars* itself, which is a metaphor for progress and journey in love (cf. e.g. *Ars* 3.47).

[67] According to Rosati 1985, 116, this fake purity claimed by Phaedra refers to the fact that the relationship with Hippolytus would represent her first affair. However, it is not necessary to imply this connotation: Phaedra either wants to appear pure to Hippolytus, since he is obsessed with purity, or wants to be as similar as possible to him.

[68] The word *libamen* is a Vergilian *hapax* and pertains to the sacral sphere (see e.g. Verg. *Aen*. 6.245-246): in this case, it indicates the offer of virginity Phaedra is making to Hippolytus (see *TLL* VII 2.1257.23-1258.53, *s.v.* "libamen" [Meijer]).

[69] The word *nocens* is recurrent in Medea's epistle (12.108, 120, 134); see also Casali 1996, 12; Torresin 1998, 219.

[70] Cf. e.g. Plaut. *Cas*. 323-323; Cat. 70.1-2; 72.1-2; Ov. *Met*. 7.801; Rosati 1989, 114.

[71] For some remarks on incestuous relationships between gods, see Moreau 2002, 77-81. The *iunctura* of *fratremque virumque* recalls a widespread epithet for Jupiter and Juno: see e.g. Hom. *Il*. 16.432; 18.356. Ovid, however, is very innovative in the employment of this nexus; cf. *Met*. 3.265-266; 13.574; *Fast*. 6.27-28.

relationship, she strongly emphasises that Jupiter and Juno are both siblings and partners (cf. line 35), which anticipates her argument that incest is not such a serious crime.[72] Moreover, while Phaedra does not openly denounce the incestuous nature of her love, she eagerly defends her reputation against the potential charge of committing adultery with her stepson (27-36). The heroine's emphasis on adultery seemingly endorses Augustan legislation punishing extramarital unions and supporting legitimate parenthood.[73] However, as we know, Phaedra's letter eventually contravenes that legislation, since adultery is not enough to make the heroine refrain from pursuing her passion. This emphasis on adultery articulates (once again) Phaedra's (and Ovid's) subversive attitude towards current Augustan policies regulating sexual behaviours, thereby questioning the consistency, and validity, of the Roman legal system as a whole. Finally, Phaedra's denial of the incestuous nature of her relationship paves the way to her self-presentation as an elegiac lover, and poet, and to the rejection of her (step-)motherhood at large.[74]

Alongside the rejection of her motherhood, the heroine's insistence on virginity is aimed at constructing herself as both a counterpart of Artemis/Diana (Hippolytus' patron and model for good behaviour) and Hippolytus himself. This attempt at aligning herself with Diana, Hippolytus or even an Amazon (as Hippolytus' mother was) is particularly evident in the description of Phaedra's desire to go hunting (37-52), as well as her self-depiction as a sort of huntress (*ignotas mutor in artes*, 37).[75] Phaedra, like Hippolytus, who as we have noted fails to perform his rite of passage and remains an ephebic figure, also seems to be stuck in a liminal phase, where she is ignorant of her

[72] Cf. Seneca's Phaedra, who asks Hippolytus to call her either *soror* or *famula* (611), instead of *mater*. From an anthropological point of view, incest between siblings is considered less immoral than between father/daughter or mother/son; cf. Heritier 1999, 230.

[73] Cf. Moreau 2002, 344: "[...] la *lex Iulia* ne réprimait pas spécifiquement l'inceste, mais réprimait ce délit uniquement lorsqu'il s'ajoutait à l'adultère [...]"; cf. Cass. Dio 56.1.2; Svet. *Aug*. 34.2, for the consequences of the Papian Law; see Rawson 1987, 20-21; 33-35; Evans Grubbs 2015, 127-138.

[74] See Pearson 1980, 110-129.

[75] Cf. Eur. *Hipp*. 215-237; for Phaedra's self-depiction as Diana, see Armstrong 2006, 100.

previous sexual relationships, her marital status, and her (step-)motherhood.[76] On the one hand, hunting represents the heroine's attempt to depict herself as a version of Hippolytus and persuade him to start a relationship with her, as well as expressing a rejection of her (step-)motherhood.[77] On the other hand, hunting articulates Phaedra's desire to escape the borders of domestic settings, to evade the closed space of the house to which women are confined, and gain a certain agency. This evasion and search for freedom parallel Phaedra's self-expression as a writer and elegiac poet of her epistle,[78] as hunting and writing can be both seen as hypostases of this process of escape and liberation from physical, linguistic, psychological and *symbolic* boundaries. In this conflation of spatial and textual dimensions, where the open space of the woodland overlaps with the 'free' niche of subjective writing, Phaedra can (re)shape her quasi-maternal experience, by first rejecting, then re-appropriating, and finally deconstructing it.

Phaedra's negation of her (step)-motherhood is strengthened by the rejection of her mother's motherhood.[79] At lines 57-62, the heroine refers to her mother Pasiphaë, who fell in love with a bull, and to her sister Ariadne, deceived by Theseus.[80] This catalogue (53-62) of Phaedra's female relatives (Europa, Pasiphaë, Ariadne) has been seen as a rewriting of *Hipp*. 337-339 but here appears to be modified according to the rhetorical purposes of the (Ovidian) heroine.[81] Having listed the doomed destiny of three female members of her family (Europa, carried off by a bull; Pasiphaë, who develops an

[76] For a connection between virginity, Diana and "the forest world", see e.g. Segal 1986b, 60-76; cf. pp. 106-114 for Hippolytus' suspension between male and female sphere.

[77] Cf. Fabre-Serris 2014, 275-288, on the connections between hunting, gender dynamics and savage places in the *Metamorphoses*; for Phaedra's self-representation as a female version of Hippolytus, see Jacobson 1974, 151-152.

[78] For the subversive value of female writing and its opposition to traditional female tasks, see Moi 1987, 28-31.

[79] See Kristeva 1980, 237-243.

[80] For Pasiphaë in Ovid, see *Met*. 8.131-137; for Theseus as *perfidus*, cf. Cat. 64.132-133; Ov. *Ars* 1.536; *Fast*. 3.473.

[81] "Theseus is indeed notorious for perfidy, but not to Phaedra. Theseus' behavior towards Ariadne has transformed by exigencies of the moment into abandonment of her sister Phaedra" (Fulkerson 2005, 133); see also Casali 1996, 10-12; Armstrong 2006, 274-277.

unnatural passion for a bullock; and, Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus), who correspond to three generations, Phaedra states that she is the last to come under the law of her line (61-62). The expression *in socias leges* ("laws of marriage" or simply "relationship", 62)[82] recalls the *socialia foedera* at line 17, and emphasises Phaedra's distortion and overthrowing of the 'norms' regulating marriage and, more broadly, familial relationships. These norms are clearly jeopardised by Pasiphaë's childbirth (57-58), which is defined as a *crimen* and *onus*.[83] The phrasing at line 58, *enixa est utero crimen onusque suo* (cf. *crimen* at line 18), which recalls *Her*. 11.64 (*et positum est uteri crimen onusque mei*; see below), suggests a sort of alienation of the mother from the child through the impersonal reference to the foetus or newborn as *crimen* and *onus*.

This de-personalisation of the foetus articulates Phaedra's rejection of her mother both as a parental figure and as a reflection of her own abnormal maternal relationship with Hippolytus. Pasiphaë's monstrous childbirth and Phaedra's (step-)motherhood are both linked to the idea of female pregnancy, and motherhood, as being simultaneously dangerous and attractive. The pregnant body is something in between *natural* laws of perpetuation of the species – which are recognised as socially acceptable and even supported (cf. Augustan legislation) – and, conversely, abnormality and uncanniness. The pregnant woman is perceived as unexplainable and mysterious; 'othered' and reified, she embodies the patriarchal "myth of femininity":[84] "the pregnant woman's location is on the threshold between nature and culture, biology and language".[85] Phaedra's fear of and hostility towards (step-)motherhood, which is implied in her reference to Pasiphaë's monstrous childbirth, articulate her attempt to deconstruct well-

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[82] Palmer translates as "laws of marriage" (see Kennedy 2005, ad loc.); cf. *OLD* 1777-1778, *s.v.* "socialis".

[83] See *RE* XVIII 4.2069-2082, *s.v.* "Pasiphae" [Scherling].

[84] See Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield and Sharpe 2011, 6. This view has been contrasted by post-structuralist and anti-essentialist feminist thought: "All forms of sexual reductionism implicitly deny that a woman is a concrete, embodied human being [...] and not just a human being sexed in a particular way" (Moi 1999, 35-36).

[85] Kristeva 1986, 297; see also Worth-Stylianou 2018, 64-67.

established and conventional conceptions of women, the female body and maternity. The heroine's subversion of social and familial relationships, as well as gender roles, continues at lines 71-84, which feature Phaedra's description of Hippolytus:

> candida vestis erat, praecincti flore capilli,
>   flava verecundus tinxerat ora rubor,
> quemque vocant aliae vultum rigidumque trucemque,
>   pro rigido Phaedra iudice fortis erat.
> sint procul a nobis iuvenes ut femina compti!— 75
>   fine coli modico forma virilis amat.
> te tuus iste rigor positique sine arte capilli
>   et levis egregio pulvis in ore decet.
> sive ferocis equi luctantia colla recurvas,
>   exiguo flexos miror in orbe pedes; 80
> seu lentum valido torques hastile lacerto,
>   ora ferox in se versa lacertus habet,
> sive tenes lato venabula cornea ferro.
>   denique nostra iuvat lumina, quidquid agis.
>
> (Ov. *Her*. 4.71-84)

Widely studied and variously interpreted, this passage (cf. Eur. *Hipp*. 24-28)[86] has been attributed to "the topos of erotic composition, especially comedy, namely, the distorted manner in which a lover can visualize his beloved" (cf. Jacobson 1974, 150; *Ars* 1.509-512; 2.657-662; Lucr. 3.1157-1169). Other scholars have read this description vis-à-vis Ovid's precepts at *Ars*. 1.509-511 (*forma viros neglecta decet: Minoida Theseus / abstulit a nulla tempora comptus acu; / Hippolytum Phaedra, nec erat bene cultus, amavit*),[87] which suggest that precisely Hippolytus' *rusticitas*, as well as *verecundus ... rubor* (72) and chastity, is what Phaedra finds particularly attractive. While Ovidian intertextuality enhances Phaedra's function as *praeceptor amoris*, this passage also features a gender role reversal, with Phaedra becoming an active observer of Hippolytus' body, an attitude which recalls very closely the 'scopophiliac' male gaze of elegiac poets.[88]

[86] Since these lines are a part of Aphrodite's opening speech in Euripides' drama, Ovid may here hint at Aphrodite's responsibility for Phaedra's falling in love with Hippolytus; cf. Barrett 1964, 158-160.

[87] Cf. Landolfi 2000, 33-36.

[88] See e.g. Ovid's description of Corinna in *Am*. 1.5.17-20; 1.7.11-18; also Davis 1995, 45-47; cf. Greene 2005, 231, on Prop. 2.9. For the elegiac *puella* as a "written woman" and for the possibility of

Phaedra focuses in particular on the visual aspects of Hippolytus' physical appearance:[89] Hippolytus' *vestis* is *candida*, his locks are bound around with flowers (71),[90] a *verecundus ... rubor* (72), which is a reference to Hippolytus' virginity,[91] colours his *flava ... ora* (73); his severe and stern face (*vultum rigidumque trucemque*, 74) is *fortis* (74).[92] Phaedra concludes her description by saying that she prefers roughness and toughness to effeminate attire (75-76): *sint procul a nobis iuvenes ut femina compti! – / fine coli modico forma virilis amat.*[93] Beyond reflecting a principle that was also enunciated by Ovid elsewhere (see e.g. *Med.* 23-25; *Ars* 3.107-108; 127-128), this couplet contributes to blurring the boundaries between femininity (75) and masculinity (76) in the description of Hippolytus. His beauty, which is characterised by sacredness, purity and virginal delicacy (see e.g. *candida vestis*; *praecincti flore capilli*; *verecundus rubor/flava ... ora*),[94] is ephebic; his appearance and virginity have a feminine component which, alongside his isolation from social life, questions his status as an adult male. Therefore, Hippolytus' *rusticitas*, which is a counterbalance to Phaedra's claimed *rusticitas* in erotic relationships (cf. 27-35), can only superficially be

extracting a feminist discourse from Augustan elegiac poetry, in spite of its male perspective, see Wyke 2002, 11-45. According to Greene 1998, 76, Ovid's representation of elegiac love unveils the actual predominance of the male lover, as is showed in *Am.* 1.3.

[89] Cf. Sen. *Pha*. 651-670.

[90] For similar expressions, see Hor. *Serm.* 2.8.70; Ov. *Fast.* 3.669. Binding the hair with flowers was certainly a religious devotees' act, which can refer to Eur. *Hipp*. 73-81. However, this may also pertain specifically to females (see e.g. Prop. 3.10.16); moreover, the colours of 71-72, red and white, recall a virginal and female aspect (cf. Narcissus in *Met.* 3.423; Lavinia's blush in *Aen.* 12.64-70; Prop. 2.3.10-12; Cat. 61.185-188; Tib. 3.4.30-34; see Lyne 1983, 55-64; Dyson 1999, 281-288).

[91] Cf. e.g. Daphne at *Met.* 1.484, Hermaphroditus in *Met.* 4.329-330; for the Senecan reception of this line, see *Pha*. 652.

[92] The adjective *fortis* refers often to heroic or epic characters: see e.g. Aeneas at *Aen*. 4.11; Achilles at *Her*. 3.137; *Met.* 13.131, 170, 383, 598, 616. For the coexistence of strength and love in Ovid, see *Am.* 1.6.12; 1.7.38.

[93] It may be possible to read *nobis* as a real plural, so that Phaedra seems to try to keep other males away from the sexually attractive Hippolytus, who looks like an ἐρώμενος here (cf. above, n. 90). Even in this case, Hippolytus appears depicted as feminised, while Phaedra seems to play the part of the male lover. For a similar situation in *Her.* 15, where Phaedra is replaced by Sappho and Hippolytus by Phaon, see Gordon 1997, 274-291; Hallett 2005, 1-15.

[94] This description recalls Phaedra's first sight of Hippolytus at Eur. *Hipp*. 23-28, where he was celebrating the holy mysteries of Demeter (25). This Euripidean passage may have represented a model for the idea of sacredness and purity evoked in *Her*. 4.

seen as a marker of machismo (cf. 75-76), whereas it hints at his precarious masculinity and undeveloped manhood.

Hippolytus' masculinity is further threatened, and questioned, by Phaedra's sort of "scopophiliac" (male) gaze, which "projects its fantasy onto the [fe]male figure, which is styled accordingly".[95] Phaedra not only shows a scopophiliac attitude towards Hippolytus' 'feminised' body, but also builds her visualisation of him on the basis of her own desires, expectations and fantasies. Beyond displaying Hippolytus' body to the reader,[96] Phaedra's description also operates as an active scopophiliac pleasure, which leads to an identification with the visualised object.[97] The scopophiliac gaze produces two different kinds of gender role reversals: first, a reversal between Phaedra as a lover and [fe]male observer, and Hippolytus as a scopophiliac (fe)male object; second, Phaedra's self-identification with her stepson (cf. 37-52) and, accordingly, appropriation of his image and tasks. This identification is a consequence of the progressive development of Phaedra's self-awareness, which implies an initial rejection of her status as a (step-)mother.

Phaedra's rejection of her (step-)motherhood is also linked to the negation of her status as Theseus' wife, whose mention as Phaedra's husband is delayed until lines 109-116 (although the heroine did mention his relationship with her sister Ariadne at 59-65). This delayed mention of Theseus as her husband is functional to Phaedra's re-appropriation and acknowledgement of her identity as a (step-)mother, which occurs progressively more in the epistle. Moreover, this reference to Theseus, who will remain away for a long time (*abest aberitque*, with polyptoton, 109), is highly rhetorical and is

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[95] Cf. Mulvey 1989, 19; for an "inversion of sex-order" as well as Phaedra's appropriation of the 'male eye' in this portrait of Hippolytus, cf. Michalopoulos 2006, 42-43.

[96] "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1989, 19).

[97] "The second [kind of scopophiliac pleasure], developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen" (Mulvey 1989, 18).

aimed at underlining his offences to Phaedra, as well as placing him in a bad light: he preferred Pirithous' companionship to both Phaedra and Hippolytus (109-112);[98] he offended Phaedra's family by killing her brother, the Minotaur (115-116), and abandoning Ariadne (59-60)[99], as well as Phaedra and Hippolytus, because of his mission (or relationship) with Pirithous (*in magnis laesi rebus uterque sumus*, 114).[100] While at line 28 the pronoun *uterque* refers to the fact that both Phaedra and Hippolytus were guilty (*uterque nocens*, 28), at 114 Phaedra and Hippolytus are placed (again) on the same level, only this time in respect to the damage they both suffered from Theseus.

As a culmination of this damage, Theseus is accused of having killed Hippolytus' mother, who, as "first, in respect of virtue, among the battle-axe bearing girls", gave birth to Hippolytus (117-118). This reference to the Amazons, a female community from which male presence was almost entirely excluded (the only exception was due to the need for procreation), hints at Hippolytus' hatred for 'the other sex', which he seems to inherit from his race – and his mother in particular.[101] At the same time, this couplet is characterised by further ambiguity, as the expression *securigeras ... puellas* at line 117 ("battle-axe bearing girls") rather contradictorily combines a quasi-elegiac mention of the *puella(-s)* with a reference to violent battle. Accordingly, the mighty Amazonian *puella* turns into a mother "worthy of her son's force" (*nati digna vigore parens*, 118),

[98] The form *aberit* may imply a reference to the fact that Theseus is in the underworld (cf. Herter 1971, 63-64). In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Phaedra not only states that Theseus did not do anything wrong (320-321) but is also convinced that Theseus would come back at some point (720-721). The idea that Theseus is intentionally spending time with Pirithous may have been drawn from Sophocles' *Phaedra* (cf. Fr. 686 R; Casanova 2007, 16). In this context, Phaedra's implied reference to a sort of homosexual relationship between Theseus and Pirithous is aimed at putting her passion for Hippolytus in a better light.

[99] For the abandonment, see Ov. *Her*. 10.96; Cat. 64.152-153; for the intratextual relationship between *Her*. 4 and 10, cf. Fulkerson 2005, 130-135.

[100] The Minotaur, in fact, has gone from being a *crimen* (58) to being depicted as Phaedra's brother (115): this shift is a consequence of the heroine's rhetorical argument at this point of the epistle, which aims to outline Theseus' responsibilities with respect of her family.

[101] For Hippolytus' mother, who is known with the name of Antiope but is never mentioned by Ovid, see Roscher I.2, 2681, *s.v*. "Hippolytos"; Barrett 1964, 8.

both in terms of strength and, probably, rejection of the 'other sex'.[102] Killed by Theseus' sword (119), which is a weapon suited to kill male, epic warriors,[103] Hippolytus' mother becomes a symbol of Theseus' unjust behaviour: her murder should convince Hippolytus to take Phaedra's side against Theseus. At the same time, Phaedra's mention of Antiope is rhetorically aimed at reminding Hippolytus that she is not his (actual) mother (cf. *peperit*, 118, as well as Phaedra's denial at 1-2, which we saw above). By stressing the lack of any parental bond between herself and Hippolytus, Phaedra denies her (step-)motherhood for the last time within her letter.

After saying that Hippolytus was not a sufficient "assurance" to save his mother from Theseus' sword (120), the heroine suddenly openly acknowledges her status as the wife of Theseus, mother of their children and Hippolytus' stepmother. This re-appropriation of her role(s) is anticipated by the choice of the ambivalent word *pignus* (120), which can be translated both as "assurance/guarantee/pledge" and "child".[104] Hippolytus' ambivalent status as a "child" and "guarantee" parallels Phaedra's ambiguous stepmotherhood. Once acknowledged, stepmotherhood is treated at first as a mere literary and cultural topos. As stepmothers were (and, in some cases, still are) widely believed to be hostile to their stepchildren, with designs to usurp their inheritance,[105] the heroine specifies that Theseus – not she herself – wanted to recognise his own and Phaedra's children as legitimate: cf. *addidit et fratres ex me tibi, quos tamen omnis / non ego tollendi causa, sed ille fuit* (124), where the verb *tollere*, here in the gerund, is a

[102] Hippolytus' misogyny is very well-known in the literary sources: cf. in particular, Eur. *Hipp*. 565-666; Sen. *Pha*. 672-697. Hippolytus' mother is indicated through the word *parens*, which is more gender neutral than *mater*: this lack of specificity may be an allusion to the gender ambiguity of the Amazons as a community of only women.

[103] This version of the myth, according to which Theseus kills Antiope (Hippolytus' mother) is not attested before Ovid; by contrast, it is probable that some later authors have drawn this variant from Ovid: see e.g. Sen. *Pha*. 927; Apollod. *Epit*. 1.17; Hyg. *Fab*. 241.

[104] For the child as a *pignus* in the *Heroides*, see e.g. *Her*. 6.122, 130; 11.113; 12.192. Cf. *OLD* 1379, *s.v.* "pignus": "3 (applied to any person, thing, event, etc., which gives assurance of anything) A guarantee"; "4 (applied to children as the guarantee of the reality of a marriage)": see e.g. Prop. 3.11.73; Ov. *Met*. 5.523.

[105] Seneca's reference to his mother's stepmother is evidence of the existence of such a stereotype (cf. *Helv*. 2.4); cf. Watson 1995, 92-134; Dixon 2001, 24-25.

technical term to indicate the acceptance of a child by the father.[106] The references to legitimate unions and legitimacy of childbirth represent two elements that, once again, recall Augustus' legislation and concerns about familial relationships. The status of illegitimate children (the so-called *filii iniusti* or *filii naturales*) underwent some modifications under Augustus, which were in agreement with his campaign against adulterous relationships.[107] While Phaedra's Ovidian voice plays with the main features of contemporary legislation concerning marriage and childbirth, as an elegiac artist Phaedra underlines her complete lack of responsibility for Theseus' decision process, thereby denying her alignment to the traditional topos of the *dira noverca,*[108] as well as challenging the significance of her stepmotherhood.

With a cunning rhetorical strategy, the heroine justifies the damage that she may have caused to Hippolytus by marrying Theseus and rejects this union to appear more desirable to her stepson, in agreement with the virginal frame that characterises the first part of her epistle. The counterfactual wish that her previous childbirth had ended in spontaneous abortion (*in medio nisu viscera rupta foret*, 126) represents Phaedra's denial of both her actual motherhood and stepmotherhood. At the same time, this passage also anticipates Phaedra's desire to re-acquire full possession of her own persona through the full acknowledgement, reshaping and re-appropriation of her (step-)motherhood.[109] This re-appropriation is pursued in the last part of the epistle, where

[106] See *OLD* 1947, *s.v.* "tollo": "(spec., of a father) To pick up (a new-born child) from the ground in the process of formal recognition"; cf. e.g. Ter. *Hau*. 6.27; Cic. *Phil*. 1.3.23; Hor. *Sat*. 2.5.46; Liv. 4.54.7.

[107] See Treggiari 1991, 317-319; 2005, 130-147; McGinn 2008, 1-32; Evans Grubbs 2015, 115-141; cf. also *Dig*. 2.4.5 (*pater ... is est quem nuptiae demonstrant*) for the necessity of a legal marital union for the recognition of legitimate childbirth.

[108] For the depiction of stepmothers as being cruel to their stepchildren, cf. *OLD* 1195, *s.v.* "noverca", 1b: "(alluding to the cruelty, hostility, etc., traditionally ascribed to stepmothers"; see e.g. Hor. *Epod*. 5.9; Sen. *HO* 561; Stat. *Silv*. 5.2.80; see also *Her*. 12.188, *saeviet in partus dira noverca meos*; *Met*. 9.181; Sen. *Pha*. 356-357; for other examples, see Otto 1890, *s.v.* "noverca". Literary accounts, however, were often exaggerated and typified (see Treggiari 1991, 394-395; Watson 1995, 109-113; Dixon 2001, 24-25).

[109] According to Kristeva, under the realm of the Symbolic, motherhood is what satisfies the expectations of the society for a woman, as well as what maintains order and hierarchies. A negation of this model leads to a negation of the symbolic position of a woman/mother within the patriarchal society (see Kristeva 1980, 241-243).

Phaedra establishes her anti-patriarchal 'Law of the Mother', thereby challenging and reinterpreting the traditional concepts of motherhood and stepmotherhood.

2.3. Phaedra's new perspective: the 'Law of the Mother'

Adopting a new tactic, in the last part of her epistle (129-176) Phaedra seemingly acknowledges her status as a stepmother. The heroine points out the opposition between the *rustica ... regna* of Saturn (132), in which incestuous relationships were not allowed, and the *aevus futurus* (131), i.e. the present age, where incest and adultery are said to be ratified by gods themselves. The negative connotation of the realm(s) of Saturn, which was traditionally linked to the Golden Age,[110] is functional to Phaedra's argument that incest is sanctioned by Olympian gods. This negative connotation also holds a programmatic value within Ovid's elegiac poetry, where *rusticitas* is rejected and moral freedom is welcomed. This reversal of the traditional features of the two ages articulates Phaedra's attempt to overthrow customary conceptions and views, in order to establish her own rules (129-140).

nec, quia privigno videar coitura noverca,
    terruerint animos nomina vana tuos. 130
ista vetus pietas, aevo moritura futuro,
    rustica Saturno regna tenente fuit.
Iuppiter esse pium statuit, quodcumque iuvaret,
    et fas omne facit fratre marita soror.
illa coit firma generis iunctura catena, 135
    inposuit nodos cui Venus ipsa suos.
nec labor est celare – licet; pete munus ab illa;
    cognato poterit nomine culpa tegi.
viderit amplexos aliquis, laudabimur ambo;
    dicar privigno fida noverca meo. 140

(Ov. *Her*. 4.129-140)

[110] For the realm of Saturn as a Golden Age opposing to the following age of Jupiter, cf. e.g. Ov. *Am*. 3.8.35-50; *Fast*. 5.11-46; *Met*. 1.113-150; Tib. 1.3.35; Prop. 2.32.52. For one of the most notable celebrations of the *Saturnia regna* in Augustan Age, cf. Verg. *Ecl*. 4: *iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturna regna* (5). While the *rustica ... regna* (132) are depicted with negative accents by Phaedra, these were acknowledged as a positive topos in the contemporary literary and artistic tradition. This negative depiction of the *Saturnia regna* is aimed at reinforcing Phaedra's argument, namely, the one that Jupiter's realm has brought an improvement insofar it has sanctioned the lawfulness of incest.

By stating that *noverca* and *privignus* represent *nomina vana*, i.e. that they are merely empty definitions and do not have any actual value (129-130),[111] Phaedra further develops the ambiguity of speech, concepts and writing that characterises her entire letter – cf. e.g. her hesitation to openly pronounce Hippolytus' name (and her own) at the very beginning of the epistle.[112] This rejection of well-acknowledged and conventional definitions also anticipates the ensuing opposition between the *rustica ... regna* and the *aevus futurus*, where kinship seems to have lost its normative value.[113] The reference to "the empty names" (*nomina vana*, 130), i.e. mere words without any real significance, can be read vis-à-vis Kristeva's semiotics as a traditional mark of *écriture feminine*. As female writing is characterised by the lack of a binary link between signifier and signified, and implies something deeper than what can be gathered from a surface-level reading,[114] so Phaedra's writing is ambiguous, insofar as it aims to dismantle binary oppositions as well as subvert gender and social roles. Through her *écriture féminine*, Phaedra creates a separate space, namely a form of enclave that breaks the borders of the patriarchal world, whereby the female voice can find expression.[115] This expression, however, is neither clear nor entirely open but remains hidden, flowing subtly, and is still hindered to some extent by the 'Law of the Fathers'.[116]

This Law of the Fathers is subtly and progressively disavowed through the (re-)creation of a reality where the rules established by a patriarchal society, as well as the

[111] Cf. Landolfi 2000, 37-42; according to Knox 2002, 131, this passage may have been drawn from Eur. Fr. 433 N; see also Byblis' episode at *Met*. 9.551-555.

[112] Differently from Phaedra, Myrrha, who commits incest with her father, refers quite openly to the fact that her passion is impious: cf. e.g. *Met*. 10.346-348, *et quot confundas et iura et nomina, sentis? / tune eris et matrix paelex et adultera patris? / tune soror nati genetrixque vocabere fratris?*; also 10.467-468.

[113] Cf. Sen. *Pha*. 274-357.

[114] "First, every time I read a text by a woman, I am left with the impression that the notion of the signifier as a network of distinctive marks is insufficient" (Moi 1987, 112).

[115] What I define here as 'enclave' is meant as an expression of the Platonic-Irigarian *chora* by Spentzou 2003, Ch. 3.

[116] Cf. Lacan 1997, 218-220.

Olympian system, are not fully denied but recast, readapted and reinterpreted. This new reality is not represented by the *rustica regna* of Saturn, i.e. the stereotypical and highly stylised Golden Age (celebrated by Vergil in *Ecl*. 4). In fact, it originates from the subversive content that can be found even in a fictional world dominated by the order of the 'father' of the Gods, i.e. Jupiter, and in a real world ruled by the "father of the state", the *pater patriae* Augustus. Despite this normative society shaped by men, the maternal component thus persists in a more implicit form within *écriture feminine*: a subtle, undefined and undetermined force that re-interprets and undermines the rules of the patriarchal, and Olympian, order.[117]

Accordingly, the *vetus pietas* (131), which characterised kinship and social relationships in the *rustica ... regna* (132), would disappear in subsequent times, i.e. the present (*aevo moritura futuro*, 131).[118] Jupiter himself is said to have established as *pium* what was able to give pleasure (133), and everything is sanctioned as *fas*, incest in particular (since the sister, Juno, has married her brother, Jupiter; 134).[119] Such a kinship (*generis iunctura*, 135) is firmly tied (*coit*; cf. 129)[120] with a chain knotted by Venus herself (135-136), so that the *culpa* (a programmatic word to indicate an adulterous affair) can be hidden by the name of kinship (138).[121] By pointing out the inconsistency between the rules imposed by morality or social customs and the norms

[117] Cf. Moi 1986, 207: "Is it because, faced with social norms, literature reveals a certain knowledge and sometimes the truth itself about an otherwise repressed, nocturnal, secret and unconscious universe? Because it thus redoubles the social contract by exposing the unsaid, the uncanny? And because it makes a game, a space of fantasy and pleasure, out of the abstract and frustrating order of social signs, the words of everyday communication? [...] This identification with [the] potency [...] also bears witness to women's desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract from their shoulders, to nourish our societies with a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never been an object of circulation in the community: the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hatreds of the second sex".

[118] Cf. Lucr. 3.486, *fore ut pereant aevo privata futuro*.

[119] The word *fas* etymologically relates to speech (see *TLL* VI 1.287.59, *s.v.* "fas" [Vetter]) and recalls the antithesis between speech and written text.

[120] The verb *coeo* can be used both for sexual and marital unions (*TLL* III 1415.17-1421.79, *s.v.* "coeo" [Bannier]): cf. respectively, *Ars* 1.564 and *Her*. 19.67.

[121] Line 137, which is corrupt, has been reconstructed in different ways by various editors (cf. Goold 1977, 54). For *culpa* referring to an adulterous affair in erotic writing, see e.g. Cat. 11.22; 68.139; 75.1; Ov. *Am*. 2.2.55; 2.8.26; 2.19.13; 3.14.6; 3.14.43; *Ars* 2.389; 2.572; *Her*. 17.50, 68, 146, 183.

established by gods, Phaedra questions and challenges the current, well-acknowledged, system of values. While representing an ironic reinterpretation of the Olympian schemes, Phaedra's subversive attitude also appears highly problematic in the *hic et nunc* of Ovid's contemporary context. Frequently addressed as the 'new' Golden Age brought back by Augustus, the age of Saturn became an embodiment, a literary symbol for the return of peace, wealth and morality under the *princeps*.[122] After reassessing a sort of female normative power through the enclosed space of the *écriture féminine*, Ovid's Phaedra uses this space to challenge Augustus' ideological frame.

As words have lost their 'symbolic' meaning and traditional definitions have no significance, there is no need to refrain from referring to things, people and concepts with their proper names. Phaedra's initial vagueness about her status shifts to open acknowledgement, as well as legitimation, of her (step-)motherhood at the end of her letter. The *Cressa puella* (2), who abstained from pronouncing her own name (as well as mentioning her role within the family) at the beginning of the epistle, is no longer afraid to be called a *noverca*, loyal to her stepson (cf. *privigno fida noverca meo*, with a chiastic construction, at 140); the incestuous bond, which should have hindered Phaedra's love, now becomes a means to cultivate her relationship.[123] This part of the letter shows how the two voices, one of the poet and the other of the heroine, entirely overlap and converge to the same aim.[124] While Phaedra's persona infringes the rules sanctioned by the patriarchy and perpetuates the subversive content of the maternal matrix, Ovid mocks the norms established by the 'father' Augustus, the *pater patriae*,

[122] Cf. Introduction, IX-XIII.

[123] "Il vincolo precedente che lega la matrigna a figliastro preserverà la coppia dalle presenze ostili che di norma angustiano gli amori elegiaci" (Landolfi 2000, 41).

[124] This process may be connected to the concept of Bakhtinian dialogism or heteroglossia: "Heteroglossia [...] serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (Bakhtin in Dentith 1995, 218).

thereby challenging the dominant political and social discourse.[125] Phaedra's re-appropriation of her stepmotherhood is an expression of this dissent and subversive attitude (129-130; 140): maternity, like other social norms established by the institutions or authority, is first accepted, only to be subsequently deprived of its objective significance and provided with a new, subjective meaning.

The traditional elegiac topoi are also reinterpreted and incorporated within the writing of the heroine, who towards the end of the epistle performs a programmatic plea like an elegiac lover (149-164).[126] This return to a more authentic elegiac attitude is a consequence of Phaedra's temporary trespass outside of the limits imposed by her stepmotherhood and social norms. The heroine's acceptance and re-appropriation of her (step-)motherhood coincide with the rehabilitation of her own mother, who, distinct from lines 47-52, is mentioned as a good example to follow (165-166). If her mother was able to pervert the bull (*corrumpere taurum*, 165), Phaedra wonders why she should be unable to do the same with Hippolytus.[127] Ovid's educated reader, who is supposed to be aware of Hippolytus' reaction to Phaedra's passion in other sources (culminating in his famous misogynistic speech reported by both Euripides and Seneca), already knows that Phaedra's attempts will be frustrated. The tragic irony of the (Ovidian) heroine serves to question the previous literary tradition, alongside well-established normative categories concerning familial, social and political relations. By prospecting a different outcome to the story, Phaedra posits her challenge to what is customary and well-recognised.

[125] For Augustus as *pater patriae*, cf. e.g. Svet. *Aug*. 58; see also *Met*. 15.860, where Ovid refers to the *princeps* by saying: *pater est et rector uterque*; also *Met*. 2.848.

[126] In this plea, Phaedra seems to replace the role of the nurse in Euripides (cf. *Hipp*. 605-607); see Armstrong 2006, 274.

[127] At line 165 Hippolytus is said to be *ferox* (with *feros* as an alternative reading; see Goold 1977, 56), an adjective referred to Theseus at Cat. 64.73, 247; it also refers to Penthesilea, the queen of the Amazons, in Prop. 3.11.13; for the use of *corrumpo* in an erotic context, see e.g. *Am*. 2.4.35; 3.8.30; Prop. 2.8.57-58.

Phaedra's inclusion of elegiac topoi in her rhetorical strategy continues in her final prayer (167-174), where she wishes for Hippolytus to survive and have success in his undertakings.[128] In this ironic re-adaptation of such a programmatic formula, the concessive of lines 173-174, *quamvis odisse puellas / diceris*, can be read as an implied reference to the extended misogynistic speech of Hippolytus in both Euripides (565-666), and later in Seneca (672-697). The brevity and tangentiality of this reference are particularly striking vis-à-vis the length and elaborate nature of Hippolytus' speech in Euripides' drama, particularly given his famed hatred for women, notable in the literary tradition.[129] The final disavowal and overthrowing of readers' expectations are certainly in agreement with the tone of the entire letter which, as we have seen, is highly ironic, ambiguous and polysemous. By incorporating this polysemy into what is a de facto monologue, Phaedra's persona is co-operating with Ovid's voice to accomplish a deconstruction of reality. While Ovid's reality consists of his contemporary historical and political context, Phaedra's subversive discourse challenges wider social and mental constructions. This double-voiced discourse takes place in a limited space, namely the subtext of the epistle, where Phaedra's process of rejection, re-appropriation and overcoming of the traditional idea of (step-)motherhood is finally accomplished.

This process articulates the construction of a new abstract community, which can be defined as a sort of 'Realm of the Mother(-s)', and would represent an actual translation of the written enclave constituted by the *écriture féminine*.[130] In this realm, ruled by a law (of the Mother) established by Phaedra herself through her writing, social obligations, as well as mental categories, shift their meaning or simply disappear. The conception of maternal space is also readjusted by these 'rules of the Mother(s)', in this

[128] Cf. *Her*. 7.161; 16.11; 18.45; 20.117.

[129] According to Casali 1996, 12, in these two lines "Phaedra still flatters herself"; for an intertextual parallel, see Prop. 1.1.5. The use of the word *diceris* enhances the vagueness of the reference: cf. *Her*. 6.1-3, 131-132; 9.73-74; 17.195-196; *Tr*. 4.3.49; *Pont*. 2.3.66; 2.5.8; 3.1.44.

[130] For the notion of a "speaking-among-women", see Irigaray 1985a, 135.

case by Phaedra, who begins to perceive and depict it subjectively, and not as a construction perpetuated by a paternal symbolic order.[131] Within this space, created by a feminine voice for (a) feminine voice(s), the categories of subjective/objective and true/false are not easily identifiable or distinguishable, but must be explored and rethought more deeply.

Existing patterns and definitions are eventually reshaped and renewed through Phaedra's writing, from the beginning to the end of her letter (175-176): *addimus his precibus lacrimas quoque; verba precantis / perlegis et lacrimas finge videre meas*.[132] The verb *perlegis*[133] recalls, with a ring-composition, the beginning of the letter (3), while the imperative form *finge* (either "pretend" or "imagine")[134] is both programmatic of erotic contexts and a sign of the multiplicity, and complexity, of discourses implied by this text. In the following two sections, which focus on *Her.* 11, it will be demonstrated that the polysemous nature of such discourses changes the literary text into a hypostasis of the (female) body, thereby linking the physical rejection of the maternal body to the psychic, discursive and conceptual rejection of motherhood.

2.4. Sibling relationships: story, background and main patterns of *Her.* 11

Canace is not the most famous of Ovid's heroines, but her letter has been said to be more refined in artistic and literary terms than most of the others.[135] The number of authors or sources for Canace's narrative is rather low:[136] according to scholars, the one with the most influence on Ovid's account is likely to have been Euripides' lost tragedy,

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[131] "If, traditionally, in the role of mother, woman represents a sense of place for man, such a limit means that she becomes a thing, undergoing certain optional changes from one historical period to another. She finds herself defined as thing" (Moi 1987, 122).

[132] Cf. *Her.* 6.71-73; 20.75-78; see also Dido in *Aen.* 4.413-415; cf. Casali 1996, 3.

[133] The manuscripts show an alternation between *perlegis* and *perlege*, the imperative form; see Dörrie 1970, 81.

[134] Cf. *TLL* VI 1.770.41-780.46 (part. VI 1.775.30 ff.), *s.v.* "fingo" [Vollmer].

[135] "The letter of Canace has long been judged among the most successful and appealing of the *Heroides*" (Jacobson 1974, 159); see also Verducci 1985, 181-234.

[136] For an overview, see *RE* X 1853-1855, *s.v.* "Kanake" [Scherling]; Jacobson 1974, 159-175; Reeson 2001, 38.

Aeolus.[137] The main plot of this tragedy can be gathered from a fragmentary hypothesis reported by *P. Oxy.* 2457, discovered in 1961, as well as from later sources, especially pseudo-Plutarch (*Mor.* 312c) and Stobaeus (4.20.72).[138] According to these sources, Canace, one of the daughters of Aeolus, is seduced or, in other cases, raped by her brother, Macareus. In this respect, the version of *P. Oxy.* 2457 is highly ambiguous, since the Greek verb it reports, διέφθείρεν, has been translated as either (he) "seduced" or "raped".[139] While it seems that Euripides portrayed Macareus as "a forceful and aggressive brother", Ovid depicts Canace's and Macareus' relationship as a requited love: *ipsa quoque incalui qualemque audire solebam, / nescio quem sensi corde tepente deum* (*Her.* 11.25-26).[140] Although the pronoun *ipsa* and the conjunction *quoque* emphasise Canace's willingness to engage in a relationship with her brother, "*quoque* does suggest that it was Macareus who took the initiative" and therefore alludes to the alternative version of their story.[141] After having sexual intercourse with her brother, Canace becomes pregnant but manages to hide her pregnancy from her father by pretending to be ill. In the meantime, Macareus, having succeeded in persuading Aeolus to arrange marriages between his daughters and sons, reassures Canace about their future. However, Aeolus decides to draw lots to determine which of his sons will marry which of his daughters, but the lots fail to assign Canace to Macareus.

After Aeolus discovers Canace's childbirth, he orders his grandchild to be killed and sends a sword to Canace, as an apparent invitation to commit suicide. At this point, it seems that Macareus again succeeds in persuading his father to spare Canace and the

[137] Cf. Labate 1977, 583-593. "Scholars are in agreement that Euripides' *Aeolus* is the source for the XIth epistle of the *Heroides*" (Philippides 1996, 426); also Lloyd-Jones 1963, 433-455; Knox 1995, 257-258.

[138] The accounts of pseudo-Plutarch and Stobaeus are, in fact, a summary of part of a broader work, namely the *Tyrrhenica* authored by one Sostratus; see Knox 1995, 258; Reeson 2001, 38.

[139] Cf. Schol. Ar. *Nub.* 1371; Stob. 4.20.72: ἐβιάσατο; see Jacobson 1974, 162-163; Casali 1998, 701-702.

[140] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 163; see Hyg. *Fab.* 243: *propter amorem Macarei fratris*; also Ov. *Tr.* 2.384: *nobilis est Canace fratris amore sui.*

[141] Cf. Knox 1995, 263.

child, but the heroine, unaware of these events, kills herself with the sword noonetheless. The moment preceding the suicide is precisely when the Ovidian Canace writes her letter. After Macareus discovers that Canace has committed suicide, he also kills himself with the same sword.[142] This conclusion of Canace's narrative highlights the dramatic irony intrinsic to *Her.* 11. While knowledgeable readers of Ovid are aware that the heroine is going to kill herself immediately after she is finished writing her letter, as her final words suggest (*mandatum persequar ipsa patris*, 128), they also know that this suicide is "both ill-timed and unnecessary", since both Canace's child and Macareus could have been safe.[143] Canace's anticipation of her suicide produces a metaliterary effect, whereby Canace's survival is strictly tied to the writing of her letter: Canace survives while she writes, but she will die (by self-murder) after having finished her epistle. Canace's writing is what keeps her alive, whereas the interruption of the process of writing implies the interruption of her life.

Like Phaedra's letter, *Her.* 11 can also be profitably interpreted vis-à-vis narrative theory. Thus Canace, as a female storyteller and writer, is comparable to the female narrator *par excellence* – Scheherazade – who is the (fictional) storyteller of the Middle Eastern collection of tales known as the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Scheherazade lives in order to tell stories and is alive because of storytelling itself. Through her strategy of delaying the stories she is narrating, which arouse the curiosity of the prince who is keeping her prisoner, Scheherazade not only escapes death but also creates life (by giving birth to three children).[144] By contrast, it is precisely a kind of suspension or interruption (of writing) that foreshadows Canace's suicide. Moreover, this suicide is also a consequence of her child's death, which (at least from her perspective) has

[142] According to an alternative tradition (Hes. *Cat*. Fr. 10a.34; Callim. *Hymn*. 6.98-99; ps.-Apoll. *Bibl*. 1.7.4; Diod. Sic. 5.61; Ov. *Met*. 6.116), Canace bears a child to Poseidon; cf. Reeson 2001, 40.

[143] Cf. Williams 1992, 201.

[144] "The tale not only stops death, but also gains the time to generate life. Within the narrative scene of the relation, despite its terrifying side, eros and storytelling obey a single rhythm" (Cavarero 2000, 123).

already taken place, whereas the result of Scheherazade's storytelling is her giving birth. Therefore, the proliferation of texts corresponds to a proliferation of stories and life; conversely, an interruption of text/writing corresponds to a disruption of stories and life.[145] But is this proliferation a never-ending (re)generation of stories? Is Canace's (or Scheherazade's) storytelling due to end? Does the story truly end with, or because of, Canace's suicide?

As *Her*. 11 stages a story that is told subjectively, its narrative ends only for the narrating self; the educated reader knows that a sequel does exist.[146] As is usually the case within the *Heroides*, which, as we have seen, open a window on many different versions of the same story (cf. above, V), (Ovid's) Canace suggests that this conclusion is only one of many possible endings to her narrative: for instance, in this case we cannot be certain that Macareus did not arrive on time, so perhaps Canace would have survived. The interruption of this story from the perspective of the intradiegetic and subjective narrator (i.e. Canace) opens up the opportunity for the reader to imagine various outcomes. In this, Ovid has Canace exploit an intrinsic feature of ancient mythology, which is not fixed, univocal and indisputable as, for instance, the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Bible is supposed to be, but changeable, fluid and often subject to plurality, as well as proposing alternative versions to those that are best known. The range of possible alternatives makes the story and the 'body' of the text particularly malleable, plastic and adaptable to alterations. The materiality of such a multifarious and variable text leads to its transformation into a different corporal entity, namely Canace's child, whose inclusion within Canace's narrative changes the body of the

[145] As a *mimesis* of reality, the text is able to transcend reality itself or to create an alternative form of reality; cf. Cavarero 2000, 126-127.

[146] "At a certain point, surely, we must accept that material reality exists, that it continually knocks up against us, that texts are not the only thing" (Stanley 1992, 246).

letter into an actual body, i.e. the body of the child.[147] The possibility that Aeolus would have spared the child in an alternative version of Canace's story[148] suggests that this double corporal entity, i.e. the text and the child, is what survives Canace's death both ontologically, as a material body, and discursively, as a literary text.

Another principal actor within *Her.* 11, Canace's father, Aeolus, apparently plays the role of the villain within the narrative of the heroine, who shows her rage against him through the letter.[149] Such a rebellious attitude culminates in the heroine's suicide: as we shall see, this suicide materialises Canace's *abjection* of herself (to put it in Kristeva's terms), which is ultimately aimed at restoring her control over her own body. Self-appropriation through suicide is a consequence of Canace's internal conflict, which derives not only from her struggle with her father, but also from an unresolved relationship with her motherhood, as well as her (maternal) body. Canace's body is constantly recalled throughout her letter, from its very beginning,[150] where the heroine refers to her own blood, which may stain the *libellus* she is writing (1-2). The traditional tears that articulate the topos of illegibility of the characters[151] are changed into more macabre blood spots and anticipate the heroine's subsequent suicide, thereby creating a ring-composition with the conclusion of the epistle (cf. above, line 128). Canace, like other Ovidian heroines (e.g. Dido in *Her.* 7.184-185), writes while holding, at the same time, a pen and a sword: *dextra tenet calamum, strictum tenet altera ferrum* (3).[152] This

[147] For a connection between text and body, see Cavarero 2000, who draws from Barthes' theorisation: "She [Scheherazade] tells in the text how *the body of the book* is the only thing that facilitates the love-making of *The Arabian Nights*, giving birth into three sons" (127).

[148] Cf. Williams 1992, 201-209; Fulkerson 2005, 67-86.

[149] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 165-166; Verducci 1985, 209-10; Fulkerson 2005, 70: "parts of Canace's letter are addressed to Macareus, but seem designed for Aeolus, her father".

[150] A minority of manuscripts report an opening formula (*Aeolis Aeolidae quam non habet ipsa salutem / mittit et armata verba notata manu*), which has been considered spurious by a majority of scholars. Both Rosati (1984, 417-426) and Reeson (2001, 40-41), however, convincingly argued in favour of its authenticity (*pace* Showerman; cf. Goold 1977, 162). Not only does that opening show close similarities with *Her.* 4.1-2 (*qui, nisi tu dederis, caritura est ipsa, salutem / mittit Amazonio Cressa puella viro*), it also focuses on the act of writing, as well as forecasting the self-murder.

[151] Cf. *Her.* 3.3; 15.98; Prop. 4.3.3-6; Verducci 1985, 209.

[152] See Casanova-Robin 2009, 55-56.

connection between the pen and the sword is very significant, since both objects can be read as phallic symbols. From the very beginning of her letter, Canace therefore performs, or forecasts, acts that are not aligned with the expected female tasks, i.e. literary composition and heroic self-murder by sword (see lines 19-20; below).

This emphasis on the act of writing continues in the subsequent couplet, which is also characterised by the mention of Canace's genealogical background. By defining herself as *Aeolidos fratri scribentis imago* (5), the heroine implies a reference to her father (*Aeolidos*), her brother as the supposed recipient of the letter (*fratri*), and the writing of the letter itself (*scribentis imago*).[153] By acting "in this way" (*sic*), Canace thinks she may be able to please her "cruel father", i.e. *duro ... patri* (6), which is a conventional expression to indicate a programmatic, and negative, character in elegy, just as in comedy.[154] But, what is the phrasing "in this way" supposed to mean? The word *sic* has generally been considered as a reference to Canace's prospective suicide, but *sic* appears rather undetermined and linguistically generic, and can both indicate Canace's sword (the suicide) and the pen, namely the writing of her letter.[155] The overlap between writing and self-murder generates ambiguity concerning what may give satisfaction to Aeolus: Canace's death; her explanation of the reasons for her death (recorded through her epistle); or both of these.

This ambiguity is elaborated further in the following lines, where Canace claims she wishes that her father could be a spectator of her death (*necis ... nostrae*, 7), thereby

[153] The word *imago* introduces the metaphorical frame of the creation of a work of art. These lines contain other hints at this performative context: cf. *videor*, *placere* (6), *spectator* (7), *oculis*, *auctoris*, *opus* (8). Such an intrinsic theatricality may result from the influence of various sources on Ovid. Among artistic sources, it is worth mentioning the Vatican fresco, in which Canace is portrayed together with other female characters from mythology (such as Myrrha). Although such artistic representations are later than Ovid, they are supposed to have been drawn from Hellenistic models (cf. *LIMC* V 1.950-951, *s.v.* "Kanake"). As for literary sources, the notion of pleasing combined with that of spectators may look to Eur. *Aeolus TGrF* 19, misquoted at Aristoph. *Ba.* 1475: τί δ'αἰσχρόν, ἢν μὴ τοῖς θεωμένοις (for the original's τοῖσι χρωμένοις] δοκῇ). Canace's episode might have been influenced also by Pantomime (we know that there was a Canace pantomime; cf. *AP* 11.254); see Knox 1995, 259; Reeson 2001, 42-43; for the intrinsic theatricality of these lines, see Casanova-Robin 2009, 63-64.

[154] Cf. e.g. *Am.* 1.15.17-18; *Rem. am.* 563-564.

[155] Cf. Knox 1995, 260: "i.e. by intending to kill herself, the purpose of the sword she holds".

pointing out that her suicide is a direct result of Aeolus' will.[156] However, *auctorisque oculis exigeretur opus* (8) is also phrased very equivocally (cf. *sic*, 6) and the substantive *opus* is too vague to be seen exclusively as a reference to Canace's suicide. This term, whose first meaning is "deed", can also be employed in the sense of "creation",[157] so that it may be understood as a broader reference to Canace's dead body in its entirety and not necessarily as a specific reference to her suicide, as long as Canace is Aeolus' *opus*, i.e. his daughter. Moreover, Canace seems to play with the multiple meanings of the word *auctor*, which can be translated both as "author" (or as the "person responsible" for something) and as "parent" or "ancestor", so that *auctoris ... opus* may refer either to the result of Aeolus' will, the "creation" (*opus*) of Aeolus as a father (Canace, her daughter), or the *opus* as literary work, i.e. the creation of the "author", Canace.[158] By creating an overlap between literature (*opus* as a literary work) and reality (*opus* as a result of Aeolus' will, i.e. Canace's suicide; or, as Aeolus' offspring, namely Canace herself), the heroine merges the ontological with the linguistic; her storytelling with the actual events happening within her story; her letter with her life.

Canace's ambiguous, multifarious discourse characterises her rhetorical strategy as well as her language throughout her letter. After having ironically highlighted that Aeolus is able to rule over the winds but not control his own *ira* (15-16), the heroine refers to her ancestry: even though her lineage seems to be very noble (it goes back to Jupiter), this is completely useless in the *hic et nunc* of her present situation (17-18).[159] Canace's mention of her ancestry activates a link with Phaedra (*Her*. 4.53-62; cf.

[156] Building on Ovid's dramatic irony, Williams 1992, 207-208, argues that, as Macareus has been able to persuade Aeolus to forgive Canace and spare her child, Canace's suicide will go, in fact, against Aeolus' ultimate will.

[157] See *TLL* IX 2.840.25-862.7 [Ehlers; Lumpe], *s.v.* "opus".

[158] See *TLL* II 1194.47-1213.8 [Bögel], *s.v.* "auctor".

[159] Canace's ancestry and offspring differ according to the sources; cf. Reeson 2001, 47-48; Knox 1995, 262.

above), whose reference to her lineage, however, was meant to genealogically justify her cursed love. Moreover, while Phaedra skilfully uses Jupiter and Juno to validate her incest (4.131-136), Canace, rather curiously, does not openly refer to Jupiter's incestuous relationship. By implying that having Jupiter as an ancestor is useless to justify her own incestuous liaison with Macareus to his father Aeolus,[160] Canace almost undermines Phaedra's rhetorical strategy that we saw at work in *Her*. 4. Canace's omission and interplay with a fellow heroine are further evidence of the variety and originality that characterise the *Heroides* as a collection.

In fact, Canace's divine ancestry would not change Aeolus' decision and does not make the sword the heroine is holding in her hand less dangerous or less effective (19-20): *num minus infestum, funebria munera, ferrum / feminea teneo, non mea tela, manu?* The line-long hyperbaton *feminea ... manu* (20) establishes an opposition between *feminea* ("feminine") and *ferrum*, i.e. the sword, which is a man's weapon. This opposition is enhanced by the expression *non mea tela* (20), which can be translated either as "weapons not suited for me" or "weapons not belonging to me". While the literal meaning of the substantive *telum* would be "spear" or "javelin", metaphorically it can also mean "male member".[161] As the sword is both a weapon suited to men and the concrete object that has been sent to Canace by her father (cf. *funebria munera*, 19: with tragic irony implied in the adjective *funebria*) to prompt her suicide, such a lexical ambivalence underlines Aeolus' control over Canace's body and sexuality, as well as hinting at a different kind of incest, namely between father and daughter.[162] This connotation would suggest that a form of jealousy on Aeolus' part

[160] Cf. Casali 1998, 707-710; Fulkerson 2005, 71-72.

[161] See e.g. *Priap*. 9.14, 55.4; Mart. 11.78.6; see also *Am*. 2.9.31; *Ars* 3.734; *Her*. 2.39-40; 3.107-108 (as a possible allusion); cf. *OLD* 1911, *s.v.* "telum"; Adams 1982, 19-22.

[162] Canace will refer again to Aeolus' sword and to her suicide at lines 95-100, where she recalls the lexical context related to the gift: *dona paterna* (98), *muneribus* (99), *tua dote* (100); see Casali 1998, 706; Reeson 2001, 49.

might well have come into play when he decided to punish Canace so harshly for her relationship with Macareus.

Furthermore, the word *tela*, due to its homography with the first declension substantive *tela* (gen. *telae*), may also be interpreted as a pun, which alludes to a more appropriate activity for a woman, i.e. spinning.[163] The opposition between sword and web is one way to translate symbolically the opposition between male and female genders in antiquity, and more particularly in Ovid's poetry.[164] Sword and web, however, together with symbolic body acts and attitudes, must be interpreted only as performative markers of expression of a gender, which is in fact determined by social and ideological categories.[165] By holding in her hands a pen and a sword, Canace performs tasks that are more appropriate for men, thereby destabilising gender categories.[166] This destabilisation is marked by the antithesis between male and female objects and/or attitudes that continues throughout the entire epistle and culminates with Canace's departure, or a sort of dissociation, from the objectified, 'othered', version of herself. This break is reinforced by the loss of her child, which, as we shall see, is created ad hoc in order to justify Canace's suicide and endow it with further significance, as well as a broader scope: the heroine's suicidal act articulates her last rebellion against the 'law' of *her* father.

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[163] Cf. above: Penelope at *Her.* 1.9-10; also Hypermestra at *Her.* 14.65; Ov. *Am.* 3.9.30, *Pont.* 3.1.113 (*Icariotide tela*); cf. Knox 1995, 263; Reeson 2001, 49.

[164] Cf. e.g. the episode of Philomela's rape (*Met.* 6.549-560: Tereus cuts Philomela's tongue with his sword after having raped her; 6.576-586: Philomela reports her rape by weaving it; see Richlin 1992a, 158-179). Within the *Heroides*, cf. Dido at *Her.* 7.184, Hermione at *Her.* 8.60; see also *Her.* 9.115-116, where Omphale is said to hold Hercules' *tela*.

[165] "As a sedimental effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions ..."; Butler 1993, 10.

[166] "This instability is the reconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which 'sex' is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of 'sex' into a potentially productive crisis"; Butler 1993, 10. Drawing from the Foucauldian conception of construction of power, Butler discusses the relationship between sex and gender in terms of constructivism and deconstructivism: beyond gender, and before it, (what is perceived as) 'the subject' is defined as a "process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (Butler 1993, 9).

2.5. An ill-fated mother or an insolent daughter?

As has been highlighted by certain scholars, from Aeolus' point of view, Canace's transgression is not determined by her incest with Macareus but by the clandestine and illicit nature of her affair, which demonstrates her escape from her father's control.[167] Evidence of this affair can be seen in Canace's pregnancy and childbirth, which the heroine does not manage to keep hidden from her father. After having claimed that she regrets the moment when she and Macareus joined together in love (20-21: *quae ... hora*, with an emphatic prolepsis of the relative pronoun),[168] Canace alludes to her incest by mentioning that Macareus has loved her more than a brother should do (*plus me, frater, quam frater amasti*, 23) and that "she was [to him] what a sister should not be" (*non debet quod soror esse*, *fui*, 24).[169] Although the heroine refers quite openly to her incest, the main focus of her epistle is not incest per se but the result and consequence of her incestuous relationship, i.e. her childbirth, which materialises the infringement of her father's orders.[170]

While relating her falling in love with Macareus, at lines 27-30 Canace begins listing what appears to be a series of traditional symptoms of lovesickness. However, the symptoms are depicted in such an ambiguous way that they can be interpreted either as the result of lovesickness, or of pregnancy. Accordingly, if paleness,[171] thinness (27)[172] and loss of appetite (28), as well as insomnia[173] and groans (29-30; cf. Byblis at *Met.*

[167] "Aeolus sends the sword to Canace not because of incest, but because of the loss of her honour" (Reeson 2001, 50); cf. also Philippides 1996, 426-439; Verducci 1985, 220-221.

[168] For the focus on the sexual union in other scenes from the *Heroides*, cf. *Her*. 2.57-60; 7.93-94 (*illa dies nocuit, qua nos declive sub antrum / caeruleus subitis compulit imber aquis*); 13.115-118.

[169] Cf. *Met*. 9.456 (Byblis' episode): *non soror ut fratrem, nec qua debebat, amabat*; also *Ars* 1.285 (Myrrha); Knox 1995, 263. "Dans le distique 23-24, l'heroïne recourt à une forme de litote pour évoquer la degré d'affection inconvenant qui la lie à Macarée" (Casanova-Robin 2009, 60). The incest is also mentioned in some fragments of Euripides' *Aeolus* (*TGrF* 17, 18 and 24); cf. Reeson 2001, 50.

[170] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 168: "Only once does she allude to their sexual liaison (23-26) and this is in terms which almost completely lack physical colour"; also Philippides 1996, 435.

[171] Cf. e.g. *Am*. 2.11.28; *Ars* 1.120; 2.450.

[172] Cf. *Ars* 1.729, 733; *Met*. 3.397; 9.536; 11.793.

[173] For insomnia as a symptom of lovesickness, see e.g. *Am*. 1.2.1-4; for a discussion of the reading *somni* (29), see Reeson 2001, 55-56.

9.537), are programmatic patterns of lovesickness in erotic poetry, these can also result from pregnancy.[174] Since Canace (the narrating-I) has already given birth before writing the letter and, as the omniscient narrator, is aware that she would have conceived, we may read these ambivalent symptoms as a rhetorical attempt to blur the boundaries between her falling in love and becoming pregnant.[175] If we accept this ambiguity between lovesickness and pregnancy, the sequence of events appears particularly confused, since the heroine describes her pregnancy as though it happened before she had fallen in love, thereby generating a sort of *hysteron proteron* in the progression of the story.

This confusion, as well as the overlap between different temporal dimensions and narrators, increases when the heroine distances herself from the moment of the story she is narrating at lines 27-30 and openly acknowledges that the reason for her illness was love: *nec noram, quid amans esset; at illud eram* (32).[176] After the nurse also remarks that the cause of Canace's condition was love (*Aeoli, dixit, amas*, 34),[177] the heroine looks at her bosom (35): this act is said to be *tacita signa* ("silent proof", 36) of her confession (*fatentis*, 36). Although Canace's looking down at her belly may be interpreted simply as a reaction determined by her *pudor*, the choice of the word *gremium* (*gremio*, 35)[178] does not appear incidental, but seems to anticipate the

[174] This argument was made by Casali 1998, 703-704, who quotes the Hippocratic *Women's Diseases* 1.17, which lists some effects of pregnancy that occur also in *Her.* 11; cf. also Hipp. *Mul.* 1.25-34 (esp. 34).

[175] In fact, all of the verbs in this passage are past tense, so they could apply to both falling in love and pregnancy.

[176] For the alternation between the form *eram* and *erat* in the manuscripts, as well as related philological issues, see Reeson 2001, 57.

[177] The nurse as a love-confidant is quite programmatic in the tragic genre: in Euripides' *Aeolus*, the presence of the τροφός is attested by the hypothesis (cf. Reeson 2001, 57).

[178] The word *gremium* may refer to those who take care of children, i.e. parents, nurses, *et sim.* (cf. *TLL* VI 2.2320.69-71, *s.v.* "gremium"), but it also indicates the belly and has, thus, the same meaning as *venter* (cf. line 37; *TLL* VI 2.2322.36-50). As the substantive *venter* is a more obvious word for the pregnant belly (see *OLD* 2030, *s.v.* "venter", 4), the choice of the word *gremium* enhances the ambiguity of Canace's behaviour, who both looks at her bosom and becomes red: beyond being an expression of *pudor*, the form *erubui* might be considered as a symptom of pregnancy (cf. e.g. Hipp. *Mul.* 29). For the circulation of Greek medical writings in the Roman world, see e.g. Nutton 2004, 160-173.

heroine's long description of her pregnancy and childbirth beginning at line 37.[179] By using the conjunction *iamque* (37), Canace introduces this description rather abruptly, thereby enhancing the overlap between the moment of her falling in love and the beginning of her pregnancy. These two circumstances are therefore juxtaposed in the memory of the heroine, who appears to be no longer able to distinguish between the two events.[180] Perceived as a traumatic experience, pregnancy leads Canace to alienate, and depart from, her body and what is growing within her, i.e. the foetus. This sort of rejection of her (pregnant) body as well as her offspring generates an initial abjection of her motherhood (37-44; 49-64).

> iamque tumescebant vitiati pondera ventris,
>   aegraque furtivum membra gravabat onus.
> quas mihi non herbas, quae non medicamina nutrix
>   attulit audaci supposuitque manu, 40
> ut penitus nostris—hoc te celavimus unum—
>   visceribus crescens excuteretur onus?
> a, nimium vivax admotis restitit infans
>   artibus et tecto tutus ab hoste fuit.
> [...]
> nec tenui vocem. "quid," ait, "tua crimina prodis?"
>   oraque clamantis conscia pressit anus. 50
> 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— 55
>   et grave, si morerer, mors quoque crimen erat—
> cum super incumbens scissa tunicaque comaque
>   pressa refovisti pectora nostra tuis,
> et mihi "vive, soror, soror o carissima," dixti;
>   "vive nec unius corpore perde duos! 60
> 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.
>
> (Ov. *Her*. 11.37-44; 49-64)

[179] This gesture has been read as a "sign of modesty" by Knox 1995, 265; for intertextual parallels, see e.g. Prop. 1.1.3, but especially *Am*. 1.8.37; 2.4.11.

[180] According to Reeson 2001, 59, *iamque tumescebant* "moves the reader on to a point in time when Canace is already pregnant: the imperfect tense of the verb ensures that we hit the ground running"; see also Verducci 1985, 213.

As observed, the reference to Canace's pregnancy comes unexpectedly (*iamque*, 37) and the unlawful nature of her relationship with Macareus is recalled only implicitly through the expression *vitiati pondera ventris* (37), where the participle *vitiati* hints at incestuous intercourse.[181] This connotation is reinforced in the following line (38), characterised by the parallel construction *aegraque furtivum membra ... onus*, where the *iunctura* of *furtivum ... onus* indicates the clandestine nature of Canace's pregnancy, as well as her need to keep it hidden.[182] The next six lines (38-44) refer to the heroine's frustrated attempts at ending her pregnancy through herbs or medicines that the nurse (*nutrix*, 39) has given or applied to her (*attulit ... supposuitque*, 40): *ut penitus nostris [...] visceribus crescens excuteretur onus* (41-42).[183] Whether the reference to the abortion attempts is an Ovidian invention or not,[184] it is worth noting that abortion is an unusually prominent feature within Ovid's elegiac poetry (particularly when compared to other elegiac poets), where the poet programmatically suggests that *puellae* should avoid pregnancies in order to preserve their beauty.[185] Pregnancy (or motherhood) is noticeably antithetical to elegiac love, and abortion represents for the *puella* a means to both preserve her beauty and (perhaps more importantly) to keep her adulterous affair(s) hidden from her husband. Remarkably, in Canace's epistle the role of the 'legitimate' husband seems to be played by Canace's father, who is the one who becomes angry after his discovery of Canace's affair. This overlap between paternal authority and

[181] Cf. *OLD* 2079, *s.v.* "vitio" (3): "to impair by violating the virginity of, deflower": the participle form *vitiati* is "an explicit term with legal undertones" (Knox 1995, 265).

[182] Cf. *TLL* VI 1.1643.27-1645.6, *s.v.* "furtivus" [Rubenbauer]; Knox 1995, 266.

[183] *Suppono* is a specific medical term, which may hint at the nurse's experience in pregnancies; cf. *OLD* 1883, *s.v.* "suppono" (2b); also *Am.* 2.14.27. For an intertextual parallel of lines 41-42, see *Fast.* 1.624; for a wider discussion of the herbs and pessaries given by the nurse, see Reeson 2001, 61.

[184] Cf. Verducci 1985, 214; Knox 1995, 266.

[185] Cf. Gamel 1989, 183-206; Kapparis 2002, 117-118; 142. Ovid devotes two elegies to his mistress' abortion, i.e. *Am.* 2.13 and 2.14; cf. Watts 1973, 89-101; Dixon 2001, 59-65; cf. also the later accounts of emperor Domitian's and Julia's (Flavius Sabinus' daughter) affair in Juv. 2.34-40; Plin. *Ep.* 4.11.6; Svet. *Dom.* 22; also Tac. *Ann.* 14.63 (Octavia, accused by Nero of having concealed her affair by having an abortion). For some examples of pregnancy considered as disastrous for female beauty, see *Ars* 3.81; Sen. *Helv.* 16.3 (Seneca praises his mother since she was not concerned with preserving her beauty); also Theoc. *Id.* 27.30; for abortion in medical writings, cf. Hipp. *Mul.* 1.72; Nutton 2004, 22.

sexual jealousy is a subtle allusion to Aeolus' ambiguous role within Canace's epistle and narrative. As we have seen, Aeolus' jealousy seems to go beyond his preoccupation with maintaining control over his children's sexual relationships, and may imply an erotic inclination towards his daughter.

A historical and legal reading of abortion, which could have been a reason for divorce according to Roman law but was not considered to be a strictly illegal act,[186] suggests that Canace's actions are not only a way to escape her father's judgment, but may have also been at variance with the norms established by Augustus' family policy.[187] Canace's abortion attempt, however, does not succeed (43-44): while representing a sort of personification of the foetus, the expression *nimium vivax ... infans* (43) also suggests that Canace is, at least unconsciously, proud of the strength of her unborn child, who manages to resist the attempts to abort it.[188] These coexisting feelings at such an early stage within Canace's narrative reveal an inner conflict between the heroine's desire (and need) to separate from her de-personalised self (that is materialised by her child) and the maternal affection she feels for her unborn baby.[189] Canace's ambivalent attitudes can be read as an expression of the abjection of her pregnant body. Caused by something that is perceived as disturbing for the incorruptibility and stability of the self, abjection is manifested by the need to expel a

[186] Although abortion was not illegal, it was sanctioned by social norms, since it went against the principles of the *mos maiorum*; cf. e.g. Riddle 1992, 7-10. For the relationship between abortion and adultery, as well as female beauty, within the classical world, cf. Kapparis 2002, 97-120, 193-194; Treggiari 1991, 406 (cf. Cic. *Clu*. 32-35; Ov. *Am*. 2.13.3; *Fast*. 1.621-624; Quint. *Inst*. 8.4.11; Tac. *Ann*. 14.63.1; Juv. 6.594-601; *Dig*. 48.19.39); in Roman culture, the foetus was not considered to be a person (cf. *Dig*. 35.2.9.1).

[187] Cf. e.g. Dixon 2001, 62-63; Kapparis 2002, 102; 138-139; Martorana 2020, 65-75. Abortion was also socially condemned because it was suspected to conceal adulterous affairs: see e.g. Richlin 2014, 45.

[188] Cf. *Tr*. 2.415-416.

[189] "There is a fine description at 41-46 of the conflict in a woman who feels it necessary to abort, yet cannot but help feeling strongly for her child" (Jacobson 1974, 170); cf. Reeson 2001, 63: "*nimium vivax* indicates regret at the foetus' tenacity to life [...]".

part of one's own body that is felt to be "unclean".[190] This abject element is not recognised immediately, but is acknowledged from the symptoms, like Canace's pregnancy: the abject element is suspended between the inside and outside, and delimits the borders of the body; its nature is highly ambiguous and liminal – as liminal as the condition of the foetus.[191]

Thus, the still unborn corporal entity growing within her body represents for Canace a part of herself which she needs to forego, to *abort*. The foetus is the expression of an 'other(-ness)' that is still within her body, but needs either to be eliminated or expelled. The unborn child embodies a sort of abject 'other', which has already been appropriated, and determined, by patriarchal norms: to be objectified, materialised, as this 'other', it needs to be generated (i.e. expelled). Accordingly, by giving birth, that is, by expelling the 'abject other', Canace is able to define her subjectivity within a male-dominated context as a counterpart of the objectivity which she generates, i.e. the child.[192] Therefore, Canace's contradictory attitude towards her own pregnant body arises from the combination between her willingness to eliminate (i.e. *abort*) the abject part of herself (the foetus), and her desire to expel and objectify it.

This expulsion is enacted through childbirth, which is described from line 49 onwards. At lines 49-50, Canace observes that her secret childbirth was assisted by the nurse, who prevented her groans: the word *crimina* (49), because of its indeterminacy, may refer both to incestuous intercourse and pregnancy.[193] This entire line recalls Phaedra's reference to her mother's monstrous childbirth in *Her*. 4.58 (*enixa est utero*

[190] Kristeva 1982, 3-4: "It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The boarder has become an object. [...] Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object".

[191] Cf. Kristeva 1982, 11; also Grosz 1990, 80-103: "The abject is that part of the subject [...] which it attempts to expel. The abject is the symptom of the object's failure to fill the subject or to define and anchor the subject" (87).

[192] "Abjection is the subject's and culture's revolt against the corporeality of subjectivity" (cf. Grosz 1990, 94).

[193] Cf. *OLD* 459, *s.v.* "crimen", 4: "a misdeed, crime"; see also Reeson 2001, 67.

crimen onusque suo; cf. above, 2.2.), whereas Canace uses *crimen* to allude either to her affair or her pregnancy (or to both). The use of the word *crimen* recalls the incestuous connotation that also characterises Phaedra's letter. To conceal this *crimen*, Canace has to stifle her groans, in spite of the pain she feels: *timor et nutrix et pudor* (52), rhetorically marked by a syllepsis, are said to inhibit Canace's cries.[194] This *tricolon* is paralleled by the content of the following lines, where three reactions to the labour are also mentioned, namely groans (*gemitus*, 53), words (*verba*, 53), and tears (*lacrimas*, 54).[195] Aside from being interpreted as typical reactions to the pain of childbirth, these attitudes also articulate Canace's struggle against a part of herself that she now sees as *abject*. As the "inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding",[196] abjection leads Canace to her attitude fluctuating between the need to keep herself united (by eliminating the abject element from her body) and her desire to expel, engender, and objectify this (abject) part of herself (i.e. an-other-self, the child) to define and establish the borders of her subjective self-identity.

In this respect, when the heroine states that she has to stifle her groans and words as well as force herself (*cogor*, 54) to drink her tears (*lacrimas conbibere ... meas*, 54), it seems as though the necessity to expel the foetus is balanced by the need to hold together the various parts of herself – here represented by her groans, screams and tears. In particular, the reference to the *gemitus* and *lacrimae* hints at a kind of abjection that manifests itself as corporal fluids flowing from her body.[197] To expel this sort of undetermined and indistinct 'fluidity' that the foetus represents, Canace needs to retain,

[194] This *tricolon* has been defined as a syllepsis, which, in this case, "places the abstract nouns *timor* and *pudor* on the same plane as the *nutrix*" (Reeson 2001, 69); cf. Ov. *Ars* 1.551; 3.614.

[195] Although in other cases the expression *lacrimas conbibere ... meas* has to be taken figuratively (cf. *Met*. 13.539-540; Sen. *Ep*. 49.1), in this passage it seems that it works both at a literary and a metaphorical level; see Knox 1995, 268; Reeson 2001, 70.

[196] Cf. Kristeva 1982, 64.

[197] For feminine fluids and related theories in ancient world, cf. e.g. Hipp. *Mul*. 1 ("And when the body of a woman – whose flesh is soft – happens to be full of blood and if that blood does not go off from her body, pain occurs, whenever her flesh is full and becomes heated"; cf. Hanson 1975, 572); see also Nutton 2004, 47-48.

i.e. to (re-)include, other fluids produced by her body.[198] This process of compensation enables the existence of a balance between the 'I' and the 'other', interiority and exteriority, inside and outside; at the same time, the acknowledgement of the 'abject' element implies a process of self-destruction and regeneration, death and rebirth. This progression from life to death and *vice versa* is actually experienced by the heroine in the following couplet (55-56), where she describes *mors* as an epiphany (*mors erat ante oculos*, 55)[199] and states that *Lucina*, the goddess of childbirth, did not help her (*et opem Lucina negabat*, 55).[200] This death, however, does not represent an escape, but would be a *crimen* itself (it is worth noting that this word is used twice in the space of a few lines), since it would reveal Canace's pregnancy. Canace's figurative and metaphorical death is followed by a form of rebirth, namely the actual birth of her child.

This rebirth is seemingly facilitated by the arrival of Macareus, who suddenly appears on the literary stage of the epistle and comforts Canace, both physically and psychologically (55-61).[201] In his words, Macareus candidly refers to Canace as a sister (*"vive, soror, soror o carissima"*; 59) without refraining from hinting at the incestuous nature of their relationship (cf. *e contrario*, Phaedra in *Her*. 4 or Byblis in *Met*. 9).[202] After having stated that she was dead (*mortua*, 63) and came back to life again at Macareus' words (*ad tua verba revixi*, 63), the heroine says that finally she gave birth:

[198] Speaking about the symptom of abjection, Kristeva 1982, 11, defines it as "a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire"; cf. also Grosz 1990, 90-94.

[199] In terms of figures of speech, such a description can be said to be a hypostasis, i.e. a particular kind of personification.

[200] Lucina's help is often denied, or hindered, within the narratives of Juno's rivals, such as Semele, Latona or Alcmene. At *Met*. 9.281-323, for instance, Alcmene relates her labours, underlining her struggle to get the help of Lucina, who was blocked by Juno (9.292-305); cf. Fantham 2004, 67-69.

[201] Cf. *AP* 5.128.1.

[202] Cf. Knox 1995, 268, on *soror* (59): "the choice of address is poignant, since his attentions are more than brotherly"; also Philippides 1996, 434. In *Met*. 9.466-467 and 487-488, by contrast, Byblis is not keen on addressing Caunus as her brother and wishes to not be his sister.

et positum est uteri crimen onusque mei (64).[203] Canace's 'reinvigoration' or 'rebirth' after Macareus' words is closely followed by the childbirth: this is described through certain lexical choices recurrent within *Her.* 11 in reference either to her pregnancy or her unborn child, particularly the nouns *crimen* and *onus*, which create a chiastic construction with *uteri ... mei* (64). As a form of rite of passage, Canace's childbirth marks the death and rebirth of the heroine herself, thereby paving the way to the creation of her new, subjective identity.[204]

This rebirth overlaps with Canace's actual childbirth, which is supported by the external help of Macareus,[205] and results in the generation and expulsion of Canace's abject self, i.e. the body of her child. This child, who is thus also linked with Macareus, is both loved and hated by his mother, Canace. As an external object and manifestation of an 'abject' otherness, the child both allows the heroine to acknowledge and distinguish her own subjectivity, while also (de)limiting it. To put it in Kristeva's words, this "abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject [:] one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject".[206] By fixing the borders of Canace's body, the *abject body* of her child leads the heroine to an acknowledgement of her own corporeality and, accordingly, subjectivity.

Moving to the events subsequent to the childbirth, Canace relates her attempts to conceal the baby with the help of the nurse (65-70). The heroine states that the *crimina* (this is the fourth, and last, occurrence of this word in the epistle), i.e. the child that has resulted from an adulterous/incestuous affair, is to be removed from Aeolus' sight,

[203] Some editors, including Burman and Palmer, who quote Phaedr. 1.18.5, 1.19.4 and Cat. 34.8, print *depositum* instead of *positum*; cf. Reeson 2001, 74-75.

[204] "[...] 'I' am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit" (Kristeva 1982, 3).

[205] Cf. lines 58 (*refovisti pectora nostra*), 59 (*vive, soror*), 63 (*revixi*).

[206] Kristeva 1982, 5.

oculis ... patris (66).[207] At this point, Aeolus' role within the story starts to become more significant and active than before, although, as observed, his presence permeates the entire epistle from its very start. As soon as Aeolus has discovered the newborn, he fills up the court with his cries (73-74). Thereafter, he suddenly bursts into Canace's bedchamber; she breaks out into tears, but is powerless and unable to speak: the expression *nostrum vulgat clamore pudorem* (79), together with the adjective *pudibunda* (80), emphasises Canace's concern with her reputation, which makes her cry (*lacrimas*, 81).[208] While this mention of tears (81) may recall the previous scene of childbirth (54), the tears appear in this case to have been caused not only by fear, but mostly because of shame. Aeolus' irruption into Canace's bedchamber represents the quasi-obsessive control that 'the Father' wants over his daughter's life and sexuality, as well as her reproductive capability. This concern over Canace's childbirth confirms that Aeolus' anger is caused not by incest per se, but by his ignorance of, and lack of control over, Canace's affair with Macareus.[209]

Aeolus' attitude alludes once more to his putative jealousy for Canace, which does not find a counterbalance in his feelings for Macareus:[210] only Canace will be given the sword to commit suicide, whereas Macareus appears to have been able to persuade his father to spare their child (cf. above, 2.4.). Canace, by contrast, is not allowed to defend herself with words but remains silent, her only weapon being her letter, her written expression. The heroine appears to be silenced not only by her father, but her self-

[207] *Crimina* "may be taken as metaphor for the heroine's infant, the spring of an illicit love affair" (Philippides 1996, 433). According to Knox 1995, 269, this scene has to be placed after the unsuccessful drawing of the lots, when Canace has lost hope about her destiny. It is also worth noting a possible ironic overlap between Macareus and Aeolus in the mention of the *pater* (66).

[208] The adjective *pudibunda* (81) recalls *pudorem* (79): the former is a quite a rare word, which is first attested in Hor. *Ars* 233 and *Culex* 399, and is considered to be not so formal (see Knox 1995, 271); see also Casanova-Robin 2009, 58-59.

[209] According to some scholars, at this point Aeolus still does not know that Macareus is the father of Canace's child, but is only concerned with his daughter's extra-marital affair; see Philippides 1996, 435-438.

[210] According to the version reported by pseudo-Plutarch (*Mor.* 312c) and Stobaeus (4.20.72), Macareus' death occurs because of his suicide, after the discovery of Canace's dead body – and not because of Aeolus' will; see Williams 1992, 203.

expression is paradoxically also limited by the intervention of her brother. Despite acting for her benefit, Macareus moves within the borders of the same patriarchal system as his father,[211] so there seems to be no space for Canace's intervention; her words would be useless and hopeless. By remaining silent, the heroine makes it clear that she needs the intermediary of another male character (that is, Macareus) to gain a chance to be spared: Canace's expression does not truly matter. Her suicide, therefore, has to be seen as a rebellious counteraction (the only one possible alongside her epistle) to the limitations imposed by this male-dominated system, which is hypostasised by her father and brother/lover, rather than simply as a reaction to her father's order or her child's death.

The death of Canace's child is introduced at lines 89-90, where Canace states that an undefined *inimicus* brought her child (*mea viscera*, 89-90) into the deep forests (*silvas in altas*, with anastrophe, 89) to be eaten (*edenda*, 90) by the wolves. According to certain scholars, the *inimicus* cannot be Aeolus, while others state that he must be Canace's father.[212] Whoever the *inimicus* is, Canace's report gives rise to questions about the extent of her knowledge of her child's death. In other words, from what she says, it seems that Canace actually witnesses (*me coram*, 89) her child being taken away from her, but cannot know with certainty what really happens in the aftermath (91-92).[213] Therefore, as this death is only anticipated and forecast – but not witnessed – by Canace, the child's unfortunate destiny may just be seen as her projection of future events, which may or may not have happened. As a rhetorical construction of the heroine, the child's death would be functional to her attempt at shaping her version of the story, thereby escaping the constraints of the paternal, and patriarchal, authority.

[211] With respect to the limitations of female speech within a male-based context, particularly in Antiquity, cf. e.g. Skinner 1993, 129.

[212] While Knox 1995, 272, believes that this *inimicus* is Aeolus, I side with Reeson 2001, 88-89, who thinks that he may be one of Aeolus' servants.

[213] Cf. Williams 1992, 201-209.

The word *viscera*, i.e. "womb" (90; cf. 118; *Her.* 1.90),[214] an "emotive term for a child",[215] is only one of many generic, yet metaphorical, ways in which Canace refers either to the foetus or to the newborn throughout the epistle. Beyond being poetic *variationes*, these alternatives contribute to enhancing the indeterminacy and objectification of the 'other' who Canace is referring to: cf. *pondera ventris* (37), *onus* (38; 42), *infans* (43), before the childbirth; *onus* (64), *crimen* (64; 66; 67), *infans* (67; 73; 119), *nepotem* (83), *viscera* (90; 118), *puer* (107), *natus* (108; 111; 113; 122), *pignus* (113), after the childbirth. These terms are characterised in most cases by the neuter, with a few exceptions, i.e. *parvum ... nepotem* (83), *puer* (107), *natus* (108; 111; 113); a rather peculiar occurrence is represented by *infans ... tutus* (43-44), where Canace is still referring to the unborn child but employs the masculine gender for the related adjective. Although the gendering of her child as male before childbirth is justified by Canace's awareness of the sex of the foetus as an omniscient narrator (the narrating-I), this choice also suggests that the heroine is keen on linguistically constructing the gender of her child[216] and enhancing his masculinity, without actually knowing it at the time of the story she is narrating.[217] This anticipation of the sex of her still unborn child may be interpreted as Canace's attempt at attributing to *him* a place

[214] Cf. e.g. Ov. *Am.* 2.14.27; *Rem. am.* 59; *Met.* 5.18-19; 6.651; 8.478; 10.465; *Fast.* 6.137; *Tr.* 1.7.20; this meaning may derive from the Greek σπλάγχνα, which is used not only for womb but also for offspring: cf. e.g. Artem. 1.44; 5.57.

[215] Cf. Reeson 2001, 89.

[216] "This linguistic process of sexing the universe, of providing gendered categories for each of its elements, assisted the native speaker in turn by providing labels through which that named universe could be further interpreted and understood"; cf. Corbeill 2015, 3. It is worth underlining that the attribution of the male sex to the unborn child occurs in the passage describing the resistance of the foetus to the abortion attempts, so that masculinity and strength seem to be closely related.

[217] This attribution of the unborn child to the male gender may be explained, for instance, through the Lacanian theory of subjectivity, which has been developed further by Kristeva and Irigaray (for a summary, see Moi 1985, *passim*). According to this theory, women automatically internalise the patriarchal system and express this internalisation in their language, which as a result is also male-based; see also Frazer and Cameron 1988, 25-40.

within a patriarchal frame, and agrees with her perception of it/him as an 'otherness', an abject element.[218]

Childbirth coexists with death within the last section of *Her*. 11, as Canace's suicide and her child's (putative) death seem to suggest. As if they were on a theatrical stage, after Aeolus leaves, another character enters Canace's bedchamber, the messenger.[219] Introduced through a chiastic construction, *patrius vultu maerente satelles* (93), the messenger is said to pronounce "shameful words" (94), i.e. Aeolus' message, while also bringing a sword to the heroine: these words and this object are meant to make her pursue self-murder. According to some interpretations, Aeolus has the sword delivered to Canace (instead of giving it to her in person) in order to avoid the μίασμα deriving from her death, as well as confining her killing to a spatially distant dimension (cf. Creon in the *Antigone*).[220] Moreover, the emphasis on the sword, which is mentioned twice in the same line, with a repetition of the same word in the same case (*Aeolus hunc ensem mittit tibi – tradidit ensem*, 95),[221] suggests that the choice of such a weapon is not incidental. As the sword is both a weapon suited for men and a phallic symbol, this insistence on such an object, alongside the expression *condam dona paterna* (98), contributes to the depiction of Canace's death as an act of symbolic sexual penetration, which is metaphorically perpetrated by Aeolus as both an expression of his power and his (incestuous) sexual desire for his daughter.[222]

[218] There are a few occurrences (aside from Ovid's *Her*. 11) when the word *infans* is used to indicate a still unborn child (cf. Lucr. 5.810; Ov. *Met*. 3.307, 10.503; Liv. 24.10.10; Sen. *QNat*. 3.27.2, 3.29.3; Cels. 5.21.5; Svet. *Aug*. 63.1; cf. below for Ov. *Her*. 7.135); see *TLL* VII 1.1346.31-1349.67, *s.v.* "infans" [Bulhart].

[219] For the theatricality of this scene, cf. Reeson 2001, 83.

[220] This episode must have also been mentioned by Sostratus (cf. ps.-Plut. *Mor*. 312C and Stob. 4.20.72); according to Reeson 2001, 94, the episode was also reported in Euripides' *Aeolus*.

[221] The parenthesis of line 95 increases the pathos of the scene and shows a certain empathy of the author toward the heroine; cf. also Verg. *Aen*. 6.406. For a similar repetition of the same word in the same case, see e.g. *Met*. 1.590-591; 5.281-282.

[222] A similar sexual connotation of this verb can be found in e.g. Plaut. *Poen*. 1269; Ov. *Am*. 3.14.23; see *TLL* IV 149.50-62, *s.v.* "condo" [Spelthahn].

At the same time, an anthropological reading would suggest that the *ensis* recalls the context of an exchange culture and reciprocation, insofar as Canace is forced to give away the child and receives a sword in replacement (cf. *dona*).[223] The product of her womb, the child, which has been expelled from her body, is exchanged for an object, the sword, which is meant to penetrate her.[224] By saying that she is going to "bury" (*condo*, 98) the sword (*dona paterna*, 98) in her breast (*pectoribus ... meis*, with one-line long hyperbaton, 98), Canace implies a double meaning, that is to take her father's gifts to heart both literally, i.e. by pursuing her suicide, and metaphorically (with a certain irony implied in this latter sense, as the paternal gifts are certainly not going to please her).[225] The sword, i.e. the paternal gift, represents the dowry that her father (*genitor*, 99) has prepared for her: line 100 (*hac tua dote, pater, filia dives erit*, 100)[226] shows an evident antiphrasis between *pater* and *filia*, which are placed one next to the other.[227] The coexistence of death (Canace's suicide) and marriage (cf. *dona paterna*; *dote*) that characterises this passage is a *Leitmotiv*, particularly in the tragic genre.[228] Moreover, by recalling the context of Roman marriage, the *dos* (*tua dote*, 100), which is traditionally provided by the father of the bride, represents another expression of the patriarchal system, as well as a way to control female members of the family.[229]

[223] At the same time, the sword may be ironically interpreted as a sort of childbirth gift for the mother, Canace, which would mark an important moment of passage as well as the acquisition of a role, such as motherhood (cf. Sherry Jr. 1983, 158-159).

[224] This symbolic penetration may be interpreted as a form of reaction to women's generative power, i.e., the 'power of the mothers', that is, the power of giving birth (Kristeva 1982, 77). This process is part of the "ritualization of defilement", which develops from the necessity to separate the sexes in order to give to men rights over women; cf. Kristeva 1982, 70-89.

[225] Cf. *TLL* IV 150.67-77: for (*in*) *pectore condo* as "to take to heart", cf. e.g. Plaut. *Ps*. 575, 941; Sen. *Tro*. 580; Apul. *Met*. 11.25.

[226] This expression picks up the irony implied in the *dona ... paterna* at line 98; see Knox 1995, 273.

[227] Cf. Knox 1995, 273.

[228] On this *topos*, cf. e.g. Seaford 1987, 106-107, and Rehm 1994, *passim*.

[229] The Latin word *dos* comes from the same root as the verb *dare* (cf. *TLL* V 1.2041.74-2042.7), which demonstrates how the dowry was closely related to a reciprocation system of giving and/or exchanging gifts; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969, 42-68. In most cases, a Roman woman passed from her father's to her husband's control: cf. Treggiari 1991, 323-364. On the links between this scene and *Her*. 14.27-28, see Fulkerson 2005, 81-88.

Besides hinting at the contemporary legal and social context, the reference to marriage (*mea ... conubia*, 99) alludes to Canace's possible awareness of the marriage-lottery arranged by her father, which would make her suicide unnecessary.[230] If Canace is not, knowledgeable readers are perfectly aware of the tragic irony that the episode implies, since Macareus, having been able to persuade Aeolus to marry himself to his sister, might well have also convinced his father to spare the child (and Canace as well). What if Canace were aware of this outcome while pretending not to be? What if the self-murder initially ordered by Aeolus represented, after the following development of events, Canace's subversive act? Could this ironic connotation be implied in the poetic discourse of (Ovid's) Canace? The heroine's insistence on the topic of marriage through her remark that the wedding-torches have been replaced by the torches of the dark Furies (*Erinyes atrae*, 103), as well as her wish of a better marriage for her sisters (105-106),[231] seems to hint at Canace's knowledge of the existence of a marriage-lottery and, accordingly, a possible alternative outcome for her story, and life. This alternative outcome is suggested, but never openly addressed within *Her*. 11.

Accordingly, Canace only implicitly refers to such awareness and ends her letter by focusing on the death of her child and her own self-murder. The heroine refers to her unlucky child as a *puer* (107), which is a rather inappropriate word for a newborn, particularly vis-à-vis Penelope's choice of addressing Telemachus with the same word at *Her*. 1.97 (cf. above, 1.3.).[232] The word *puer* to indicate a newborn recalls Verg. *Ecl*. 4, where the birth of a *puer* would have sanctioned a period of peace and prosperity.

[230] This lottery was mentioned in the hypothesis of Euripides' *Aeolus* (cf. Lloyd-Jones 1963, 443). Following what is reported by this hypothesis, Knox 1995, 273, sees in this passage, and in the following lines (101-106), a reference to the marriage-lottery, whereas Jacobson 1974 (161) and Verducci 1985 (221-222) think it more generalised.

[231] "The thought that Canace is to have a funeral in place of a wedding finds expression through the contrast between marriage torch and funeral torches, both indicated with the term fax" (cf. *TLL* VI 1.400.51-406.28, *s.v.* "fax" [Jachmann]); see Reeson 2001, 97-99. For black Furies in Latin see e.g. Verg. *Aen*. 7.329; Sil. *Pun*. 2.529 and 13.575; Stat. *Theb*. 11.75: some scholars (cf. e.g. Knox 1995, 274), however, have suggested the emendation *atras* – agreeing with *faces*.

[232] Cf. Harlow and Laurence 2002, 67-78.

Given such an intertext, this word may be interpreted as an ironic reference to Augustus’ concern for childbirth, as well as his family policy aimed at encouraging procreation. This policy appears to be completely frustrated and denied by the child’s death, and Canace’s self-murder. Continuing her references to her infant, Canace appeals to him with the vocative *nate*, in anaphoric repetition (111; 113): this invocation has been linked to Euripides’ *Rhesus* 896-897, where Terpsichore laments her dead son, while holding his body in her arms.[233] In this case, however, Canace underlines that she has no corpse which she can mourn, because her child has been given (at least from her point of view) to the wild beasts to be devoured: *rapidarum praeda ferarum [...] natali dilacerate tuo* (111-112).[234] The emphasis on the child as a *pignus* (113) plays with the ambivalent meaning of the Latin word (as we have seen happening for Phaedra at 4.120), which can mean both “pledge” and “child”.[235] The newborn, therefore, is both a pledge and, accordingly, evidence of culpability, and the actual “offspring” that results from Canace’s and Macareus’ union.

The physicality, and materiality, expressed by Canace in the description of her child’s (theoretical) death is increasingly pointed towards the end of the letter (118-128). Canace’s repeated use of *viscera* to refer to her child (90; 118: *viscera nostra*) contributes to the heroine’s identification of her child with a part of her own body.[236] This is not a part of herself which she desires or loves, but an entity that both determines her subjectivity and places limitations on it, by giving it a definition. Building on the implications of Canace’s possible knowledge of Aeolus’ change of mind, her suicide is both a rebellious act against the ultimate will of her father and a

[233] Cf. Eur. *Rh*. 895-897, ἰαλέμῳ αὐθιγενεῖ, τέκνον, σ᾽ ὀλοφύρομαι, ὦ ματρὸς ἄλγος.

[234] There is an alternation in the manuscripts between *rapidarum* and *rabidarum*: cf. Goold 1977, 140; Knox 1995, 275.

[235] Cf. *TLL* X 1.2120.44-2128.10, *s.v.* “pignus” [Ottink].

[236] Cf. *OLD* 2077, *s.v.* “viscus” (5): “A person’s flesh and blood, i.e. his kindred, nearest and dearest (usu. w. ref. to offspring)”; cf. e.g. *Rem. am*. 59 (Medea); *Met*. 6.651; 8.478; 10.465 (Myrrha and Cinyras).

way to depart from what she perceives as abject, thereby pursuing a re-appropriation of her body as well as her subjective identity. This separation, re-appropriation and final identification with her child continues until the end of the letter (119-128).

> ipsa quoque infantis cum vulnere prosequar umbras
> nec mater fuero dicta nec orba diu. 121
> 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, 125
> neve reformida corpus amantis amans.
> tu, rogo, dilectae nimium mandata sororis
> perfice; mandatis obsequar ipsa patris!
>
> (*Her*. 11.120-128)

Since the heroine maintains that she will kill herself after finishing her letter (128), these lines represent Canace's *novissima verba*. By accompanying her dead child in the underworld (*infantis cum vulnere prosequar umbras*, 119),[237] that is, by killing herself, she will neither be called mother nor be bereaved any longer: *nec mater fuero dicta nec orba diu* (120). That Canace refuses the name, along with the categories of "mother" and "bereaved" attributed to her by others (cf. *fuero dicta*, "I will have been said"), articulates the heroine's attempt to take control of her subjectivity. Canace's death represents not only the end of her life but also the objectified, depersonalised notion of motherhood, as well as grief for her dead child. In this couplet, Canace appears to consider her motherhood a necessary condition for her own existence: the childbirth has determined the development of her subjectivity, not only linguistically and psychologically, but also ontologically. The negation of *jouissance* that stems from motherhood, which takes place within the patriarchal order, is here amplified by the

[237] For the plural form (*umbras*, 120) instead of the singular, see e.g. *Met*. 1.387; 3.720; for *prosequor* hinting at a funeral context, see e.g. *Am*. 1.4.61-2; *Tr*. 1.8.14. The emendation proposed by some scholars of *vulnere* with *funere* would increase the ambiguity of the line; cf. Reeson 2001, 107.

actual removal of the object of this motherhood, Canace's child.[238] At the same time, no one can assure knowledgeable readers that Canace's child has actually died. If we imagine for a moment that the heroine is aware of Macareus' (successful) attempts at persuading Aeolus to spare his sister (cf. 61-62) and their child too, then Canace's suicide would represent an act of disobedience against her father's ultimate will.[239] With her suicide, Canace would therefore challenge the concept of motherhood as it is labelled within a patriarchal frame, by literally neutralising it.

Moreover, by killing herself by the sword – a phallic symbol – Canace can be said to use both a real and metaphoric *Phallus* to destroy an entity manufactured by the 'Law of the Father', i.e. the patriarchal idea of motherhood that finds concrete expression in her own (pregnant) body.[240] The *Phallus*, however, is not only represented by a material object, namely the sword, but also by Canace's child, who was incorporated within the symbolic space of patriarchy immediately after his birth. By asking Macareus to bury her with her child (123-124),[241] the heroine performs a sort of re-appropriation of her own offspring, alongside the very moment of childbirth, which has determined the start of her motherhood.[242] This re-appropriation leads to a deconstruction of both the

[238] Kristeva 1985, 138: "[...] motherhood is perceived as a conspicuous sign of the jouissance of the female (or maternal) body, a pleasure that must at all costs be repressed: the function of procreation must be kept strictly subordinated to the rule of the Father's Name".

[239] According to Fulkerson 2005, 83-84, Canace's letter would have changed Aeolus' decision and saved her child's and her own life. On the *Heroides* as "windows" to alternative outcomes of mythological narratives, cf. Liveley 2008, 86-102; Barchiesi 2001, 29-47.

[240] Cf. Kristeva 1986, 139-145. For the (female) body as social inscription and expression of signs, cf. Grosz 1994, 118: "Bodies become emblems, herald, badges, theatres, tableaux, of social laws and rights, illustrations and exemplifications of law, informing and rendering pliable flesh into determinate bodies, producing the flesh as a point of departure and a locus of incision, point of 'reality' or 'nature' understood (fictionally) as prior to [...] social practices".

[241] Canace's request may have been drawn from Euripides' *Aeolus* (cf. Reeson 2001, 108); it also recalls Eur. *Med.* 1220-1221, where Creon's and Creusa's bodies are described as holding each other (κεῖνται δὲ νεκροὶ παῖς τε καὶ γέρων πατὴρ / [πέλας, ποθεινὴ δακρύοισι συμφορά]); cf. also Sen. *Med.* 880. A more programmatic version of this topos is represented by the pair of lovers buried together: see, e.g. *Met.* 4.166 (Pyramus and Thisbe); 11.705-707 (Ceyx and Alcyone).

[242] In this way, Canace seems to deny a certain construction of the body (particularly the female one) pursued by the cultural context, as well as expressing a subjective perception of her own body, which is accomplished through an active and subversive bodily expression, i.e. her suicide; cf. Butler 1990, 128-134. The destruction (suicide) and re-creation (the meaning and continuity of this subversive act itself) of Canace's body are not accomplished within the frame of a patriarchal order, but, as I have shown, in opposition to it.

Phallus and *symbolic* system established by the patriarchal order, as well as leading to a (re-)appropriation of her maternal *jouissance*.

Canace's re-appropriation, as well as the re-determination of her identity, is accomplished in the last lines of *Her*. 11, where she asks Macareus to collect the *sparsa ... membra* (122) of their child (it is worth noting the hyperbaton, which emphasises the fact that the parts of the body are scattered),[243] imagining him to have undergone a sort of *sparagmos*. Such a disintegration of the body of the newborn, be it imagined or not, is part of a process that leads to the heroine's conceptual reconstruction and, accordingly, her re-appropriation of the 'othered' body of the child. Moreover, this *sparagmos* recalls other myths where women act violently against men or their own sons (as in the *Bacchae*), thereby subverting traditional social norms.[244] Furthermore, the substantive *membrum* itself has a significant sexual connotation, since it may refer to the male member.[245] In light of this innuendo, Canace's reference to the *sparsa ... nati membra ... tui* seems to actualise and materialise the heroine's deconstruction, her verbal reshaping and appropriation of paternal, and patriarchal, discourse.

Before finishing her letter, Canace prays (*rogo*, 127) again to her brother/lover to carry out her requests (*mandata sororis / perfice*, 127-128), while she accomplishes her father's order (*mandata*, 127; *mandatis*, repeated with a polyptoton, 128).[246] The closing word of the epistle is, not incidentally, father (*pater*, 128), which articulates Canace's final rebellion against the patriarchal order, as well as her own father. Concurrently, "father" as the last word reminds us that her rebellion is ultimately frustrated, as Aeolus is the one who causes her death. By taking her life, however, Canace remains a symbol

[243] Cf. *Her*. 6.129-130.

[244] This passage also recalls Hippolytus' dismemberment in Euripides' and Seneca's tragedies: cf. Knox 1995, 276. By linking these lines with 89-90 and 120, Viarre 2007, 88-89, observes the connections between murder (of one's child/children), anthropophagy and incest.

[245] Cf. *TLL* VIII 636.49-637.13, *s.v.* "membrum" [Hofman].

[246] The word *mandatum* is drawn from legal language and refers to the last will of a dying person (see Knox 1995, 277): cf. *Her*. 13.165; *Fast*. 4.193; *Pont*. 2.2.43. The transmission of this couplet is quite extensively discussed: see Goold 1977, 140; Reeson 2001, 112-113.

of a challenge against both the abstract 'Law of the Father(s)' and the more concrete and tangible law/rules of *her father*. This challenge goes through many steps, as we have seen: the abjection of her own body and, accordingly, of her childbirth, as a product manufactured by the patriarchal order; her use of the sword as a weapon, as well as a phallic symbol, to appropriate the symbolic order of the/her father; the imaginary projection of the death of her child; and finally her re-appropriation of the child after his supposed – and her own – death. This physical re-appropriation of her own, and her child's, body would in fact have not taken place if Macareus had also killed himself in the aftermath, as tradition suggests. The achievement of a more personal and subjective concept of motherhood, therefore, can be pursued and secured only through an unfailing means, namely the writing of the epistle. It is Canace's writing that eventually allows the heroine to rebel against the established patriarchal order, independent of how the story actually ends outside of the fiction. However, the fiction – the written text – is what really counts from the subjective point of view of the heroine. Within the *Heroides*, this subjective perspective is the only perspective, the only voice. *Her*. 11 is not simply Canace's version of the story; it is the only possible one.[247]

Conclusion: Phaedra and Canace in dialogue

The peculiar mother-son relationship that Phaedra and Canace share affects how they relate both with their partners and their own selves: incestuous motherhood, alongside incestuous relationships with their partners, is at the very core of both their epistles (even though in *Her*. 11 this is not the primary reason for Aeolus' anger). However, the nature of these relationships is different, since Phaedra desires incest with her stepson,

[247] "La parole est libérée de la contingence, gommant le moi pour mieux le sublimer. La fusion avec l'autre se trouve enfin réalisée, dans un ailleurs fantasmé concédé par l'écriture poétique" (Casanova-Robin 2009, 65).

while Canace actually commits it with her brother. If Canace had learnt from Phaedra's epistle, she would have made the argument that incest, especially between brother and sister, is not really a transgression of the social norms, since Jupiter married his sister Juno (cf. *Her*. 4.134; see above).

However, mentioning this argument would have called forth the issue of familial relationships and, accordingly, incest as well, since in Canace's genealogy Jupiter turns out to be one of her ancestors (*Her*. 11.17-18). The heroine, in fact, does not appear to be very keen on recalling her ancestry as evidence, or as reason for her (incestuous) attitudes, while Phaedra refers often to her ancestry or family, such as her mother Pasiphaë (cf. *Her*. 4.57). Canace's mother, Enarete, by contrast, finds no place within *Her*. 11 and, at least from Canace's point of view, does not seem to have any significant role within the story. Like in *Her*. 1 (Penelope), this absence of the heroine's mother is further evidence of Canace's isolation in a male-based context, whose borders and rules are established only by Canace's father, Aeolus. Motherhood, specifically incestuous motherhood, helps both the heroines, Phaedra and Canace, to escape the patriarchal frame and break its rules, thereby creating, at least within the limited space of their epistles, new legislation made by (and for) 'the Mothers'.

In Phaedra's myth, her incestuous relationship with Hippolytus also determines the death of her stepson, but this outcome is an indirect consequence of her desire to save her honour and is not even mentioned within the Ovidian epistle. By contrast, the two heroines that feature in the next chapter (Deianira and Medea) can be said to both be wretched mothers. Due to her jealousy, Deianira brings about the death of her husband, Hercules. The heroine is only an unintentional actor in her husband's death, however, and her epistle is aimed at justifying her acts to her son, Hyllus. Medea (*Her*. 12), meanwhile, will intentionally kill her two children to take revenge on Jason. An

exploration of Deianira’s misfortune and Medea’s wickedness vis-à-vis their maternal experience will provide new insight into their letters.

Chapter 3

'The name of the Mother': abomination, mistake and revenge (Deianira and Medea)

With writing, words are everything. [...] Words are, each one of them, like the Trojan Horse. They are things, material things, and at the same time they mean something. And it is because they mean something that they are abstract. They are a condensate of abstraction and concreteness, and in this they are totally different from all other mediums used to create art.
(M. Wittig, *The straight mind and other essays*)[1]

In the previous chapter, we saw that Phaedra's and Canace's incestuous motherhood did not simply express the degeneration of traditional familial relationships, but also contributed to the creation of an autonomous space for the heroines' voices, which has been defined as the 'Realm of the Mother(s)': such a space challenges the binary system established by the *symbolic* realm, i.e. the 'Law of the Fathers'. Continuing on the same path, this chapter focuses on Deianira (*Her*. 9) and Medea (*Her*. 12), who are both responsible, although with different levels of intentionality, for the death of one or more members of their family. While Deianira appears to be unaware of the consequences of her actions, which ultimately lead to Hercules' death,[2] Medea's murderous resolutions are more deliberate, although the murder of her children is only allusively forecast, and not enacted, in the Ovidian epistle (cf. *Her*. 12.189-190; 207-212).[3]

Medea's letter is imagined as being written after she has discovered that Jason will marry Creusa, but before the most tragic and dreadful events of her narrative, which

[1] Wittig 2002, 71.
[2] The main source for Deianira's myth before Ovid's *Heroides* is Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, where Deianira is portrayed as a naive character and is punished for her excessive simplicity and lack of wisdom. Sophocles, however, must have been only one of many authors who wrote on this topic: cf. Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.8.1; Nonnus, *Dion*. 35.89-91; see Jacobson 1974, 235-236.
[3] See e.g. Bessone 1997, 32-41, 256, 274-286; Heinze 1997, 205, 212-219.

culminate in the murder of Creusa and her father Creon, as well as Medea's children.[4] Deianira's writing, by contrast, is interrupted *in medias res* by the news that the robe she sent to Hercules is now the cause of his death (9.143-168): the final part of *Her*. 9 is therefore a sort of 'live report' of Deianira's reaction to this shocking discovery. Although she has often been paralleled to Clytemnestra and Medea herself, Deianira appears as a more innocent and harmless character.[5] Like Medea, Deianira uses a magic piece of clothing to pursue her aim but, ultimately, she appears unable to properly control her magical arts (cf. e.g. *Her*. 9.39-42),[6] as her original target was to gain back Hercules' love, not to kill him. Such a traditional interpretation has recently been revised by some scholars, who have argued that Deianira's act was not entirely unintentional, as she should have known that Nessus' blood was poisonous.[7] Building on this interpretation, my analysis of *Her*. 9 emphasises Deianira's active role and responsibility for the death of Hercules, who is also the alleged addressee of her letter. Concurrently, certain lines of *Her*. 9 (e.g. 165-168) suggest that Hercules may not be the only addressee of Deianira's letter, which implies at least one more fictional addressee, i.e. Deianira's son, Hyllus. *Her*. 9 can accordingly be read as the heroine's rhetorical attempt to justify her ill-fated deeds to her son.

Both Deianira's and Medea's epistles are characterised by ambiguous discourse, gender fluidity and reversals of expected, stereotypical, familial and social roles. While in *Her*. 9 the (re)interpretation of gender as a performative act is functional to Deianira's self-empowerment, the blurring of gender boundaries articulates Medea's self-construction as an autonomous subject in *Her*. 12. Accordingly, the analysis of the

[4] Cf. Goold 1977, 142; Bessone 1997, 11-12.

[5] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 236; Wender 1974, 1-17; Faraone 1994, 120-121. Littlewood 2011, 317-340, underlines the importance of Seneca's *Medea* as a model for the portrait of Deianira in the *Hercules Oetaeus*.

[6] Cf. Fulkerson 2005, 116.

[7] Deianira's innocence has been long debated, particularly with regard to Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: cf. e.g. Faraone 1994, 115-135; Pozzi 1994, 577-585; Scott 1995, 17-27; Wohl 2010, 33-70; Kratzer 2013, 23-63; see Gerlinger 2011, 303-309, for Ovid's Deianira.

two epistles in the next sections (3.1-3.3: Deianira; 3.4-3.5: Medea) is mainly informed by, respectively, Judith Butler's theories on the performative nature of gender (*Her*. 9) and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman feminism (*Her*. 12). Alongside these two main interpretative avenues, this chapter draws from the writings of other feminists (particularly Kristeva and Irigaray), as well as anthropological views on the rites of passage and life stages. By engaging with this theoretical framework, I aim to demonstrate how the heroines' motherhood is rhetorically shaped and ingeniously employed as a means to embrace a more active and self-conscious role within their epistles.

3.1. (Ovid's) Deianira: a response to the sources

Daughter of Althaea and Oeneus, sister of Meleager, Deianira is most noticeably Hercules' (second) wife.[8] According to a different tradition, Deianira was in fact Dionysus' daughter (not Oeneus'), who had had an affair with Althaea.[9] Dionysus' potential paternity activates another connection between Hercules and Deianira, as in Aristophanes' *Frogs* Dionysus disguises himself as Hercules (Ar. *Ran*. 1-35), thereby displaying a ridiculous combination of effeminacy and machismo. This coexistence, and conflict, between masculinity and femininity also characterises Hercules in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and, to an even greater degree, in *Her*. 9.[10] Furthermore, Dionysus' affinity with the magical dimension, as well as maenadism, also evokes certain features of Deianira's narrative, as we shall see.

[8] Cf. *RE* IV 2.2378-2382, *s.v.* "Deïaneira".

[9] See e.g. ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.84; Hyg. *Fab*. 129; Serv. *ad Aen*. 4.127.

[10] Hercules fluctuates through various literary genres, including epic, tragedy and comedy: the coincidence of both tragic and comic aspects in his personality is widely attested throughout the classical tradition, both within Greek (e.g. Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Hercules*; Aristophanes' *Ranae*; Apollonius' *Argonautica*) and Latin literature (e.g. Plautus' *Amphitruo*; Seneca's *Hercules furens*, *Hercules Oetaeus*); see e.g. Galinsky 1972, *passim*; Jacobson 1974, 237-238; Silk 1985, 1-22; Liapis 2006, 48-59; Papadopoulou 2005, 4: "An aspect of Hercules which is evident in every examination of him is his fundamental ambivalence ...".

In spite of certain minor variations, the main aspects of Deianira's myth that pertain to *Her*. 9 appear to be quite similar throughout the sources, which besides Sophocles' drama, are in fact rather fragmentary.[11] After waiting several years for the return of Hercules, Deianira finds out that he has fallen in love with Iole, the daughter of king Eurytus. As Hercules carries Iole with him to his hometown, in order to regain his love, Deianira smears some drops of Nessus' blood on a robe (in some sources this is not a generic robe, but Hercules' famous lionskin shirt), which she then gives to him. The potion, however, is a poison that brings death to Hercules. While Sophocles' *Trachiniae* is acknowledged to be the main source for Ovid's *Her*. 9, there must have been many accounts of the episodes of Hercules' saga involving Deianira that are either fragmentary or not extant.[12] This lack of other significant (non-Sophoclean) sources for Deianira's narrative means that the Ovidian innovations in *Her*. 9 should not necessarily be attributed to Ovid's invention.[13] In terms of differences between *Her*. 9 and the *Trachiniae*, the Ovidian epistle departs in three main instances from the Sophoclean narrative. First, at *Her*. 9.139-140 Hercules is said to have broken off a horn of Achelous, while in Sophocles there is no mention of this;[14] the list of Hercules' labours also differs quite significantly between the two authors; and, most importantly in light of the argument that will be articulated in the following pages, Sophocles' brief mention of Hercules' stay in Lydia (cf. *Trach*. 248-257; 356-358) becomes an elaborate, and highly ironic, account of Hercules' *servitium* to Omphale in *Her*. 9 (59-118).[15]

Together with Hercules' arrival in Trachis, Deianira's account of Hercules' affairs with Omphale and Iole, as well as her relationship with her son Hyllus (cf. *Trach*. 64-

[11] For an overview of the sources, cf. *RE* IV 2.2378-2382, *s.v.* "Deïaneira"; Jacobson 1974, 235-239.

[12] See e.g. Jacobson 1974, 235-236; Casali 1995b, 505-511; Pattoni 1995, 537-564; Bolton 1997, 424-435.

[13] Jacobson 1974, 236: "Over and over we are faced with mythic material that is manifestly not Ovidian invention but which has no place in the *Trachiniae*".

[14] Cf. also *Met*. 9.85-86.

[15] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 236-238.

93; 734-820; 1136-1142; 1151-1156) are the aspects of Sophocles' drama that are most relevant to *Her*. 9. As for Hercules' arrival, the *Trachiniae* has been defined as a "*nostos* play", since the return of the hero plays a central and substantial role within the plot.[16] Distinct from the *nostoi* of other heroes, however, Hercules' *nostos* does not imply the end of the hero's troubles. Moreover, while the 'canonical' *nostos* of the Greek hero is usually linked to a happy reunion (a sort of remarriage) with the partner (e.g. Ulysses), Hercules' *nostos* implies a departure from the normal configuration of a family, insofar as he brings along his paramour and captive Iole.[17] In *Her*. 9, this circumstance is underlined by Deianira, who fears that Hercules will replace her with Iole (131-132). As we shall see, the Ovidian heroine seems more concerned with the loss of her position as *Herculis uxor* (27) than with Hercules' infidelity and affairs, which, rather paradoxically, she praises as though they were her own conquests and victories (46-58).[18]

Moving on to Omphale, Deianira's account departs significantly from Sophocles' narrative. The brief mention of Hercules' servitude to Omphale in the *Trachiniae* (*Trach*. 248-257; 351-374)[19] may be due to the comic aspects of this episode, which make Hercules' enslavement highly inappropriate for the tragic genre. By contrast, the episode has rightly been said to be a feature that is more suited to Comedy, wherein Hercules' excessive greed and sex drive are emphasised.[20] The comic portraits of

[16] See Taplin 1977, 84; Fowler 1999, 162-164; Alexopoulou 2002, 57; Kratzer 2013, 25.

[17] For this reason, Hercules' *nostos* has been compared to Agamemnon's return and Deianira has been linked with Clytemnestra: cf. e.g. Wohl 2010, 57-58; Kratzer 2013, 23-63.

[18] Cf. Casali 1995a, 178: "è il ruolo di *uxor* che è davvero importante per Deianira"; also *HO* 278-279: *Iole meis captiva germanos dabit / natisque Iovisque fiet ex famula nurus?* See also Jacobson 1974, 240: "When Deianira recounts the achievements of the old Hercules, both pride and disappointment are present". In Sophocles, by contrast, Deianira seems to have different concerns (cf. *Trach*. 550-551).

[19] See e.g. *Trach*. 252-253, 356-358: κεῖνος δὲ πραθεὶς Ὀμφάλῃ τῇ βαρβάρῳ / ἐνιαυτὸν ἐξέπλησεν, ὡς αὐτὸς λέγει [...] οὐ τἀπὶ Λυδοῖς οὐδ᾽ ὑπ᾽ Ὀμφάλῃ πόνων / λατρεύματ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὁ ῥιπτὸς Ἰφίτου μόρος: / ὃν νῦν παρώσας οὗτος ἔμπαλιν λέγει; see Davies 1991, 121-123; for the account of Hercules' servitude, see ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.6.2.

[20] It seems that two tragic poets, Ion of Chios and Achaeus, wrote an *'Ομφάλη σατυρικὴ*, while two poets of the Middle Comedy, Antiphanes and Cratinus jun., wrote an *'Ομφάλη* where Hercules abandoned himself to sexual pleasures; cf. Jebb 1892, 42; see also Jacobson 1974, 237-238.

Hercules, which are characterised by gender role reversals and cross-dressing,[21] may have been a model for the lengthy description of Hercules' servitude to Omphale that features in *Her*. 9. Within the Ovidian epistle, the actual servitude overlaps with the elegiac *servitium amoris*, which also leads to a fluctuation of well-established gender roles, i.e. the canonical reversal of roles between the poet and the *puella*. In *Her*. 9, this canonical component is reinforced by the actual cross-dressing of the hero and by his performance of female tasks. This cross-dressing and reversal not only represent a reference to, and establish a link with, the comic genre, but also imply a more substantial delegitimation of Hercules as a male dominant hero.[22]

As for Iole, in the *Trachiniae* Deianira initially seems to show a degree of piety and an empathetic attitude to her as one of Hercules' prisoners (cf. *Trach*. 293-313; 320-321).[23] After she discovers that Iole is Hercules' paramour (*Trach*. 375-378) and represents a threat to her own legitimate union with him (*Trach*. 536-551), instead of reacting violently, Deianira conceives a more subtle strategy to gain back Hercules' love, namely using Nessus' blood to anoint his robe (552-587).[24] In *Her*. 9, by contrast, Iole is described as a sort of triumphant hero (119-130); at the same time, she is exposed, almost put on display, by Deianira's description.[25] Accordingly, Iole is not only depicted as powerful, but also embodies the scopophiliac object par excellence, namely a(n attractive) female body that is made to be viewed by men.[26] In this particular

[21] Campanile 2017, 52-64, discusses some cross-dressing performances in Roman rhetorical speeches, outlining their links with comedy.

[22] This process of delegitimation appears more emphasised in *Her*. 9 than in the *Trachiniae*; cf. e.g. Fabre-Serris 2010, 9-23: "souligner combien cette situation jurait avec son [d'Hercule] physique, sa stature de héros ou ses exploits passés" (14). Some scholars have recognised a certain ambivalence in Hercules' cross-dressing: while Hercules is characterised by feminine features, he still keeps some virile attitudes (cf. e.g. Loraux 1990, 37-39; Carlà-Uhink 2017, 13-14).

[23] Cf. *Trach*. 320-321: εἴπ', ὦ τάλαιν', ἀλλ' ἡμὶν ἐκ σαυτῆς, ἐπεὶ / καὶ ξυμφορά τοι μὴ εἰδέναι σέ γ' ἥτις εἶ. "Deianeira is deeply interested by the captive, and feels drawn towards her. She is anxious to know the stranger's story, in order to offer her *personal* sympathy" (Jebb 1892, 52).

[24] "She wishes to assure them that she intends no harm to Hercules, and has no reason to fear evil" (Jebb 1892, 91); for Deianira's responsibility in Hercules' death, cf. Faraone 1994, 115-135.

[25] Cf. Fabre-Serris 2010, 20.

[26] Cf. Mulvey 1989, 14-26.

case, the role of the active observer is played not just by Hercules and the unspecified people looking at his triumphant procession, but also by Deianira, who exposes and objectifies Iole through her writing. Deianira's treatment of Omphale's and Iole's narrative shows that her main concern is not simply that they may replace her as Hercules' wife; she is in fact afraid that they might gain a more dominant and central role in the delegitimation of Hercules that she pursues within her letter.[27]

This delegitimation is accomplished through the manipulation of her motherhood and relationship with her son, Hyllus. At Soph. *Trach.* 64-93, Hyllus shows devotion to his mother and obeys her request to look for, and help, his father Hercules.[28] Hyllus' respectful attitude towards Deianira, however, changes radically as soon as he discovers that she is responsible for Hercules' poisoning. After reporting the episode (a task that is usually performed by the messenger within Greek drama),[29] Hyllus curses his mother (*Trach*. 807-812; 815-820) and remarks that she has just killed the best man (ἄριστον ἄνδρα, 816) in the world, Hercules; thereafter, Deianira silently leaves the stage (813-814).[30] Although Hyllus' reaction is very aggressive, it is not comparable to, for instance, the revenge of Orestes, who eventually kills his mother Clytemnestra.[31] After realising that Deianira acted with the best intentions and made a mistake due to

[27] As we shall see, this delegitimation is accomplished through a female (and matrilineal) appropriation of "the name of the Father": cf. Maclean 1994, 57-58.

[28] Cf. in particular, *Trach*. 79-85; for a discussion on authenticity and the sequence of these lines, cf. Davies 1991, 74. In this passage, Hyllus' situation resembles very closely Telemachus' difficulty to accomplish the rite of passage that will eventually lead him to reach adulthood and gain his independence (cf. Ch. 1).

[29] Hyllus' *rhesis* here replaces the report of the *aggelos*: cf. e.g. Davies 1991, 187-195.

[30] Deianira's silence in the *Trachiniae* is antithetic to her writing in *Her*. 9, where the heroine keeps on writing even after having been told of Hercules' death: "Mi sembra attraente pensare, inoltre, che [...] il fatto che [Deianira] *non smetta* dopo che le è arrivata la notizia dell'agonia di Ercole, si contrapponga in modo voluto [...] a quella che era la reazione della Deianira sofoclea all'apprendimento della stessa notizia" (Casali 1995a, 197).

[31] See Wender 1974, 13-14; Wohl 2010, 57-58.

hamartia, Hyllus even tries to justify the actions of his mother to Hercules (1136-1156).[32]

While in Sophocles' drama, Hyllus plays a rather active role, in *Her*. 9 he is mentioned only twice by Deianira (44; 168): at line 44, Deianira points out that Hyllus is not there (*nec … adest*, 44); at 168, she concludes the epistle by saying farewell to her son (*et puer Hylle, vale*). This farewell at the end of Deianira's letter alludes to the Sophoclean (inter)text, as it echoes Deianira's final farewell at the end of the drama before she commits suicide: Deianira is induced to kill herself not only by her own sense of guilt, but ultimately by Hyllus' accusations (*Trach*. 807-820; 871-945). In *Her*. 9, Deianira does not mention Hyllus as the main reason for killing herself, but seemingly makes her decision because she feels responsible for the death of Hercules (145-168). As mentioned, Hercules' death is introduced into Deianira's epistle quite abruptly. With a sudden change of scenario, Deianira is told that her robe is killing Hercules (143-144). There is no specific reference to how such news reached Deianira, but a vaguer and rather undetermined mention of a *nuntia ... fama* (143-144; cf. *Aen*. 4.188 and 9.471).[33] This vagueness creates a sort of gap, a narrative vacuum, within the Ovidian epistle: who brought the (apparently) terrible news to Deianira?

Knowledgeable readers may infer the answer to this question from Sophocles' drama, where it is Hyllus who reports Hercules' agony to his mother (*Trach*. 750-806). The vagueness of the expression *nuntia ... fama* (143-144) creates a "new window" (in Barchiesi's words)[34] that can be opened onto the potential developments of the narrative, which are never fulfilled within the letter but implied by the allusivity of the heroine's writing. This open window gives the opportunity to Hyllus, who is almost

[32] Cf. *Trach*. 1136, ἅπαν τὸ χρῆμ', ἥμαρτε χρηστὰ μωμένη; for Deianira's *hamartia*, see Wohl 2010, 35-70.

[33] For other references to *fama* in Ovid, cf. e.g. *Her*. 6.9; 16.38; *Met*. 14.726; *Pont*. 4.4.15-16. This reference to the *fama* has appeared to some scholars inconsistent with other mentions of the *fama* within the epistle (cf. e.g. *Her*. 9.3-4); see Vessey 1969, 350-352.

[34] Barchiesi 2001, 31.

obliterated within the elegiac epistle, to (re)enter Deianira's narrative. The suspicion, or suggestion, that Hyllus is the bearer of the *nuntia ... fama*, alongside the sudden change of scenario, contributes to the creation of further ambiguity. The change of scenario implies a certain theatricality, insofar as the letter is cast in a way that evokes the entrance of the news-bearer (whoever they are), as though they have irrupted on a theatrical stage – instead of interrupting a poetic or epistolary composition.[35] This external intrusion is also suggested by the relatively unusual patterns that characterise the epistle from 143-144 onwards (e.g. the repeated refrain at 146, 152, 158 and 164), which has led some scholars to dispute its authenticity.[36] The narrative vacuum, the change of scenario that recalls the theatrical stage, as well as the shift in the writing patterns, need not be read as a reason to doubt the authenticity, but can be seen as the result of (Ovid's) narratological as well as stylistic and literary techniques.

In other words, one can imagine that the last part of *Her*. 9 is artistically constructed as though Deianira's writing were suddenly interrupted by the arrival of her son bringing the news of Hercules' death. If we assume that this occurrence causes her to stop writing at line 143 and restart again to finish her letter,[37] then lines 143-168 would be the section of the epistle that Deianira writes after she has spoken with her son. This last section somehow shows the footprints of such an abrupt interruption of, and intrusion into, Deianira's narrative. The metrical anomalies remarked upon by Vessey throughout the epistle, such as the four cases of hiatus (87, 131, 133, 141) or the unusually high number of caesurae after the fourth trochee, may thus be due not to its

[35] For the theatricality of Ovidian works, cf. Curley 2013, *passim* (for the *Heroides*, see 59-94).

[36] Besides the presence of a refrain and the change of scenario, another argument against Ovidian authorship is represented by the metrical and structural anomalies: cf. Courtney 1965, 66; Vessey 1969, 352; for an overview, see Jacobson 1974, 228-234. Although Ovidian authorship is highly debated, I side with the scholars that have demonstrated that *Her*. 9 may reasonably be considered authentic: cf. e.g. Jacobson 1974, 365; Seeck, 1975, 450; Rosati 1989, 19-20; Casali 1995a, 196-197; see also Jolivet 2005, 111-187; Fabre-Serris 2010, 9-23; Gerlinger 2011, 303-309; Murgatroyd 2014, 853-855.

[37] For interruptions of the writing process due to external circumstances, cf. Juv. 3.199-211; Mart. 12.57.1-9 (see Pecere 2010, 82-100). Casali 1995a, 197, observes, instead, that Deianira does not stop writing after having received the message.

inauthenticity but to the rhetorical and artistic arrangement of the epistle itself. These inconsistencies in the poetic diction reflect Deianira's emotional response to Hyllus' news, which makes her writing more irregular and discontinuous.[38] By marking a moment of transition in Deianira's literary past, this stylistic variety represents a test for the knowledgeable reader, who is invited to seek the reasons for the changes in meter in the Sophoclean intertext.

The variation in poetic style is not the only consequence of Deianira's reaction to the shocking news. Accepting the plausibility of Hyllus as the bearer of bad news to Deianira implies certain repercussions for the context of the entire epistle. Hyllus' *literal* irruption into Deianira's writing not only affects the epistle on a stylistic level, but also a structural one. After being interrupted by her son during her writing process, the heroine may have reshaped her letter as though Hyllus were another potential addressee. This implication is particularly suggestive because Hyllus is the last person that Deianira mentions and bids farewell to in the very last line of her epistle (168).[39] We have seen (cf. 2.4-2.5) that Canace's letter may imply her father Aeolus as a second addressee, which is confirmed, among the other things, by the fact that the epistle's last word is *pater*, "father". Likewise, Deianira's reference to her son at the end of her letter may suggest that Hyllus is the implied addressee of *Her*. 9. The final part of Deianira's letter thus becomes an apology for her ill-fated actions. By committing suicide, the heroine seeks to atone for her mistake and restore her memory, particularly in front of her son.[40] The mention of Hyllus at the end of Deianira's letter, as well as his role as an

[38] Cf. Vessey 1969, 349-361. As stated by Fulkerson 2005, 116: "Deianira loses her control over her story (and letter) to such a degree that it includes a refrain of the kind often found in magical rituals". The use of a refrain is not a novelty in Ovid's poetry (cf. e.g. *Am.* 1.6.24, 32, 40, 56) and can be found also in Catullus (cf. Cat. 61 and 62), as well as Virgil (*Ecl*. 8).

[39] Being a possible addressee of *Her.* 9, Hyllus may be seen as the indirect agent of Deianira's reshaping and re-adaptation of her epistle, which is adjusted according to its potential reader. Writing appears, therefore, as a process that blurs the boundaries between author and reader (cf. Barthes 1975, 16).

[40] Cf. Jolivet 2005, 185.

implied, probable or potential reader, affects our interpretation of *Her*. 9. As we shall see, the heroine's aim is not simply to restore her own reputation with her son (and the readers) but also to be legitimised by him as the dominant family member.

Furthermore, the possibility that Deianira's letter would have been read by her son shows us how the (Ovidian) epistle is not only rhetorically constructed, but also fills the gaps of the previous tradition. Hyllus' speech in favour of his mother at *Trach*. 1136-1156 suggests that *Her*. 9 may have been imagined as the reason why Hyllus changes his attitudes towards Deianira and defends her in front of Hercules at the end of Sophocles' tragedy (1136-1156). The hypothesis that Hyllus is the implied addressee of Deianira's letter makes us appreciate how *Her*. 9 enters into a highly complex dialogue with its main source, i.e. Sophocles,[41] rationalising the tragic version of Deianira's narrative (where the reason for Hyllus' change of mind is not clearly stated), while maintaining its ambiguity and offering a wide range of narrative developments. Imagining that (Ovid's) Deianira (also) addresses her letter to her son compels us to (re)think and (re)interpret *Her*. 9 as a highly rhetorical and artistic piece: through her writing, the heroine accomplishes a gender role reversal, downplays Hercules' status and gains a powerful position within her family (and her own narrative).

3.2. *Nomen est omen*? Deianira, Omphale and the fall of a hero

The beginning[42] of *Her*. 9 encapsulates the rhetorical strategies and coexistence of opposing features that characterise Deianira's discourse throughout the epistle. The epic inflexions of the first hexameter, where Deianira appears to be celebrating another

[41] For a similar intertextual play, cf. *Her*. 4.3-4, where *epistula lecta* alludes to Euripides' *deltos* (cf. Ch. 2.1).

[42] Some manuscripts report an introductory formula (*mittor ad Alciden a coniuge conscia mentis / littera, si coniunx Deianira tua est*), which most editors consider spurious: cf. e.g. Dörrie 1960, 217; Kirfel 1969, 67-68; Casali 1995a, 31.

victory by Hercules (*gratulor Oechaliam titulis accedere nostris*, 1),[43] are contrasted by a reference to the *servitium amoris* in the pentameter (2): *victorem victae succubuisse queror*.[44] By recalling the elegiac frame of Prop. 3.11.16 (*vicit victorem candida forma virum*), which contains a reference to Penthesilea and Achilles,[45] the figura etymologica (*victorem victae*) enhances the reversal between the victor and the defeated, the man and the woman, as well as recontextualising Hercules' victories within an elegiac frame. Although Hercules' erotic defeat in *Her*. 9 is a consequence of his servitude to Omphale and his passion for Iole, who is said to "have yoked" him (*inposuisse iugum*, 6), the downfall of the hero evokes his last speech during his agony at *Trach*. 1046-1052, where the responsibility for his death is attributed to Deianira.[46] Accordingly, the expression *inposuisse iugum* not only articulates the traditional elegiac paradox of the *puellae* who are victorious over men/poets (at least metaphorically),[47] it also creates an overlap between Deianira and Iole as having both defeated Hercules.

Deianira's mention of Juno and Jupiter at lines 7-8 (cf. Phaedra at *Her*. 4.133-134) contributes to the creation of further ambiguity. The heroine indicates the goddess as being both *germana Tonantis* (7) and Hercules' *noverca* (8),[48] while the expanded reference to Jupiter hints at the humorous context of Hercules' conception, for which one night was not sufficiently long (*cui nox ... una non tanta, ut tantus conciperet, fuit*,

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[43] Cf. Soph. *Trach*. 293-294; for *gratulor*, cf. *Her*. 6.3, where Hypsipyle ironically rejoices at Jason's safety. Certain editors have printed *vestris* instead of *nostris*, but *nostris* seems a more acceptable reading; cf. e.g. Housman in Diggle and Goodyear 1972, 2, 794; Jacobson 1974, 239; Casali 1995a, 33.

[44] For this kind of opposition between the opening hexameter and the following pentameter at the beginning of a programmatic poem, cf. Ov. *Am*. 1.1.1-2. The verb *succumbo* is often employed in elegy to indicate a defeat in love (cf. e.g. Tib. 1.8.8; Ov. *Her*. 8.38; *Ars* 2.186; for women subjugated by men, cf. *OLD* 1858, *s.v.* "succumbo"); *queror* is also a marker of elegy, the genre of complaint: cf. e.g. Ov. *Am*. 1.4.23; 1.14.35; 2.5.60; 3.12.4; *Her*. 1.8; 2.2; 3.6; see *OLD* 1547, *s.v.* "queror".

[45] Cf. also Prop. 4.9.45-50; *HO* 753: *ille victor vincitur maeret dolet*.

[46] This echo from the *Trachiniae* is an expression of Ovid's tragic irony, which is emphasised by *victorem victae* (2): together with *queror* (2), *victorem victae* contributes to the creation of a typical elegiac frame, which appears to mark a departure from the tragic source.

[47] Cf. Prop. 2.5.14 (*iniusto subtrahe colla iugo*); 3.11.4; Ov. *Rem. am*. 90; *Tr*. 5.2.40; *Her*. 6.97; see also Davies 1991 on *Trach*. 536 (150-151); Eur. *Hipp*. 545-553.

[48] For Juno as Hercules' *noverca*, cf. e.g. *Ars* 2.217; *Met*. 9.15, 135, 181; *Fast*. 6.800; Prop. 4.9.44; Verg. *Aen*. 8.288; for the traditional wickedness of *novercae* against their stepchildren, cf. above, 2.2.

9-10).[49] By stressing that Hercules is the result of an adulterous relationship, lines 7-10 recall the topos of bastardy. According to the mythological model "of the absent royal or divine father",[50] bastardy leads the illegitimate child, who is often characterised by hyper-masculine traits, to achieve a legitimate status through heroic actions.[51] Hercules' progressive self-legitimation is pursued through his accomplishment of the labours, but now appears entirely neutralised by his servitude to Omphale, as well as his performance of female tasks, which are described by Deianira at lines 55-118. This delegitimation of Hercules' status as the dominant heroic figure contributes to Deianira's self-empowerment and self-legitimation, which are eventually sanctioned by her son Hyllus as the potential reader of her letter.

Deianira's downplaying of Hercules through references to his bastardy also emerges in lines 43-44,[52] where the heroine recounts that she is alone in her sorrow, since Hercules' mother (Alcmene), father (Amphitryon), and his son Hyllus are all absent.[53] The reference to Amphitryon as Hercules' father alludes to an alternative version of Hercules' conception, according to which both Jupiter and Amphitryon had sexual intercourse with Alcmene on the same night.[54] By stressing this disputed paternity, Deianira not only underscores Hercules' bastardy but also questions Hercules' divine natural right, before mentioning Hyllus as his *puer*, or son: *nec pater Amphitryon nec puer Hyllus adest* (44). The closeness of the reference to Hercules' human 'adoptive' father (and accordingly his disputed ancestry) and to Hercules' son, who are both said to

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[49] Moreover, in elegy Jupiter is often invoked to protect adulterous affairs: cf. e.g. Prop. 1.13.29, 32; 2.2.4; 7.2.3, 30; 2.26.46; 2.30.27-32; 2.32.57-60; Ov. *Am.* 1.3.21-24; 1.10.3-8; 2.19.27-30; 3.8.29-30; *Ars* 1.713-714; for other references to Hercules' conception, cf. e.g. Diod. Sic. 4.9.2-3; Plaut. *Amph.* 112; Sen. *HF* 23-24, 1147-1159; *HO* 1864-1866; Hyg. *Fab.* 29. For the variants of this line, cf. Goold 1977, 108-109; Casali 1995a, 44-46.

[50] For other examples of this model of bastardy, cf. certain characters of the Arthurian cycle or, with some variants, Abraham's myth: see Maclean 1994, 49.

[51] Cf. Loraux 1995, 116-139.

[52] This distich has been considered spurious by e.g. Palmer 1898: see Casali 1995a, 84.

[53] As we have seen, at *Her.* 1.97-98 Penelope mentions herself among the small number of people, *tres imbelles*, who remain to protect Ithaca and Ulysses' realm; see also *Trach.* 1151-1152. (Alcmene).

[54] For Amphitryon's paternity, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.103, 214, 301; Prop. 4.9.1; *Met.* 9.140; 15.12, 49; see also *Met.* 9.23-26.

be "absent" (*nec ... nec ... adest*), materialises the loss of Hercules' status as a hero and the unreliability of his central role within his family, as well as raising suspicions over the legitimacy of Hercules' own fatherhood of Hyllus.

The absence of Hercules' parents and son is also a means of self-affirmation for Deianira, who uses the narratological vacuum generated by the lack of other characters to tell her version of Hercules' affairs (46-130). Hyllus is momentarily away because he was sent by Deianira to look for his father, as knowledgeable readers may deduce from Sophocles' drama.[55] However, as we have mentioned, Deianira's son can be considered to (re)enter her narrative by interrupting her writing process with the news of Hercules' condition (143-144). Hercules' loss of dignity due to his death – which is highly unheroic, being caused by a woman – is anticipated by Deianira's progressive diminishment of his status and masculinity through her poetic discourse. Such a strategy aims to emphasise her own agency.

This self-empowerment begins with Deianira's (seemingly conventional) rhetorical self-portrayal as Hercules' legitimate wife. At lines 27-28, the heroine refers to herself as *Herculis uxor*: *at bene nupta feror, quia nominer Herculis uxor, / sitque socer, rapidis qui tonat altus equis*. On a first-level reading, the expression *nominer Herculis uxor* emphasises Deianira's passivity in the construction of her own identity (cf. the passive form *nominer*, 27) and legitimates her status as Hercules' wife, as well as hinting at her fear that she will be replaced by Iole (131-132).[56] By labelling herself as *Herculis uxor*, Deianira underlines not only her status, but also her dependence on Hercules, insofar as she avoids referring to herself by her actual name.[57] The use of her husband's name to define herself represents the inscription of her persona into a

[55] Cf. Penelope at *Her*. 1.63-65 (above, 1.2); *Trach*. 64-93.

[56] See Jacobson 1974, 241.

[57] Without considering the opening couplets of each epistle, whose authenticity is disputed, such a significant delay (the name of Deianira occurs for the first time at line 131) can only be compared to *Her*. 4, where Phaedra mentions herself at line 74, *Her*. 10 (Ariadne) and *Her*. 11 (Canace), where the two heroines never refer to themselves by their own given names.

patriarchal, heteronormative context. The unnamed heroine has no value as a person and cannot stand alone, but is granted a status only within her marital relationship with Hercules. If, however, Hercules progressively loses his heroic status, his wife can finally appropriate her own identity, alongside her name, “Deianira”, and its (etymological) meaning, “slaughterer of men”.[58]

This gradual appropriation of her name is pursued throughout the epistle and achieved by the end, as Deianira begins to use her given name to refer to herself only from line 131 onwards, but then repeatedly, during a refrain. Becoming “Deianira” implies becoming a “slaughterer of men”, the etymological meaning of her name: this is precisely what explains, justifies and legitimises the killing of Hercules. Becoming “Deianira” – that is, the slaughterer of *her* man – represents a sort of necessary evil to amend Hercules’ loss of status, as well as reflecting Deianira’s heroic, almost epic, code of conduct. The death of Hercules is thus not merely the result of Deianira’s tragic mistake, but also articulates her *epic* concerns about restoring the *kleos* of her family. Concurrently, the murder of Hercules empowers the heroine to gain an independent agency and dominant position within her household (and narrative), as well as placing her beyond expected (gender) roles and patriarchal boundaries. By killing her husband, Deianira not only presents herself as a tragic or epic hero, she also grants Hercules a heroic death. Paradoxically, Deianira restores the dignity of Hercules and his family by erroneously killing him, thereby saving her own reputation and that of Hyllus, which were jeopardised by Hercules’ cross-dressing and elegiac, unheroic, *servitium amoris*.

The legitimation of herself as the defeater, killer, and ultimately surrogate of her husband is pursued through the delegitimation of Hercules and the reduction of his

[58] Cf. *RE* IV 2.2378-2382, *s.v.* “Deïaneira”; Maclean 1994, 7-8: “For women in patriarchal society, a change of name used to be seen as natural if not inevitable. Whether they became brides of Christ or merely brides, 90 per cent of women have traditionally experienced at least two public names in their lifetime (not including the changes in personal appellation which accompany us all in private life). Women therefore had from the first a certain protean quality. If one change is possible, then all other changes become thinkable”.

status, which are enacted gradually. At lines 13-18, for instance, Deianira lists Hercules' deeds in a very hyperbolic tone (11-12), so that his defeat by Venus (a widespread elegiac metonymy to indicate the strength of love) appears even more paradoxical and incredible.[59] The mention of Juno and Venus (11), who are usually competing goddesses within the classical tradition, increases the antithetic and paradoxical nature of Hercules' defeat.[60] By trying to oppress Hercules with labours, Juno made him a great hero (*illa premendo / sustulit*, 11-12),[61] whereas Venus, representing erotic passion, dominates him: *haec humili sub pede colla tenet* (12).[62] This line recalls the topos of military or athletic victories, which in Greek are indicated by the technical verb ἐπεμβαίνω.[63] However, it also refers to the elegiac topos of the humbleness of the lover who, through humility, may gain a positive outcome.[64] This mixture of military and elegiac language contributes to downplaying Hercules' achievements.

This overlap characterises other points of the epistle. At 37-38, Deianira quite emphatically and hyperbolically enumerates some of Hercules' labours, such as the Lernean hydra (*serpentes*, 37), the Erymanthian boars (*apros*, 37), the Nemean lion (*avidosque leones*, 37) and Cerberus (*haesuros terna per ora canes*, 38).[65] In order to receive news of Hercules, Deianira seeks help from divination and dreams (39-40),[66] but the rumours that she hears are uncertain: *incertae murmura famae* (41).[67] The *incerta fama* will turn into the *nuntia* (and more certain) ... *fama* of Hercules' agony at lines 143-144. The alternation of hope and fear that more clearly features in line 42 (*speque*

[59] Cf. e.g. *Her*. 4.136.

[60] Cf. Soph. *Trach*. 860-861: ἁ δ᾽ ἀμφίπολος Κύπρις ἄναυδος φανερὰ / τῶνδ᾽ ἐφάνη πράκτωρ.

[61] For such military imagery applied to love poetry, cf. e.g. Prop. 1.1.4; Ov. *Rem. am*. 530; see *OLD* 1452-1453, *s.v.* "premo" (8).

[62] For the textual issues concerning this line, see Goold 1977, 108-109.

[63] Cf. e.g. Hom. *Il*. 13.618; Verg. *Aen*. 10.495-496; Ov. *Met*. 8.425.

[64] Cf. e.g. Prop. 1.10.27-28; *Her*. 4.149.

[65] The plural forms are particularly emphatic and suggest Deianira's subjective participation in the labours of her husband (cf. Jacobson 1974, 242); see also Casali 1995a, 76-79.

[66] Gathering information about the partner from oracles and seers is a topos dating back to the Homeric Penelope: cf. *Od*. 1.415-416.

[67] Cf. Prop. 2.5.29; *Her*. 1.64.

timor dubia spesque timore cadit) is a programmatic motif within the *Heroides*.[68] The *timor* (42) is often also recalled by Penelope in *Her*. 1:[69] this '*timor*-motif', the absence of the husband (cf. line 33) and the mention of the *vidua domus* (*domo* at 9.35), as well as a fear for the partner's life, together with other features of the passage (cf. e.g. *arcana nocte*, 40; *incertae murmura famae*, 41), link these lines (i.e. *Her*. 9.33-42) to Penelope's attitude in the first part of *Her*. 1. Like Penelope (cf. Ch. 1), Deianira also pretends to act within a programmatic elegiac frame, only to challenge and undermine it.

This reversal of traditional tasks culminates in the account of Hercules' servitude to Omphale (55-118) which, together with the description of Iole's triumph (120-130; see below), represents a peak of degradation for the hero. The episode is introduced by Deianira as *recens crimen* (53),[70] a phrasing that has an ambivalent meaning (cf. line 51), since *crimen* can indicate both a "crime" in a general context and an adulterous affair, particularly within elegiac poetry.[71] Whilst the reference to Omphale as an *adultera* (53)[72] holds a legal connotation and hints at Ovid's contemporary political context (e.g. the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*),[73] Deianira's choice of the word *noverca* (*unde ego sum Lydo facta noverca Lamo*, 54)[74] to indicate her own status after Hercules' affair with Iole seemingly undermines her legitimacy as his wife. By questioning the legitimacy of her union, Deianira in fact once again challenges

[68] Cf. e.g. *Her*. 6.38; 13.124; 20.166.

[69] Cf. *Her*. 1.11, 12, 16, 69, 71 (*bis*).

[70] Cf. e.g. *Am*. 1.8.46; 2.18.37.

[71] For the use of *crimen* within the *Heroides*, cf. *Her*. 4.18; 16.296; 17.17, 31, 48, 95; 19.105, 112; 20.7 ("adultery"); 4.25, 31, 58; 11.49, 64, 66; 15.19 (ambiguity between "adultery" and actual "crime"); see *TLL* IV 1195.5-28, *s.v.* "crimen" [Burger].

[72] This is a rather common word in Ovid's poetry; cf. e.g. *Am*. 1.10.4; *Her*. 1.6; 5.125; 13.133; 17.217; *Ars* 2.367; *Met*. 4.132; see *TLL* I 879.75-881.63.

[73] Cf. Treggiari 1991, 61-63.

[74] Cf. Juno as a *noverca* at line 8.

Hercules' status as a true hero, and of Hyllus as his legitimate son and heir.[75] The delegitimation of Hercules is Deianira's rhetorical strategy to justify her role in his death. Deianira's extensive account of Hercules' servitude to Omphale therefore becomes a means of presenting herself as a prominent character, as well as legitimising herself to Hyllus as a replacement for Hercules.

Ranging from line 55 to 118, Omphale's episode[76] is interrupted from time to time by Deianira's mention of Hercules' labours or great deeds, which serve as pendants of Hercules' degradation: rhetorical *amplificatio* is contrasted by extreme *reductio* of status; hyper-masculinity opposes hyper-femininity; the terms of the equation women/weakness vs men/strength are mixed up; and motherhood becomes a space for the woman (Deianira) to exercise a certain kind of freedom. The contradictory nature of these dichotomies suggests that Hercules' cross-dressing represents an exceptional moment, part of a liminal phase, a sort of rite of passage.[77] As a ritual performance, the cross-dressing articulates the excess of a performative or theatrical act, which leads to a reversal of established patterns and to the sacrifice of the main actor, whereas it strengthens the persona relating it, namely Deianira.[78]

The episode is thus characterised by a list of antithetic features, where Hercules' great deeds are opposed to his degradation and cross-dressing: past opposes present; the masculine hero opposes the effeminate lover.[79] For instance, the *fortis ... lacertos* are said to be bounded (*cohibere*; but also "enveloped, imprisoned") by gold (59); gems are

[75] Deianira's concern about Hercules' potentially illegitimate children recalls, *e contrario*, *Her*. 4.121-124, where Phaedra presents this issue in the opposite way – the heroine does not want her children to usurp Hippolytus, with whom she has fallen in love (Ch. 2.2).

[76] For this myth, cf. *RE* XVIII 1.385-396, *s.v.* "Omphale" [Herzog-Hauser]; for Omphale's episode on Pompeian walls, cf. Knox 2014, 42-43, with relevant bibliography; for two opposing views on Hercules' cross-dressing, cf. Cyrino 1998, 216-217 (cross-dressing as a "transitional phase" that leads to a reinforcement of the hero's masculinity) and Eppinger 2017, 202-214 (the hero's transvestism as a diminishment of his status).

[77] Cf. Bolton 1997, 431.

[78] See Turner 1982, 12.

[79] Cf. Bolton 1997, 427.

placed on the strong muscles (*solidis ... toris*, 60),[80] while Hercules' own arms (*his ... lacertis*, 61) were able to defeat the Nemean lion (whose skin has notably become the symbol of Hercules' strength and power).[81] At line 63, Hercules is said to have dared to put on his head (*hirsutos ... capillos*)[82] a *mitra*, an oriental turban that is acknowledged to be a symbol of effeminacy, instead of the more usual poplar crown (64);[83] he also wore a Maeonian belt (*Maeonia ... zona*, 65-66)[84] in the guise of a *lasciva puella* (*lascivae more puellae*, 65).[85] Hercules' assimilation to a *puella* becomes progressively more patent as Deianira establishes an opposition between the enemies that Hercules defeated – Diomedes (67), Busiris (69) and Antaeus (71) – and Hercules' deplorable behaviour with Omphale.[86] The reoccurrence of the opposition between *victor* and *victus* (*huic victor victo nempe pudendus eras*, 70; see line 2, above) emphasises this gender role reversal between Hercules and Omphale (cf. also *molli succubuisse viro*, 72: *mollis* is a programmatic adjective in elegy that is used to express effeminacy).[87] By elegising Hercules, Deianira progressively undermines his status as a (male) hero.

Ioniacas calathum tenuisse puellas
  diceris et dominae pertimuisse minas.
non fugis, Alcide, victricem mille laborum   75
  rasilibus calathis inposuisse manum,
crassaque robusto deducis pollice fila,
  aequaque formosae pensa rependis erae?

(Ov. *Her*. 9.73-78)

[80] This *iunctura* refers again to Hercules in *Met*. 15.230.

[81] In Soph. *Trach*. 1090-1094 Hercules complains that his arms have been defeated by a woman; see also Sen. *HF* 1150-1151: *cur latus laevum vacat / spolio leonis?*

[82] Shaggy locks have a masculine valence; cf. Ingleheart 2010 on *Tr*. 2.259-260: "The most literal meaning of *hirsutus* is 'shaggy', 'hairy', and it is often applied to manliness (e.g. Juv. 2.41, Mart. 2.36.5-6)"; see also Prop. 4.9.49. By contrast, at *Her*. 4.71 Hippolytus' *capilli* are *praecincti flore*.

[83] For Hercules' poplar crown, cf. e.g. Theocr. *Id*. 2.121; Paus. 5.14.2; Verg. *Ecl*. 7.61; *G*. 2.66; *Aen*. 8.276; Sen. *HF* 893-894. The *mitra* was probably also worn by men in the non-Roman 'East', but was in fact considered a symbol of effeminacy by 'western' authors; cf. e.g. Verg. *Aen*. 4.215-218; 9.614-620.

[84] For the adjective *Maeonius* in connection to effeminacy, cf. *Aen*. 4.215-217.

[85] Cf. e.g. Verg. *Ecl*. 3.64; Hor. *Carm*. 4.11.23; *Ars* 1.523.

[86] Cf. *HO* 1783-1791. For Diomedes, cf. *Met*. 9.194-195; *Ib*. 379-380, 399-400; *Pont*. 1.2.120, but also Eur. *Her*. 380-388; for Busiris, cf. Bömer 1994 *ad Met*. 9.182-183; *LIMC* III 1.147-152, but also Sen. *HF* 483-484; *HO* 25-26; for Antaeus, cf. Bömer 1994 *ad Met*. 9.183-184; *LIMC* I 1.800.

[87] For *mollis* to refer to effeminate heroes, cf. *Tr*. 2.411; Hor. *Epod*. 1.10; Sen. *Dial*. 3.11.3; Quint. *Inst*. 5.9.14. The expression *vir mollis* was often used to indicate *cinaedi* (see Eppinger 2017, 202-214): cf. e.g. Liv. 33.27.2; Sen. *Ag*. 686; Mart. 1.96.10; 3.73.4; see also *TLL* VIII 1378.75-76, *s.v.* "mollis" [Buchwald].

Hercules is said to have held the wicker-basket (*calathum*, 73)[88] among the girls of Ionia, and to have been scared by the threats of his *domina*: this is a highly emphatic word, as it both stands for the elegiac *domina* to whom the lover/poet offers his *servitium amoris,* but also refers to the mythological episode according to which Hercules was actually enslaved by Omphale.[89] Lines 75-80 stress the opposition between Hercules' vigour, and roughness, and the delicacy and accuracy of the spinning: cf. e.g. *robusto ... pollice* (77) and *aequa ... pensa* (78), i.e. "the just amount of web"; *stamina* (79) and "hard fingers" (*digitis ... duris*, 79); *fusos* and "strong hands" (*praevalidae ... manus*, 80).[90] Hercules' cross-dressing is described gradually, starting with the wearing of female jewellery and ending with the weaving, which was considered the quintessential female task.[91] In contrast to other heroes involved in similar episodes (such as the youthful Achilles' cross-dressing), Hercules does not appear to fit well into female attires and behaviours, as is clearly shown in the opposition between his machismo and the delicacy that the spinning demands.

This suspension and liminality between two genders imply that the cross-dressing functions as a distorted rite of passage that prevents Hercules from experiencing his disguise as a temporary phase only to subsequently restore his status as a male hero (as does Achilles).[92] The permanence of Hercules' anti-heroic behaviour is confirmed by his subsequent *servitium amoris* to Iole (120-130) and actual defeat by Deianira, which brings about his death. What should have represented just a momentary performance of

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[88] Cf. Vitr. 2; Columella, *Rust*. 1; Plin. *HN* 3; Apul. *Met*. 1; also Verg. *Aen*. 7.805; Ov. *Ars* 1.693; *Met*. 4.10; 12.475; *Fast*. 2.742; see also *TLL* III 125.16-126.10, *s.v.* "calathus" [Probst].

[89] For the meaning of *domina* in an elegiac context, cf. *TLL* V 1.1915.33-42, *s.v.* "dominus" [Kapp]; for Omphale as *domina*, cf. *Ars* 2.211; *Fast*. 2.305; Mart. 9.65.11.

[90] Cf. *robusto pollice* (77); see also Prop. 3.11.20. As for *praevalidae ... manus*, the adjective *praevalidus* is a Vergilian coinage (*TLL* X 2.1085.51-1087.3, *s.v.* "praevalidus" [Thome]): cf. Verg. *G*. 2.190, 243; see also *Met*. 3.219; *Aen*. 10.320; 11.552; 12.98; *Am*. 3.2.72; *Rem. am*. 480 for *valida manus*.

[91] Cf. above, 1.2.

[92] "As anthropologists of Greece know, the wearing and giving of clothing plays a very important role in the balance of the relationship between the sexes. The example of Herakles indicates that it serves as well to dramatize the exchange between masculine and feminine that takes place within the hero" (Loraux 1995, 130). For the ritual component of Achilles' cross-dressing, as well as the irony implied in the Statian episode, cf. Heslin 2005, 145-152; 193-236; see also Cyrino 1998, 226-239.

effeminate behaviours becomes a more long-lasting and permanent loss of his heroic status, as well as his masculinity. As performing a gender signifies constructing, materialising, and finally becoming an embodiment of that gender, covering *their* own body with female clothes and jewels leads Hercules to inscribe that body into the symbolic space of femaleness.[93] In *Her.* 9, Hercules' performance of the female gender occurs within the narrative space of Deianira's writing. His cross-dressing, therefore, should not be seen as an active appropriation of effeminacy but rather as a progressive construction produced by a minoritarian, female voice that amplifies such a performance by stressing its contrast with Hercules' heroic deeds in the past.[94] By reporting Hercules' cross-dressing, downplaying his heroic status and eventually causing his death, Deianira appropriates her identity as a "slaughterer of men", as well as simultaneously justifying her being the "slaughterer of (her) man" to her son, Hyllus. This justification is pursued by means of her epistle, which presents Hercules as an effeminate character, an 'alterity', a polluted entity that needs to be eliminated to avoid *miasma*.[95] Hercules, therefore, has been replaced by Deianira in his role as purifier and pacifier.[96] Not only does Deianira take on the role of the hero, she also seeks Hyllus' acknowledgement in order for that role to become effective.

The following section from this episode (85-118) further contributes to the reduction of Hercules' status. After listing Hercules' labours again (85-100), Deianira wonders

[93] In Judith Butler's words: "But how, then, does the notion of gender performativity relate to this conception of materialization? In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler 1993, 3).

[94] The performance of the female gender is linked to an oriental frame, which is determined by, e.g., the mention of the Meander (55), as well as oriental objects (e.g. *calathus*, 73) or clothes (e.g. *mitra*, 63). From the Late Republic on, Roman collective culture started seeing the eastern regions of the Empire as the seat of depravity, sexual excesses, luxury and softness: Octavian's propaganda stigmatised Mark Antony and Cleopatra as the embodiments of all these vices. Mark Antony's self-identification with Hercules was a great chance for Octavian to use Omphale's episode for propaganda against his rival: see Zanker 1988, 44-77; Galinsky 1996, 141-224; Levick 2010, 44-49.

[95] On Hercules' 'impurity', see e.g. Girard 1977, 40-42; Foley 1985, 159.

[96] See Soph. *Trach.* 1012: πολλὰ μὲν ἐν πόντῳ κατά τε δρία πάντα καθαίρων; *HO* 1-103; for the ambivalence of Hercules as purifier, cf. Papadopoulou 2005, 20-24.

about the paradox that Hercules dares to tell of his glorious past while dressed in the Sidonian gown (*Sidonio ... amictu*, 101).[97] She then asks ironically whether he is not ashamed to recall his deeds in such attire (*non cultu lingua retenta silet*, 102). As speechlessness represents a desirable form of behaviour for a woman,[98] Hercules' silence enhances his femininity and loss of authority. Hercules' powerlessness finds its main expression at lines 103-110, which describe Omphale's triumphal attitude. Such a triumph must be read as an anticipation of Iole's triumphal procession, as well as Deianira's final 'victory' over her husband.

> se quoque nympha tuis ornavit Iardanis armis
>   et tulit a capto nota tropaea viro.
> i nunc, tolle animos et fortia gesta recense;   105
>   quo tu non esses, iure vir illa fuit.
> qua tanto minor es, quanto te, maxime rerum,
>   quam quos vicisti, vincere maius erat.
> illi procedit rerum mensura tuarum —
>   cede bonis; heres laudis amica tuae.   110
>
> (Ov. *Her*. 9.103-110)

Omphale, who is addressed as *nympha* (103), a generic substantive to indicate a young girl,[99] is said to have adorned herself with Hercules' weapons (*tuis ... Iardanis armis*, 103)[100] and to have gained the *nota tropaea* (104), the trophies from the captured man (*capto ... viro*, 104).[101] After sarcastically encouraging (*i, nunc*)[102] Hercules to recount his great deeds (*fortia gesta*), Deianira claims that Omphale rightfully took on the role of the man that Hercules was not (*quo tu non esses, iure vir illa fuit*, 106),[103] thereby fully accomplishing the gender role reversal. Hercules is equally lesser than

[97] Cf. Prop. 4.9.47; Ov. *Fast*. 2.319; Sen. *HF* 467; the *Sidonio ... amictu* seems to hint ironically at the robe which Deianira will send to Hercules (cf. 163).

[98] See above, e.g. Ch. 1.1.

[99] The substantive *nympha* as a generic "girl" is an Ovidian invention: cf. *Her*. 1.27; 9.50; see Casali 1995a, 95.

[100] This line has been debated: cf. Casali 1995a, 152-153.

[101] According to Fabre-Serris 2010, 18-19, by wearing Hercules' arms and looking at herself in the mirror (line 118), Omphale is performing a male role.

[102] Cf. Prop. 3.18.17: the construction *i, nunc* and imperative was considered to be quite sarcastic (cf. e.g. Gagliardi 1978, 373-379; *TLL* V 2.632.37-70, *s.v.* "eo" [Rubenbauer]); see also *Her*. 3.26; 4.127; 12.206.

[103] For an alternative reading of *fortia gesta*, cf. Dörrie 1972, 172; Casali 1995a, 157 (*fortia facta*); for the alternation between *quo*, *quem*, *quod*, *quom* in the manuscripts and editions, see Goold 1977, 116.

Omphale (*qua tanto minor es*, 107) as it was greater to defeat him (*quanto te ... vincere maius erat*, 107-108) than those he had defeated; Omphale is now the true heir of Hercules' achievements and successes (*heres laudis amica tuae*, 110).[104] By mentioning the *tela ... atra venenis* (115-116), Deianira creates a sinister link between the darts anointed with the Hydra's poisonous blood (one of Hercules' famous weapons) and Hercules' death by the blood of Nessus. Although at this point of the epistle Deianira is not yet supposed to be aware of Hercules' agony, her mention of the poisoned darts appears to ironically forecast Hercules' death: this allusion suggests to knowledgeable readers (of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, for example) that Deianira may not be entirely unaware that Nessus' blood would have also been poisonous.[105]

Moreover, the mention of a *femina* bearing the *tela* (115), besides anticipating another female character dealing with poisonous weapons (namely Deianira herself), creates an antithesis between what is thought to pertain to men, i.e. weapons, and the more traditional feminine weakness.[106] Such an antithesis is enhanced by the acknowledgement that the *femina* who now holds Hercules' weapons appears to be hardly able to carry the spindle heavy with wool (*gravem lanam ... colum*, 116), representing spinning, a traditionally feminine task, as we have seen. It is worth stressing once again (cf. *Her*. 11.20, above: 2.4) the graphic similarity between *tela* as

[104] Because of the rather juridical language (109-110: cf. e.g. *procedit*; *cede bonis*; *heres*), this couplet may encapsulate a reference to the *cessio bonorum*, according to which the debtor voluntarily gave up all their possessions to the creditor in order to avoid *infamia*. Such a reference might suggest that if Hercules had given up all his *tropaea* voluntarily, as an act of benevolence, he would have avoided the humiliation that primarily derives from his passivity; in fact, Deianira underlines that Omphale has actively gained these trophies by enslaving and defeating Hercules. The *cessio bonorum* is defined as *Lex Iulia* by Gaius (3.78: *cessio e lege Iulia*): see Casali 1995a, 159-160. Moreover, the use of the technical word *heres*, "heir", also recalls a legal context, particularly Roman testamentary law, which underwent some changes during the early imperial period. In particular, it seems that Augustus emended the Voconian law (169 BC), which limited women's possibility of inheriting from their husband, thereby improving the status of Roman wives. However, this improvement was directed only to women who were married according to a *iustum matrimonium* (namely, a regular marriage) and had born children to their husband (Treggiari 1991, 69; 383-386). Alongside ratifying her status as Hercules' new *coniunx* ("wife"), a reading of the reference to Omphale as heir of Hercules vis-à-vis Roman testamentary law also suggests that she will not get his inheritance, as she is neither regularly married to Hercules nor the mother of his children.

[105] For this kind of tragic irony, cf. *Trach*. 573-574; Casali 1995a, 163-164; Scott 1997, 33-47.

[106] Cf. Verg. *Aen*. 1.364; Prop. 3.11.1; *Her*. 3.144; 7.121; see also *Trach*. 1062-1063, where Hercules feels ashamed at having been defeated by a woman.

"weapons" and *tela* as "web", which produces a verbal pun. As she is now performing a masculine role, it is as though Omphale has lost her ability to carry out the quintessentially female task of weaving.

At the same time, this reversal of roles between Omphale and Hercules does not seem to be entirely accomplished. Just as Hercules does not fit properly both within feminine clothes and attitudes (cf. 75-80), nor does Omphale seem entirely suited to playing a dominant male role. Although she takes up Hercules' famous club (*instruxitque manum clava domitrice ferarum*, 117),[107] she looks at herself in a mirror while holding it (*vidit et in speculo coniugis arma sui*, 118), thereby showing a rather feminine attitude.[108] Beyond being a programmatic object of elegiac poetry both in the *Amores* and in *Ars*, as well as representing a symbol of female vanity,[109] the *speculum* can be read as a way for Omphale to look at herself with her own eyes and from her own perspective, not as a reflection of others.[110] While she looks at herself adorned in the mirror, this contemplation concerns not only her own image as a woman, but also her image as a woman dressed up like a man, performing a male role and playing the part of the *domina*. By looking at her reflection, Omphale dismantles the heteronormative, objectified version of herself. Omphale is not simply the literary elegiac *domina* who metaphorically enslaves the lover/poet, but a true *domina* who has enslaved the greatest hero, Hercules.

[107] The verb *instruo*, which belongs to the military context, opposes *ornavit*: cf. e.g. Cic. *Leg. Man.* 20; Verg. *Aen*. 3.471; 12.124; Liv. 10.16.8; 24.28.8; Ov. *Am*. 1.1.11-12; *Her*. 16.329; *TLL* VII 1.2018.45.84, *s.v.* "instruo" [Kamptz].

[108] *Coniunx* can also mean "paramour", but only if referring to women: cf. e.g. Verg. *Ecl*. 8.18, 66; Prop. 2.8.29; Ov. *Ars* 3.331-332; *Her*. 8.18; 3.37; Stat. *Theb*. 10.646 (mentioning Omphale: *Lydia coniunx*); see *TLL* IV 342.55-343.64. Given the reversal of roles between Hercules and Omphale, the use of such a word to indicate Hercules appears quite remarkable.

[109] For the opposition between the mirror, which belongs to the elegiac world, and the weapons, which belong to the military and epic context, see Casali 1995a, 166.

[110] According to Irigaray 1985b, *passim*, the mirror is a means for patriarchal-based societies to shape the image of women according to their own needs and discourse, thus making them unable to become actual subjects of that discourse.

Deianira's contradictory, yet emphatic and exaggerated description of Omphale as dominating and ruling over Hercules certainly draws from the comic tradition, but is also reworked in order to ridicule Hercules and reduce his status. Omphale and Iole play a pivotal role in the process of Hercules' progressive degradation, as both of them subvert traditional gender categories, thereby making Hercules appear particularly effeminate.[111] After they have taken on, and replaced, Hercules' heroic role, Deianira appropriates her own prominent status at the end of her narrative, through her (un)intentional murder of Hercules. The death of the 'hero' is rhetorically justified, legitimised and sanctioned by Deianira's epistle.

3.3. Iole, Hyllus and Deianira: τὸ μητρὸς ὄνομα[112]

After the account of Hercules' enslavement by Omphale, Deianira focuses on Iole's arrival in Trachis (119-130), which is described according to patterns that recall the triumphal procession of an actual Roman general.[113] Drawing from Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (cf. 292-313; 351-374; 436-469; 531-587), this scene has been quite evidently adapted to the Roman context, both historical (cf. the triumph) and literary (cf. the elegiac patterns). This account of Iole's procession as a Roman *triumphator* upholds the coexistence of military and elegiac features that characterises the entire letter. When Deianira starts describing Iole's arrival, she stresses the antithesis between her initial disbelief as to what she heard (*licuit non credere famae ... et venit ... ab aure*, 119-120)[114] and her subsequent acceptance of what she sees in reality, which cannot be denied any longer: *ante meos oculos adducitur advena paelex* (121). While the *fama* at

[111] Cf. Gerlinger 2011, 304.
[112] Soph. *Trach*. 1065.
[113] See e.g. Beard 2007, 1-7; 107-142; Bastien 2014, 509-526; the military triumph may also become a metaphor in love elegy: cf. e.g. Ov. *Am*. 1.2.19-52. For the difference between Deianira's attitude towards Iole in Sophocles and Ovid, cf. Jacobson 1975, 350-351; see also Pattoni 1991, 126-149.
[114] For alternative readings of these lines, cf. Casali 1995a, 168-169.

119 (cf. 41) is thought to be unreliable (but will eventually turn out to be true),[115] the *fama* at 143-144 will be immediately accepted by Deianira. Besides showing that she has learnt to trust (bad) news from her previous scepticism, the lack of any hesitation in believing the *fama* at lines 143-144 is a further indication that Deianira is to some extent aware of the effects that her robe would have had on Hercules.[116]

The potential unreliability of the *fama* is replaced by the certainty that comes when she sees Iole (121-122), which recalls once more the comic context, wherein the display of a female rival in love is a prominent feature.[117] As Iole proceeds before Deianira's eyes, it is impossible to reject the truth: *nec mihi, quae patior, dissimulare licet*.[118] In the heroine's account of the procession (123-130), sight is particularly emphasised as Deianira describes Iole in physical terms: cf. e.g. *ante meos oculos* (121), *invitis oculis adspicienda* (124), *vultu decente* (126), *lato spectabilis auro* (127), *dat vultum ... sublimis* (129). Beyond evoking the theatrical stage and thereby linking Iole's procession to the following irruption of the 'news' in Deianira's 'literary stage' at 143-144, this insistence on the details of Iole's body and attire recalls the scopophiliac *male* gaze, which scrutinises and objectifies the female body.[119] Although Iole is spoken, written, by an external voice, i.e. objectified, 'othered' and put on display by Deianira, her prestige and power are nonetheless not reduced.

Iole has a sort of attractive power that forces Deianira to watch the scene (*non sinis averti* at 123 could refer either to Hercules or Iole, but either way it conveys the idea of

[115] For some expressions concerning an unreliable or ambiguous *fama*, cf. e.g. *TLL* VI 1.211.11-34, *s.v.* "fama" [Vetter]. The idea that eyes are more reliable than ears is a literary topos: cf. e.g. Hor. *Ars P.* 181; Ov. *Am.* 3.14.45-46; Vell. Pat. 2.11.3; 2.92.5.

[116] Cf. above, 3.1, 3.2; Casali 1995a, 215; in the *Trachiniae*, by contrast, Deianira seems to be unaware of the ultimate consequences of her acts: see Faraone 1994, 115.

[117] Cf. e.g. Plaut. *Rud.* 1046-1047; Ter. *Haut.* 1041; *Eun.* 623, 792; cf. also *Fast.* 3.483; for Iole as a "stranger" (cf. *advena*), see *Trach.* 299, 310, 601, 627.

[118] By contrast, dissimulating was Deianira's reaction after Lichas' report in the *Trachiniae* (436-469); cf. also *Met.* 9.155-157.

[119] "The intellectual woman looks and analyses, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation. It is as if the woman had forcefully moved to the other side of the specular"; cf. Doane 1982, 83.

the magnetism of Iole's image),[120] in spite of her unwillingness to see: *invitis oculis adspicienda venit* (124).[121] Once Deianira starts watching the spectacle of (Hercules' and) Iole's procession, she cannot help focusing on the details of this view.[122] Iole's hairstyle is said to be different from what one would expect of a prisoner (125) and she clearly reveals through her face the nature of her destiny, namely that she is Hercules' paramour and not simply a prisoner: *fortunam vultu fassa decente suam* (126).[123] Accordingly, she is said to be *spectabilis* (127)[124] due to the huge amount of gold that covers her, which parallels Hercules' attire during his servitude to Omphale (128). This comparison between Iole and Hercules is further developed by Deianira in the following couplet, where she states that Iole holds her head high (*dat vultum ... sublimis*, 129: *sublimis* has a predicative value), as if she had defeated Hercules (*Hercule victo*, 129), as Omphale did.[125] It seems that Oechalia is still standing and Iole's father is alive (130), since Iole behaves like the winner, whereas Hercules is the defeated.[126] The military and the elegiac sphere continue to overlap, thereby contributing to the subversion of traditional (gender and social) roles.

This reversal is enhanced by and interwoven with Deianira's ambivalent attitude towards Iole. The heroine puts the prisoner on display, looking at her as a spectacle; her gaze is not only scopophiliac but also articulates a narcissistic identification with the

[120] By contrast, in the *Trachiniae* Deianira not only presses to be told the truth by Lichas but also suspects that Lichas is intentionally concealing a prisoner from her, namely Iole, at Hercules' orders: cf. e.g. *Trach*. 449-450.

[121] For *inviti ... oculi* in Ovid, cf. e.g. *Her*. 18.4; *Met*. 6.628; *Pont*. 1.9.4; see also Prop. 1.15.39-40.

[122] For the intrinsic theatricality of the scene of Iole's entrance, see Jolivet 2005, 168-174.

[123] Scholars have proposed different readings of line 126, such as *vultum ... tegendo*, *vultu ... tegente*, *vultu ... decente*; cf. Goold 1977, 116; Casali 1995a, 172-175.

[124] Cf. *OLD* 1800, *s.v.* "spectabilis".

[125] By contrast, prisoners were supposed to keep their eyes down (cf. e.g. Ov. *Tr*. 4.2.29). The mention of the *populus* supports the idea that Ovid is depicting the scene of a Roman triumph, where Iole is the triumphant hero: cf. *Am*. 1.2.25; *Tr*. 4.2.19, 48. For alternative readings of line 129, see Goold 1977, 116.

[126] Fabre-Serris 2010, 21: "Comme dans le cas d'Omphale, il est impossible d'imputer la façon de se comporter d'Iole à autre chose qu'à une volonté, de sa part, de faire *voir* qu'elle est dans une position de *domination*".

object itself, that is, with Iole as the defeater of Hercules.[127] Like Omphale, Iole is presented as though she has actually defeated Hercules, both as a traditional elegiac mistress who metaphorically defeats the poet and in actual and more concrete terms, since she seems to enter the city as a victorious Roman general having been awarded the *triumphus*.[128] Iole's temporary victory anticipates Deianira's irreversible win over her husband, and serves to enhance Hercules' anti-heroism. If we accept as plausible the hypothesis that Hyllus may be the actual addressee of the epistle, the emphatic description of Iole would give rise to further implications, namely that Iole's depiction is filtered for Hyllus through Deianira's 'scopophiliac' gaze. The Ovidian Deianira thus seems to remember Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, where Hercules urged Hyllus to marry Iole after his death,[129] and portrays Iole so that she looks attractive to her son. The Ovidian heroine thus not only alludes to the Sophoclean intertext, but also re-enacts the role of Hercules by replacing him and endorsing his last will, that Hyllus marries Iole. Deianira's presentation of Iole as a victorious hero is aimed, therefore, at making clear (to knowledgeable readers) that she is in control of Hercules', Iole's and Hyllus' destiny, as well as the master of her own narrative.

The rhetorical nature of Deianira's discourse also emerges quite clearly from the arrival of the news about Hercules' agony at lines 143-144. As mentioned, these lines (143-144) can be thought of as filling the gaps of the *Trachiniae*, so that the letter Deianira is writing *hic et nunc* would be the cause for Hyllus' change of attitude towards his mother at the end of Sophocles' play.[130] As soon as a generic *nuntia ... fama*

[127] Cf. Fabre-Serris 2010, 20-23; Doane 1982, 78: "For the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image – she is the image. Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator's desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism-the female look demands a becoming".

[128] Cf. Casali 1995a, 177.

[129] *Trach*. 1221-1229; Casali 1995a, 218-219: such a marriage is felt by Hercules as the only way of perpetuating his line: cf. Bergson 1993, 114-115.

[130] Cf. above, 3.1.

reports to Deianira that Hercules is dying because of the poison (*tabes*, 144)[131] that spread from the robe (*tunicae ... meae*, 144) she sent to him, the letter starts to be characterised by a more agitated tone and disjointed language, as we have seen. This change of accents is expressed through an increased use of rhetorical direct questions and exclamatory sentences, which start at line 145 with an expression that recalls a well-known elegiac (and non-elegiac) motif: *quo me furor egit amantem*.[132] Deianira's distress progressively intensifies, as appears from the refrain at lines 146, 152, 158, 164 (*inpia quid dubitas Deianira mori*),[133] which can be interpreted as the result of Deianira's loss of control over her *carmen*.[134] At the same time, the emphatic repetition of her given name, *Deianira*, also suggests that the heroine fully embraces her identity, thereby fulfilling the destiny encapsulated in her name, that is, to be the murderer of a man, her man.[135] Finally, the death she forecasts for herself (*quid dubitas ... mori*) is the marker of her appropriation of an epic, tragic, heroic, masculine code. Through this refrain, therefore, while stating her guilt and, accordingly, will to die immediately, Deianira also underlines her active role in Hercules' death, which restores the order that was broken by Hercules' cross-dressing.

Such an ambivalent attitude continues in the following lines, where Deianira claims that she cannot survive the death of her *coniunx* (147): the reference to Hercules as *coniunx* (147) recalls the previous occurrence of the word at 118, where it referred to Hercules as Omphale's paramour, thereby evoking the previous gender role reversals

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[131] Cf. *OLD* 1898, *s.v.* "tabes" (3).

[132] For *furor egit*, cf. Verg. *Aen*. 9.760-761; *Her*. 13.34; see also Verg. *Ecl*. 2.69: *quae te dementia cepit? Furor* also seems to be connected with Hercules' madness: *Hercules* is *furens* in Euripides and Seneca's drama.

[133] The adjective *impia* establishes a link between Deianira and the Danaids (cf. *Her*. 3.11.30-32): see Vessey 1969, 354-355; Bolton 1997, 433.

[134] Fulkerson 2005, 116 (see above).

[135] Cf. Soph. *Trach*. 1064-1065: ὦ παῖ, γενοῦ μοι παῖς ἐτήτυμος γεγώς, / καὶ μὴ τὸ μητρὸς ὄνομα πρεσβεύσῃς πλέον.

and Hercules' loss of dignity.[136] On a similar note, Deianira emphasises her status as *Herculis uxor* (149; cf. 27), which is a rather periphrastic way to refer to herself compared to the repetition of her own given name in the refrain. On the one hand, Deianira's legitimate union with Hercules seems to give her a role within her family and society; on the other hand, by killing Hercules, the heroine has gained independent status, as well as replacing Hercules as the hero of her narrative. Accordingly, when Deianira says that the *pignus* ("proof" and "pledge") of her union with Hercules is her death (*coniugii mors mea pignus erit*, 150),[137] she alludes to her suicide as a form of legitimation not only of her status as Hercules' *uxor* (*cur Herculis uxor / credar*, 149-150) but also as an equally (anti-)heroic counterpart of her husband. In other words, Deianira can be believed to be Hercules' wife only after having demonstrated that she can slaughter a man like Hercules, as well as killing herself heroically, like a male hero.

This heroic suicide is recontextualised vis-à-vis Deianira's family history. After mentioning her brother Meleager (151), Agrius (153),[138] Oeneus (154),[139] her brothers Tydeus (155)[140] and Meleager again (156, *alter fatali vivus in igne fuit*),[141] the heroine also refers to her mother Althaea: *exegit ferrum sua per praecordia mater* (158).[142] The reference to her family members recalls the episode of the killing of Meleager by his mother Althaea and therefore alludes to Deianira's responsibility for Hercules' death.[143] Moreover, Althaea's suicide forecasts Deianira's self-murder and establishes a link

[136] Deianira's reference to Hercules as *coniunx* is highly ironic, as she previously was expressing her concerns about her replacement by Iole (131-134).
[137] Cf. e.g. Casali 1995a, 204. The meaning of *pignus* as "child" suggests that Deianira may be implying a further allusion to Hyllus: cf. *OLD* 1379, *s.v.* "pignus": "4 (applied to children as the guarantee of the reality of a marriage)"; Prop. 4.11.73; Ov. *Her.* 6.122; 11.113; *Met.* 3.134, 5.523; see above (2.2).
[138] Cf. *RE* I 896-897 ("Bruder des Oineus"), *s.v.* "Agrios" [Wentzel].
[139] Cf. *RE* XVII 2195-2204, *s.v.* "Oineus" [Hanslik]; see also Ov. *Met.* 8.273, 486.
[140] Cf. *RE* VII A.2.1702-1709, *s.v.* "Tydeus" [Diehl].
[141] For some textual issues on this line, cf. Casali 1995a, 209-211.
[142] Cf. *Her.* 4.57-58, Phaedra's reference to Pasiphaë (see above, 2.2).
[143] Casali 1995a, 204-206.

between mother and daughter. While in other ancient sources Althaea hangs herself,[144] in *Her*. 9.158 she is said to have killed herself by sword. As we have already seen, self-murder with the sword is not only uncommon for women (as the sword is a weapon suited for men)[145] but is also how Deianira kills herself in the *Trachiniae*: ὁρῶμεν αὐτὴν ἀμφιπλῆγι φασγάνῳ / πλευρὰν ὑφ᾽ ἧπαρ καὶ φρένας πεπληγμένην (930-931).[146] The heroine's mention of her mother reinforces the connection between Deianira as the slaughterer of Hercules and Deianira as heroic self-murderer.

Whilst the heroine seemingly gives up her self-agency by pointing out Nessus' culpability at 161-163, she hints again at her responsibility by using a verb in the first person singular: *inlita Nesseo misi tibi texta veneno* (163).[147] Although certain scholars have interpreted this passage as evidence of Deianira's weakness and passive role,[148] I side with Casali, who argues that line 163 represents the high point of tragic irony within *Her*. 9.[149] By stating that she sent to Hercules *inlita Nesseo ... texta veneno*, Deianira implies that she knew from the start that Nessus' blood was deadly. Far from underscoring Deianira's lack of initiative, this passage emphasises, through the use of tragic irony, the heroine's active role, as well as involvement, in Hercules' death. Thus, Deianira's display of her weakness can be interpreted as a sort of masquerade, an intentional demonstration of hyper-feminine patterns, through which the heroine is compensating and balancing the male role that she has taken on.[150] By stating something and implying something else, Deianira enacts her rhetorical strategies and

[144] Cf. e.g. Diod. Sic. 4.34.7; ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.73.

[145] Cf. above, 2.1; 2.2.

[146] "It is highly unusual for a tragic heroine to end her life with the sword"; cf. Davies 1991, 217. See also Wender 1974, 13: "[...] Deianeira, the essence of feminine weakness, becomes 'manly', killing herself with a sword rather than a woman's noose".

[147] For *inlitus*, cf. *TLL* VII 1.382.12-58, *s.v.* "illino".

[148] Cf. DuBois 1979, 41-42; see also Lindheim 2003, 64-65.

[149] Cf. Casali 1995a, 215: "Deianira avrebbe potuto capire che il sangue di Nesso era velenoso".

[150] See Doane 1988-1989, 43 (who quotes Riviere): "Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it".

continues her ambivalent as well as highly ironic discourse, which culminates in the final lines of her epistle (165-168).

> iamque vale, seniorque pater germanaque Gorge, 165
> et patria et patriae frater adempte tuae,
> et tu lux oculis hodierna novissima nostris,
> virque — sed o possis! — et puer Hylle, vale!
>
> (Ov. *Her*. 9.165-168)

Before addressing Hyllus in the last line of her letter, Deianira mentions her father (*seniorque pater*, 165),[151] her sister Gorge (*germanaque Gorge*, 165),[152] her native land and her brother Meleager (166),[153] as well as the light (167: invoking the light before dying is a tragic topos).[154] In her final reference to Hercules, *virque*, and her son (168), Deianira plays with the double function of *vale* (*virque – sed o possis – ... vale!*) which, beyond being a greeting and closing formula, literally means "to be strong/healthy/fine" – precisely what Hercules is not.[155] As we have seen, Deianira's mention of Hyllus as the last person to be named within the epistle may be due to several reasons: Hyllus is the actual addressee of the letter, as Hercules is in agony or has already died; (Ovid's) Deianira plays ironically with her main source, namely Sophocles, where Hyllus reports to Hercules Deianira's suicide and defends her after having discovered *somehow* that she is in fact innocent. In light of the Sophoclean model, the content of *Her*. 9 suggests that Hyllus' change of mind about his mother's actions is caused by the reading of Deianira's epistle: the heroine does not simply aim to justify herself to Hyllus, she also legitimates herself, as well as the destiny inscribed in her name, being the "slaughterer of men", of her man.

Deianira, however, does not accept such a destiny passively but pursues it through a well-calculated process and articulated rhetorical strategies, which range from the

[151] Cf. *Her*. 7.109 (Anchises); *Rem. am*. 470.
[152] Cf. *Met*. 8.543; *RE* VII 1.1596-1597, *s.v.* "Gorge" [Malten].
[153] Cf. e.g. Cat. 68.20 (*o misero frater adempte mihi*); 101.6.
[154] Cf. e.g. Soph. *Aj*. 856-859; Eur. *IA* 1505-1508; *Hec*. 411-412; *Alc*. 17-18.
[155] For a similar wordplay, cf. *Her*. 4.1; see also *Tr*. 3.3.87-88.

emphasis on herself as *Herculis uxor* (29-30) to the description of Hercules' cross-dressing (55-118) and complete (love) defeat (119-130), before culminating with Hercules' death (143-144). Therefore, Deianira's relationship with Hyllus, alongside the possibility that she is addressing her letter to him, must be read in light of the heroine's construction of herself as a heroic (wo)man. "Deianira" seeks to (re)appropriate herself both as a name and as a person, together with the meaning her name implies. The name of "Deianira" thus becomes a symbolic space for the development of her subjective identity and self-identification. The etymological potential of this name is developed through a contradictory, ambiguous and highly ironic discourse, which leads to the progressive degradation of the male hero and the appropriation of a masculine role.

Deianira manufactures her persona through her writing, thereby reconstructing her identity as a subject of discourse. As the mother of Hyllus, she keeps her agency hidden: her dominant role has to be read through the filter of her ironic speech. As a writer of her epistle, Deianira displays a defeated male hero to Hyllus, but without fully revealing herself. "Deianira" shapes the story from an external, *omniscient*, perspective without entering it, without *coming into life* as "Deianira" but while maintaining her liminality and ambiguity,[156] as well as reinforcing the blurring between genders, social roles and familial relationships. As we shall see for Medea in the next three sections, the multifarious, fluid, almost 'queer', nature of these heroines is what produces a space for their self-affirmation, which is pursued by destabilising conventional dichotomies and rules. Like Medea, Deianira is multidimensional: through her writing, she can be, simultaneously, *Herculis uxor*, Hyllus' mother and the "slaughterer of her man".

[156] For the 'Mehredimensionalität' of the narrator, cf. Feichtinger 2010, 200-217.

3.4. Sources and context: Medea's divided self

Medea is one of the most famous characters in classical literature.[157] An extremely multifaceted figure, Medea has been variously interpreted throughout the centuries as a godlike being or demon, an abject mother or unfortunate woman, a sorceress, a femme fatale;[158] psychological and anthropological approaches have read Medea as an example of divided self, dissociation and hysterical behaviour.[159] The Euripidean drama monopolised Medea's later reception,[160] including her depictions in works by Latin poets such as Ovid and Seneca.[161] As a consequence of such a complex background, the Medea of *Her*. 12 appears as a liminal, heterogeneous character, in a threshold space between past and present, epic and tragedy, masculinity and femininity, barbarity and civility, youth and maturity, naivety and power, weakness and violence, maternal love and infanticide.[162] Like other Ovidian heroines, Medea represents a coincidence of opposing thoughts and behaviours,[163] but the self-dissociation that allegedly occurs in Euripides[164] (cf. 1021-1080; see below) is still in its germinal phase, although in continuous development, in *Her*. 12.

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[157] For Medea's myth, cf. *RE* XV 30-64, *s.v.* "Medeia" [Lesky]; see Manuwald 1983, 27; for the reception of Medea see e.g. Lauriola and Demetriou 2015, 377-442.

[158] See e.g. Knox 1979, 304; Hatzichronoglou 1993; Segal 1996, 15-44; ; Martina 1997, 15-45; Perotti 1999, 71-72; Schmidt 1999, 243-272.

[159] For an overview, see Hall 2010, 15-24; also Verducci 1985, 80, on *Her*. 12.

[160] "Euripides' tragedy of 431 B.C., it is agreed, gives Medea her canonical identity"; Boedeker 1997, 127. For the construction of his Medea, Euripides surely took inspiration from previous sources, such as Pindar's *Fourth Pythian* (462 BC), as well as Eumelos' *Corinthiaca* (eight or mid-sixth century BC) and the epic cycle of the *Nostoi* (presumably seventh century BC), both of which are not extant. The poet Neophron wrote a *Medea* as well (*TrGF* 15, Fr. 1-3), but it is not clear whether this was written before or after Euripides' tragedy (see Manuwald 1983, 41-56). In terms of narrative plot, it is uncertain whether Medea's killing of her children, as well as her flight on the chariot of the Sun, was an innovation of Euripides or a reworking from other sources (see e.g. Mossman 2011, 1-11).

[161] Among the pre-Ovidian accounts of Medea, it is worth mentioning Sophocles' *Scythai* and *Colchides* (not extant); Apollonius' Book 3 and 4 (cf. Jacobson 1974, 109-112); Ennius' *Medea exul*, Pacuvius' *Medus* and Accius' *Medea*, of which some fragments still survive (cf. e.g. Cowan 2010, 39-52).

[162] See e.g. Davis 2012, 33: "[...] Ovid has positioned his elegiac heroine between past and future, guilt and innocence, epic and tragedy"; "Medea's epistle to Jason is the only literary artifact preserved from antiquity in which the mature, demonic Medea of Euripides' play speaks with the same voice as the young, sympathetically engaging Medea of Apollonius Rhodes' *Argonautica*" (Verducci 1985, 71).

[163] See e.g. Newlands 1997, 178-208.

[164] Cf. Gill 1987, 25-26; for the modern concept of dissociation, see Dell 2006, 1-26; Dell and O' Neil 2009, *passim*.

When (Ovid's) Medea writes her epistle, she has already been abandoned by Jason (*Her*. 12.5-6; 173-174) and heard about his new marriage to Creusa (*Her*. 12.25; 143-146), but she has not yet conceived her murderous plan against Creusa, nor has she resolved to kill her own children.[165] However, knowledgeable readers of *Her*. 12 must have remarked the allusions to Medea's future crimes within the epistle (e.g. 181-182; 207-212), which were well-known from the previous tradition.[166] Although Apollonius and Euripides (and presumably other sources that are now either fragmentary or not extant) can be easily acknowledged as the main models of *Her*. 12,[167] the Ovidian Medea, like other heroines, reshapes the previous narratives, thereby redefining her own story by exploiting the peculiar features of the *ignotum ... opus* (*Ars* 3.346): the elegiac and somehow autobiographical discourse of the *Heroides* allows us to hear Medea's subjective voice, at least within literary fiction.

Her. 12 is not the only Ovidian depiction of Medea. Despite the fragmentary state of the almost entirely lost Ovidian drama, *Medea*,[168] scholars have rightfully maintained that Ovid showed himself to be very interested in and fairly sympathetic towards Medea as a character, since he focused on her narrative (at least) three times: besides *Her*. 12 and the lost drama, *Met*. 7.1-424, which offers a more comprehensive account of Medea's narrative than the epistle.[169] *Her*. 12, alongside Ovid's lost tragedy,[170] is likely to have also influenced Seneca's drama to some extent, whereas both the Ovidian and Senecan Medea(s) may well have drawn on the previous Roman dramatic versions of

[165] Cf. e.g. Jacobson 1974, 109-123; Bessone 1997, 11-41; Heinze 1997, 25-41.

[166] These lines anticipate the events taking place in Euripides' tragedy and *Met*. 7 (cf. Spoth 1992, 202-205; Williams 2012, 49-50), and are an example of Ovid's tragic irony (cf. Barchiesi 1993, 333-365; Huskey 2004, 282).

[167] See e.g. Tracy 1972, 45; Jacobson 1974, 110. As for artistic evidence of Medea's myth in a Roman context, cf. Gessert 2004, 217-249; Carucci 2010, 53-65.

[168] Cf. Nikolaidis 1985, 383-387.

[169] Medea also features at some length in *Tr*. 3.9. For the links between *Her*. 12 and *Met*. 7 as well as the evolution of Medea through the Ovidian works, see e.g. Gildenhard and Zissos 2013, 88-130; see also Hinds 2011, 22-33; Williams 2012, 49-70; for Ovid's sympathetic attitude towards Medea, see Verducci 1985, 34-85.

[170] See Trinacty 2007, 63-78; Battistella 2015, 446-470.

the myth, i.e. Ennius' *Medea exul*, Pacuvius' *Medus* and Accius' *Medea*.[171] Among the various appearances of Medea predating the Ovidian epistle, it is beneficial to focus in more detail on two aspects of Euripides' *Medea*, namely the internal struggle between reason and anger, which can be read as gendered in terms of, respectively, the masculine and feminine self; and Medea's self-dissociation vis-à-vis her (abject) motherhood.

In Euripides' drama, Medea appears to be totally aware of her unfortunate condition of woman and barbarian/foreigner (cf. 214-266), most notably when she exclaims:[172] "Of all things that have life and reason we women are the most wretched creation; we, who must first buy a husband for an extravagant sum of money and take a master for our bodies; this is an evil worse still than an evil. [...] I would rather stand in the battle-line three times than give birth once" (Eur. *Med.* 230-234; 250-251).[173] In light of passages like this, some scholars have claimed that Medea seems to speak on behalf of women who are particularly marginalised.[174] Beyond being a woman, Medea is also a foreigner, which enhances her alterity, as well as her alienation from the values of Greek society.[175] At the same time, later in the play Medea rejects her status as a woman and mother, becoming somehow 'masculine' and suspending her maternal instinct to kill her children.[176] Accordingly, because of her concerns about reputation and honour (cf. e.g. Eur. *Med.* 394; 403; 797; 807-810; 1354-1355), Medea has been linked to tragic

[171] See Cowan 2010, 39-52.

[172] Being both a woman and a barbarian enhances Medea's marginalisation from the social and political context of the Greek *polis*. Medea, in short, combines three features that according to Greek culture and imaginary determine alterity and abhorrence, i.e. animality, femininity and barbarity (Sala Rose 2002, 293-294).

[173] Eur. *Med.* 230-234, 250-251: πάντων δ᾽ ὅσ᾽ ἔστ᾽ ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει / γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν: / ἃς πρῶτα μὲν δεῖ χρημάτων ὑπερβολῇ / πόσιν πρίασθαι, δεσπότην τε σώματος [...] κακῶς φρονοῦντες: ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ᾽ ἀσπίδα / στῆναι θέλοιμ᾽ ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ. This translation is from Mastronarde 2002; for a commentary on these lines, cf. Mossman 2011, ad loc.

[174] See Schaps 2006, 590-592; Zorn 2006, 129-130.

[175] Medea's "impossible integration" into Corinth reflects the difficult integration of foreigners in Athens (Voelke 2014, 142-154); for more general remarks on the condition of women in classical Athens, see Cohen 1996, 134-145.

[176] See Barlow 1989, 158-171. Medea's proclivity towards the masculine heroic code has been compared to Clytemnestra's masculinity and Antigone's rejection of feminine stereotypical roles (see Katz 1994, 98).

or epic male heroes (like Ajax or Achilles)[177] and has also been said to escape from her confinement in the segregated space of the house, insofar as she enters public life and rejects her allegedly stereotypical female role.[178]

This transition from feminine to masculine roles, however, is only partially completed and Medea keeps a fluctuating attitude between her opposite (gendered) selves:[179] rational and irrational drives are interwoven with male and female gender, in a relationship that is not always consistent. Whilst Medea is urged to kill her children and save her reputation by her sort of male heroism, her female maternal instinct almost convinces her to desist (cf. Eur. *Med.* 1040-1080). At the same time, it is her female proclivity towards magic and plotting[180] that allows her to accomplish her *bouleumata* (i.e. "plans"), which enhance her heroic, male, reputation.[181] Such a conflict between reason and passion, masculinity and femininity, *bouleumata* and *thumos* is clearly articulated in Medea's monologue at lines 1021-1080, which are addressed partly to her children (1021-1039 and 1069-1076), and partly to herself or the audience.[182] Medea's self-dissociation is particularly obvious in the transition from lines 1040-1048, where her maternal self appears to dominate her, to 1049-1055, where, "in a counter-reaction, she affirms totally her other self, that of avenger, dissociating herself from her maternal self".[183] Medea subsequently refers to herself in both negative and positive terms simultaneously (1056-1057), and at 1058 she distinguishes between 'us' (Medea as a

[177] Cf. Bevegni 1997, 209-227.

[178] Williamson 1990, 24-25, maintains that Medea seems to speak from the perspective of a male citizen.

[179] For Medea's gender "queerness" as well as her liminal position between human and divine, see Susanetti 2014, 4.

[180] The etymology of the name "Medea" has been linked to the Greek verb μήδομαι, which means to "plan", "plot", "invent"; "Medea sembra l'illustrazione tragica del suo nome ..."; cf. Beltrametti 2000, 47; see also *RE* XV 30; Pister 2013, 137. Medea's magic skills are pervasive features in *Met.* 7.1-424: cf. Rosner-Siegel 1982, 231-243; Wise 1982, 16-25; Segal 2002, 1-34.

[181] For self-division and fluctuation of gender categories, see Foley 1989, 61-85 (republished with minor revisions as Foley 2001, 243-271).

[182] This monologue has given rise to questions about textual transmission and authenticity (Kovacs 1986, 343-352; Gill 1987, 26; Mossman 2011, 314-332; Lucarini 2013, 163-196).

[183] Gill 1987, 27.

mother) and 'you', which is her *thumos* (1058). Eventually, Medea realises that she cannot resist her *thumos* and resolves to kill her children (1076-1080).

As has been argued, Medea's form of dissociation is informed by Aristotle's moral psychology and, particularly, by the theory of the bipartite self,[184] according to which women possess the *bouleumata* (deliberative faculty) but lack authority (*akuron*).[185] Accordingly, Medea's balance between *bouleumata* and *thumos*, rationality and emotion, is destabilised because of the departure of Jason, who as a man is thought to be a sort of regulating force: Jason's absence causes Medea's loss of control, as well as her resignation to her irrational drives and passions. Although Aristotle's theorisation seems suitable to Medea's psychology, it cannot be applied *in toto* to Euripides' Medea, where the coincidence between masculinity and rationality, for example, or conversely femininity and irrationality, is not univocal.

Compared to the Euripidean heroine, Ovid's Medea has been seen as a simpler and more naive character, far from the complexity that characterises the dramatic heroine.[186] By following the avenue traced by more appreciative judgements of the Ovidian epistle,[187] the following sections reconsider Medea's storytelling in *Her*. 12: the heroine emerges from the epistle as an extremely multifaceted and polysemous character, who parallels, and perhaps even surpasses, the complexity of her Euripidean alter-ego. This complexity emerges from Medea's construction of her motherhood and relationship with her children, which are modelled on her Euripidean monologue. Ovid's Medea enters into conversation with her model, in order to challenge, reshape and modify it.

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[184] Fortenbaugh 1970, 234: "[...] the *Medea* as a whole and the famous monologue in particular are especially useful for illustrating and understanding Aristotle's moral psychology".

[185] Cf. Fortenbaugh 1970, 240. Hall 2010, 16-23, (re)interprets Medea's actions and behaviours according to modern legal, social and psychological categories (see also Hall 2007, 91).

[186] According to Jacobson 1974, 123, *Her*. 12 is characterised by "sameness and a simplicity which plague hardly any other of the *Heroides*".

[187] See Verducci 1985, 83; Davis 2012, 33-48.

Despite her internal contrasting tendencies, the Euripidean character accomplishes the prophecy, or the destiny, implied in one of the possible etymologies of her name (cf. μήδομαι, i.e. "plotting", "planning") and *becomes Medea*. In *Her*. 12, this process of becoming is *in fieri* and the heroine's identity appears as fluid, unstable and 'queer' as ever. This instability is particularly enhanced by a temporary suspension of her status as a mother,[188] which has been read as the expression of her self-dissociation, following the Euripidean archetype.[189] The next sections of this chapter aim to demonstrate that, in *Her*. 12, Medea not only undergoes a similar self-dissociation as in the Euripidean drama, but her identity remains more profoundly undetermined: Medea's self-dissociation is only a part, a stage, of Medea's process of becoming, autopoiesis and subjective self-determination.

Before showing how this process happens in *Her*. 12, it is worth briefly mentioning two issues that have dominated the scholarly debate about this epistle, namely its authenticity and its intertextual relationship with *Her*. 6 (Hypsipyle's epistle). As for the former, it has already been noted that Ovid's authorship is not a necessary condition for the arguments that are made in this study.[190] Concerning the latter point, given Hypsipyle's long digression(s) on Medea in *Her*. 6 (cf. e.g. *Her*. 6.31-50; 127-140; 149-164), many scholars have rightfully linked *Her*. 12 to *Her*. 6 and have focused on the intertextual parallels between the two epistles.[191] This intertextual connection, which is undeniable, will be considered only to a limited extent, and in the relevant cases, but will also be discussed more thoroughly in the sections of the next chapter that focus on Hypsipyle (*Her*. 6).

[188] See Guastella 2000, 149; for Medea's killing of her children as a break of a sort of "maternal contract", see Emmett 2010, 255-259.

[189] Cf. Verducci 1985, 80.

[190] Cf. above, XXVIII-XXIX. Alongside those having shown how problematic the attribution of the epistle to Ovid is (e.g. Knox 1986, 207-223), many scholars support its authenticity (e.g. Hinds 1993, 9-47; Casali 1994, 173-4; Bloch 2000, 197-209).

[191] See Huskey 2004, 274-280; Fulkerson 2005, 51-52; Lindheim 2003, 114-133; Vaïopoulos 2013, 122-148; see below, 4.1.-4.3.

3.5. *Nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit*: becoming-Medea

In the next two sections (3.5.1; 3.5.2), we will see how Medea's oscillation between feminine and masculine attitudes implies a somewhat undetermined and fluid gender, which transcends the more antipodal (gendered) self-division of her Euripidean *Doppelgängerin*. Medea's form of gender queerness articulates the fluidity of her subjectivity, which is constructed by transitions and continuous becoming(s), and culminates in the rejection of her motherhood. This (re)interpretation of (Ovid's) Medea through the concepts of becoming(s) and perennial self-construction is theoretically grounded in posthuman feminism. In particular, I draw from the work of Rosi Braidotti, who merges Luce Irigaray's concept of sexual difference with Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's notion of the nomadic or rhizomatic subject (a kind of undetermined subject, who consists of transitions, shifts and becomings, and does not long for a fixed identity),[192] thus combining feminism and posthumanism.[193]

Braidotti encourages her readers to look at subjectivity not as a matter, but as a process that, especially with respect to female subjects, is related to the concept of becoming-woman, a re-appropriation of the female body and a rejection of Oedipal Law, which linguistically and ontologically sanctions the supremacy of male agency and fosters heteronormativity. To proceed to the de-territorialisation and redefinition of Western dichotomies, such as the opposition subject-object, same-other, male-female,

[192] Cf. the posthuman definition of "the human as a non-fixed and mutable condition" (Ferrando 2013, 27).

[193] Cf. Braidotti 2002, 1-10. In her most recent works, Braidotti has updated her position towards a more posthuman philosophy, where the anthropocentric notion of the human male as a representative of all species is further decentralised; cf. Braidotti 2013, *passim*. This resonates with her vision of feminism and female sexuality: "...we need to rethink sexuality without genders, starting from a vitalist return to the polymorphous and, according to Freud, 'perverse' (in the sense of playful and non-reproductive) structure of human sexuality"; Braidotti 2017, 36. Braidotti has very recently restated how posthuman feminism has contributed to the rise of new (academic) disciplines that question the notion of anthropocentrism, thus disentangling the identification of the subject with the human male, i.e. the Man (cf. Braidotti 2019, 37-40; see also Braidotti 2016, 16). For a theoretical and methodological framework about posthumanism and posthuman approaches, see Ferrando 2012, 9-18.

we must embrace a nomadic perspective that allows us to (re)think the subject in terms of flexibility and possibility, as well as relationality with other inanimate objects, nature and animals.[194] Through continuous becoming and redefinition, the female subject shapes *herself* as a flowing impulse perpetually in the making, thereby blurring the boundaries between human and non-human, living and non-living, as well as escaping from fixed gender categories and a binary view of social relationships.[195]

By pursuing a posthuman feminist reading of Medea, this chapter enters into conversation with recently published works on posthumanism and the Classics, particularly Bianchi, Brill and Holmes' *Antiquities Beyond Humanism*, Chesi and Spiegel's *Classical Literature and Posthumanism*, and Selsvold and Webb's *Beyond the Romans: Posthuman Perspectives in Roman Archaeology*.[196] While these three edited volumes appear to innovatively tackle the study of the classical world through the most recent developments of posthuman theory, represented by the works of Grosz, Haraway, Braidotti (to name but a few), they are also deeply concerned with showing their continuity with a scholarly tradition that has often problematised the notion of 'human' in Antiquity.[197] In fact, the point that "we have always been posthuman", which is made by certain contributors to the volumes to justify the application of modern theory to the Classics, may appear rather anachronistic.[198] However, it is true that certain patterns that would be attributed to the contemporary notion of posthumanism can be observed in many forms throughout the ancient world, such as the blurring of the borders between man and animal (cf. Caligula's relationship with his horse),[199] the human as a

[194] Braidotti 1994, 146-190; 2019, 31-61.
[195] Braidotti 2013, 21-22, 72.
[196] Cf. respectively, Bianchi, Brill and Holmes 2019; Chesi and Spiegel 2019; Selsvold and Webb 2020. Two earlier volumes that focus on objects' agency in Greek theatre seem to anticipate this 'posthuman turn' within the Classics: see Telò and Mueller 2018; Mueller 2016.
[197] Bianchi, Brill and Holmes 2019, 3-18; Chesi and Spiegel 2019, 2-7; Webb and Selsvold 2020, 1-10.
[198] Cf. e.g. Burrus 2019, 238-239; Noel 2019, 259-260.
[199] Baumgarten 2019, 123-124.

mechanical assemblage (Ajax and his sword),[200] or the idea of nature as a perpetual process of becoming (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*).[201] Such a posthuman approach contributes to remapping the notion of human in Antiquity by reconsidering the relationship between humans and animals, the natural world, the minoritarian subjects (i.e. women, slaves, persons with disabilities), and engages with the contemporary debate about the limitations, the potential, and the complexity of the concept of human.

In most cases, the various chapters are exceptionally helpful in offering case studies where the divide between human and animal, monster, nature, and machine, appears blurred and heterogeneous.[202] However, only in a few cases do the contributors show an interest in specifically dealing with posthuman feminism.[203] This is even more true of Rosi Braidotti's *Metamorphoses*, although it is well acknowledged that the re-interpretation of gender divisions and categories has played a significant role in the 'posthuman turn'.[204] By combining rather classical feminist views (e.g. Kristeva and Irigaray) with posthumanism, my reading of *Her.* 12 aims to demonstrate that Medea's conflicting relationship with her own motherhood articulates her process of self-construction as a (female) subject-in-becoming.

3.5.1. The hero(ine) and the abandoned woman: gender and genre fluidity

Medea's construction of herself as a fluid, unfixed subject is interwoven with her contradictory relationship with her motherhood, which is simultaneously affirmed and denied through the continuous blurring of gender boundaries, as well as through gender role reversals. This sort of 'psychological androgyny' culminates in a never-ending

[200] Spiegel 2019, 271-273.
[201] Sissa 2019, 159-186.
[202] See e.g. Korhonen 2019, 73-84; Geue 2019, 103-110 (animals); Strauss Clay 2019, 133-140; Ceschi 2019, 41-48 (monsters); Provenza 2019, 211-216; Giusti 2019, 275-284 (machines); Sissa 2019, 159-286; Bianchi 2019, 211-238 (nature).
[203] Cf. Bianchi 2019, 213; Nuzzo 2019, 32; McNamara 2019, 67.
[204] Bianchi, Brill and Holmes 2019, 8-9; Chesi and Spiegel 2019, 2, 9.

process of transitional shifts and transformations, which characterise her as a subject-in-becoming, to put it in posthuman terms.[205] Medea's fluid, almost queer, gender identity catalyses the rejection of her motherhood and determines her decision to kill her own children, which is implied in the very last lines of *Her*. 12 (209-212).

The fluctuation between a masculine and feminine self, and accordingly motherhood and revenge, characterises Medea's epistle throughout, and from its very beginning. The letter's opening rather abruptly recalls (cf. *at*, 1)[206] the opposition between the help that Medea provided to Jason in the past (*ferret opem*, 2), which hints at her agency, and her abandonment and helplessness, which draw the contours of a more traditionally passive and forlorn heroine. The latter connotation is introduced by Medea's reference to her memory (*memini*, 1),[207] as opposed to Jason's traditional forgetfulness (cf. e.g. *inmemor* at 16). The verb *memini* is a well-known marker of an Alexandrian footnote, and in this passage it recalls the lexical context of Catullus' Ariadne, the quintessential abandoned heroine (cf. Cat. 64.58; 117; 123; 135; 148; 231; 248),[208] thereby stressing by implication Medea's stereotypical role as a complaining woman. By contrast, Medea's mention of her *ars* (2), or her magical skill, as a means to help Jason points at her active role in the accomplishment of the trials. It also alludes to another kind of 'art', the art of love, which, however, the heroine does not seem to master (cf. *Ars* 3.29-42).[209] The double meaning implied in the word *ars* articulates Medea's internal struggle between

[205] Cf. Braidotti 2002, 111-116; 2013, 132; Ferrando 2013, 27.

[206] Some manuscripts report an alternative opening couplet which, however, has been mostly considered an interpolation (cf. e.g. Kirfel 1969, ad loc.; Bessone 1997, 46). For other examples of abrupt openings in elegy, cf. Prop. 1.8.1; 2.27.1; Ov. *Am*. 3.7.1; for the use of *at* in the beginning of a speech, see *Met*. 10.724; 12.367; *Fast*. 2.395; see also the opening of *Aen*. 4 (*at regina* ...).

[207] Memory is a *Leitmotiv* in Medea's narrative: cf. Ap. Rhod. 3.1109-1116; 1069-1071; 4.355-359; 383-385; Sen. *Med*. 48; 140-142; 465-466; 553-557; 560-562; cf. also *Her*. 12.16. While forgetfulness and fleetingness are considered traditionally female negative attributes, constancy and remembering are seen as exceptional when they characterise a woman; cf. e.g. Agamemnon's praise of Penelope in *Od*. 24.192-202.

[208] Cf. e.g. Hinds 1996, 1-16; see also Ariadne in *Her*. 10 (42; 79-80; 96).

[209] Medea is mentioned in this passage together with other 'heroines', namely Ariadne, Phyllis and Dido.

(male) heroism, or agency, and the elegiac complaint that she shares, at least on a surface-level reading, with other heroines.

This coexistence of opposite tendencies leads to the development of a self-identity in perennial movement and transition, which destabilises gender dichotomies and induces Medea to a disidentification from her maternal self. When the heroine exclaims that, if she had not helped Jason, she could have died "with honour" (*bene*) as *Medea* (5), she experiences a sort of self-dissociation: the old, somehow heroic Medea, who was yet untouched by her love for Jason, has been replaced by or entered into conflict with the new Medea, who is weakened by her passion.[210] Through the topos of a good and honourable death, the storyteller and third-person omniscient narrator Medea adopts a male and epic-based perspective on the events, thus enhancing her fluctuation between masculine and feminine self, epic and elegy, fictional narration and reality. The expression *produxi vitam* at line 6 literally means "I lived", but the verb *produco*, which is also used to indicate the "composition" of literary works and "childbirth", may be understood both as a metaliterary allusion to Medea's poetic production and a metaphorical innuendo of childbirth, as well as ominous anticipation of Medea's infanticide.[211]

Medea's oscillation between genders, attitudes and roles also emerges from her multiple, almost obsessive, references to the fact that Jason was able to accomplish Aeëtes' trials only because of her help (cf. 13-20; 39-50; 93-108; 163; 165; 171; 195-196; 199-202).[212] Through the use of jussive pluperfect subjunctives (*isset*, 15; *iecisset*, 17; *perisset*, 19),[213] the heroine maintains that Jason would have died (19-20) if he had fought the bullocks (16) and the warriors generated by the seeds (17-18) *non*

[210] Cf. Bessone 1997, 68: "l'identità eroica, smarrita, sarà riguadagnata con la vendetta. Solo allora, inoltre, l'eroina potrà dirsi propriamente 'Medea'...".

[211] Cf. *TLL* X 2.1636.50-1638.11, *s.v.* "produco" [Ramminger].

[212] The trials are also mentioned by Hypsipyle in *Her.* 6.10-14; 32-37 (see below, 4.1.-4.3.); cf. also *Met.* 7.100-158; Ap. Rhod. 3.1278-1407.

[213] Cf. e.g. *Her.* 10.77; *Am.* 2.16.17; 3.10.42; *Met.* 9.739.

praemedicatus (15), without her help.[214] The adjective *praemedicatus* ("protected by charms"), which is probably an Ovidian *hapax*,[215] refers to Medea's dangerous potential as a magician:[216] this innuendo suggests that the help Medea gave to Jason (and which she regrets having given) was essential to him overcoming the trials and, eventually, gaining his heroic status.[217] Accordingly, Medea's help is what causes her to play an active role in Jason's story, and her own. The continuous and repeated references to the trials are a way to emphasise Medea's agency and power, and conversely to underline Jason's passivity, dependency and lack of heroic temper. At the same time, Medea's help is the result of her falling in love with Jason, which causes her abandonment and gives voice to the most stereotypically feminine part of herself. The role as an abandoned woman that Medea plays, according to the patterns of the genre, is always accompanied by, and interwoven with, a more active, heroic attitude. This allegedly manly component of her personality leads her to the murder of her children, which is only forecast (but not enacted) at the end of Medea's letter.

Such a fluctuating attitude is an expression of Medea's gender queerness or psychological androgyny,[218] which are better-suited definitions than the well-known Euripidean self-division[219] to draw the contours of the Ovidian Medea. These outline the continuous overlap between genders, as well as delineating Medea's transitional, perpetually-in-the-making, (sexual) identity. The intersection between heroic (male) agency and the feminine arts (Medea's magic skills), between heroism and falling in love, revenge and maternal instinct, encourages non-binary and fluid interpretations of

[214] Cf. 15-18: *isset anhelatos non praemedicatus in ignes / inmemor Aesonides oraque adusta boum; / semina iecisset, totidemque et semina et hostes, / ut caderet cultu cultor ab ipse suo*; for textual issues, see Goold 1977, 142; Bessone 1997, 86-88.

[215] See Bessone 1997, 84; according to Heinze 1997, 102, the form *praemedicatus* may have recalled the (pseudo)etymology of Medea's name.

[216] Cf. Ap. Rhod. 3.1042-1051; 1246-1267; Pind. *Pyth*. 4.221-222, 233; ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.9.23.

[217] Cf. Bloch 2000, 199-200.

[218] Cf. Bem 1974; see Keener and Mehta 2017, 525-528. The concept of psychological androgyny has been revised quite recently, de-polarised and developed according to a more heterogeneous, non-binary, view of gender (cf. Bem 1993, 120-121; Fine, Dupré and Joel 2017, 670).

[219] Cf. Foley 2001, 243-271; above.

Medea. The struggle for a definition of her self-identity also emerges at line 25, where the heroine again names herself (cf. 5) and mentions that she has somehow been replaced by Creusa, *hoc illi Medea fui, nova nupta quod hic est*: the opposition between *Medea fui* and the *nova nupta* (note the caesura between *fui* and *nova*) has been said to sound like a bad omen, and to anticipate Medea's ensuing murderous acts, which include the murder of Creusa.[220] Moreover, this comparison between her past and present selves (cf. *fui*, 25) also manifests in Medea's difficulty at defining her new self after the displacement of her previous one. As emerges from the end of the epistle, this crisis does not entail the achievement of a stable identity, but rather one of perpetual development.

Ambiguity and fluctuation are intrinsic not only to Medea's storytelling but also to Jason's words, which recast Jason and Medea's first encounter in Apollonius (3.973-1130) and are reported (by Medea) in direct speech in *Her*. 12. The opening couplet of Jason's speech, which is staged as a sort of *suasoria*, hints at a legal frame, as Jason states that chance (*fortuna*, 73) has entrusted to Medea the right (*ius*, 73) and power (*arbitrium*, 73) over his safety, and his own destiny lies in Medea's hands: *inque tua est vitaque morsque manu* (74).[221] Both *ius* and *arbitrium* pertain to legal language[222] and the reference to the *manus* seems to allude to the *conventio in manum*, the part of the marital contract according to which the woman was delivered to her husband.[223] Jason is thus suggesting not just a marriage to Medea, but is also describing a potential liaison that is characterised by a reversal of traditional gender roles. Although this marriage

[220] This phrasing seems to anticipate the moment when Medea will effectively become or return to be "Medea", the one who plots, the murderer, goddess or demon of tradition; cf. Sen. *Med*. 166 (*Medea superest*); see Bessone 1997, 96.

[221] Cf. *Met*. 7.335; Val. Fl. 6.460.

[222] Cf. *TLL* II 410.1-415.23, *s.v.* "arbitrium" [Hey]; VII 2.678.67-704.63, *s.v.* "ius" [Teßmer, Hübner, Primmer].

[223] Cf. Gai. *Inst*. 1.108-110; see Treggiari 1991, 16-17.

will never happen and Medea's status will never be entirely legitimate,[224] the allusions to a marital relationship are further enhanced by the use of the word *potestas* (75), which is semantically linked to both *ius* and *arbitrium* (73).[225] If read alongside the reference to the *manus* (and thus to the *conventio in manum*), such vocabulary may recall the institute of *patria potestas*: the *pater familias* had the *ius vitae necisque* over his children and, in cases of marriages *cum manu*, his wife as well. Jason thus seems to acknowledge that this power (*potestas*) over his children's (and his own) life and death lies in Medea's hands (cf. *vitaque morsque*, 74),[226] thereby de facto entitling Medea to kill them, according to a *ius* which pertains to the *pater* (not *mater*) *familias*.[227] By having Jason attribute to her the role of a Roman *pater familias*, the heroine overturns interfamilial roles and relationships: while denying that she belongs to the Roman legal frame, Medea is simultaneously playing with that very system and its rules.

Whilst Jason's speech contains references to the Roman legal system, the text of *Her*. 12 also features a Medea who casts herself as being very well-versed in law. She uses it to support her rhetoric within the epistle,[228] thus (re)interpreting and manufacturing Roman legislation for her own purposes.[229] While Jason's words ambiguously hint at Medea's (*patria*) *potestas*, the heroine refers several times to the legal notion of "dowry" (*dos*) in her letter (53; 103; 199-204). It is worth noting that Medea uses *dos* as

[224] The relationship between Medea and Jason cannot be defined as a regular marital union (*matrimonium*) from the perspective of Roman law, since Medea would be categorised as a *peregrina*, i.e. "a foreigner"; by contrast, it should be attributed to the category of the *iniustum matrimonium* (cf. Ulp. 5.3-5; Treggiari 1991, 49-57).

[225] Cf. *TLL* X 2.300.81-321.68, *s.v.* "potestas" [Kamptz]; for a similar motif, cf. Juv. 10.96.

[226] For the definition of *patria potestas*, cf. Ulp. *Dig*. 50.16.195.2; see also Lacey 1986, 121-144; for *patria potestas* and legitimacy, see Rawson 1989, 10-41.

[227] For the *ius vitae necisque* of the *pater familias* over his children, cf. Clark 1996, esp. 37-39. According to Roman law, Medea's children should have actually followed her, as she would have been counted among the *peregrini* (foreigners) – and children were supposed to inherit the status of their mother (see *Tit. Ulp*. 5.3-5; Weaver 1986, 145-169; Treggiari 1991, 45). Medea not only claims possession of her children as a barbarian (cf. lines 105-106), i.e. a *peregrina*, but also claims the right to decide for them according to the Roman legal system (see Alekou 2018, 323-324).

[228] Cf. Alekou 2018, 311-334.

[229] For another example, cf. line 134 ("*Aesonia [...] cede domo!*"), where the words used by Jason to disavow Medea recall the legal formulaic language that is used to enact a *repudium* (cf. *tuas res tibi habeto*; Treggiari 1991, 447; Plaut. *Amph*. 928; *Cas*. 211; Juv. 6.146-147; Mart. 11.104; ps.-Quint. *Decl*. 259.8; see Alekou 2018, 326-328).

an ambivalent concept: first, in a rather traditional way, as something that she was expected to give to Jason as an endowment for their union (103-104);[230] second, she maintains, her *dos* consists of the help she gave him with the trials (199-204).[231] By attributing a new semantic value to the concept of dowry, alongside its traditional meaning, Medea subverts the gendered aspect of it, insofar as she takes a highly stereotypical notion of dowry as a gift offered by the woman's family and changes it into a materialisation (or symbol) of the active role that she played in accomplishing the trials. The *dos* is therefore a(nother) way to enhance her heroic status vis-à-vis Jason's passivity.

The depiction of Medea as a dominant character is further articulated by Jason's reference to her *gloria* (*sed tibi servatus gloria maior ero*, 76), a conventional epic feature, in order to convince Medea to help him.[232] By stressing his weak position and lack of resolution (73-82), Jason rhetorically takes advantage of traditionally feminine features and subverts established gender categories. While Medea shows a somewhat manly behaviour,[233] she is also depicted as being the bearer of highly stereotypical feminine traits (cf. e.g. *virgo*, 81) as we have seen, which enhance the instability of her gender identity. After another reference to her agency in accomplishing the trials (163-172), the heroine remarks that she has preserved Jason only to see Creusa (*paelex*; "concubine", 173)[234] reap the rewards of her own efforts (*et nostri fructus illa laboris habet*, 174).[235] Medea's frustration is due not only to her jealousy of Creusa, but also to

[230] Cf. *dotis opes ubi erant? ubi erat tibi regia coniunx, / quique maris gemini distinet Isthmos aquas?* (103-104).

[231] Cf. *dos ubi sit, quaeris? campo numeravimus illo, / qui tibi laturo vellus arandus erat* (199-200).

[232] Cf. *Met*. 7.49-50; 93-94; see also Ap. Rhod. 3.990-994; 1005-1006; 1122-1127.

[233] See Battistella 2015, 449-451.

[234] The reference to Creusa as a *paelex* sounds rather paradoxical, as Medea was not the legitimate bride of Jason, whereas the union between Jason and Creusa is supposed to be official (cf. 137-152). While Medea contradictorily indicates Creusa as *nova nupta* at line 25, Medea is addressed as a *paelex* by Hypsipyle (*Her*. 6.81, *barbara paelex*; 149) and refers to herself as a *paelex* in Sen. *Med*. 462 and 495.

[235] Medea's complaint recalls Hypsipyle's concerns (*Her*. 6.73-75: *adde preces castas immixtaque vota timori / nunc quoque te salvo persolvenda mihi! / vota ego persolvam? votis Medea fruetur!*); cf. Jacobson 1974, 377; see also *Met*. 7.38-41.

her suspicion that Jason may speak ill of her (175-176) and attribute to her *nova crimina* ("unusual charges"; 177), with Creusa laughing at his words (l78). Although the substantive *crimen* is often linked to adultery within elegiac poetry,[236] at line 177 it is used within a rather epic (and tragic) context, which is expressed in Medea's concerns about her honour and reputation (175-178). By appearing concerned with how others speak about her, i.e. her reputation (τιμή), Medea aligns herself with the paradigm of the epic hero, as well as evoking the tragic version of her own character.

This tragic connotation is recalled in the following lines by her proleptic allusions to the killing of Creusa (and Creon) as well as her own children (179-182), which become particularly threatening at the very end of this passage (cf. *hostis Medeae nullus inultus erit*, 182). The emphasis on vengeance represents a highly tragic topos and connects these lines (179-182) to Euripides' *Medea*, thereby giving line 182 an undertone of both prophecy and threat.[237] While Medea the narrator does not actually know how the plan that she is conceiving will develop, her allusive language, alongside the prolepsis of events that occur later in the fabula, must have played with knowledgeable readers, who would have been fully aware of the dangerous potential of the Euripidean Medea. The allusivity of Medea's discourse is enhanced by certain stylistic choices, particularly the litotes (*nullus inultus*, 182), which has an epic connotation,[238] and the mention of Medea's own given name (cf. 5; 25), which marks her attempts at redefining her identity. The search for a self-definition leads Medea to first create distance from and then re-appropriate herself, and is characterised by fluctuation, instability and inconsistency, which are expressed by the permeability and fragility of gender divisions and dichotomies.

[236] Cf. above, 106, n.71.

[237] Medea's vengeance is noticeably a *Leitmotiv* in Euripides' *Medea* (e.g. 44-45; 765-767; 807-810; 1049-1050).

[238] Cf. e.g. Verg. *Aen*. 2.670, *numquam omnes hodie moriemur inulti*; 10.739; 11.847; Ov. *Met*. 9.415; *Fast*. 2.233.

What we have defined as psychological androgyny, namely a fluctuation between masculine and feminine behavioural attitudes, ultimately serves to justify Medea's rejection of her motherhood, which culminates at the end of the letter with her threatening allusions to "something greater" (*quid ... maius*, 212) that she is conceiving, i.e. the killing of her children. This murder is anticipated throughout the epistle by the ambivalence of Medea's attitudes, which is particularly evident when she addresses her two children. In another temporal dimension, which is closer to the time when Medea is writing the epistle than her dialogue with Jason, the heroine hears the wedding songs coming from outside (143-144).[239] Medea's servants do not want to reveal the truth to her and weep in silence (145-146),[240] and the heroine herself is not willing to inquire more about what is happening, so she asks one of her children to look at the scene (147-152):

> me quoque, quidque erat, potius nescire iuvabat;
> sed tamquam scirem, mens mea tristis erat,
> cum minor e pueris (casu studione videndi
> constitit ad geminae limina prima foris) 150
> "huc modo, mater, adi! pompam pater," inquit, "Iason
> ducit et adiunctos aureus urget equos!
>
> (Ov. *Her*. 12.147-152)

By using an expression which ironically recalls, *e contrario*, the famous Vergilian *meminisse iuvabit* (*Aen*. 1.203), Medea remarks how painful may be the knowledge of some circumstances and how it would be better if they remained unknown, following a widespread topos in classical literature.[241] At the same time, the heroine hints at her sensitivity as well as foreknowledge of events,[242] which are further emphasised in the line that follows: although she did not consciously know exactly what was happening,

[239] *Her*. 12.143-144: *turba ruunt et "Hymen," clamant, "Hymenaee!" frequenter – / quo propior vox haec, hoc mihi peius erat*; cf. Cat. 62.5; Bessone 1997; Heinze 1997, ad loc.

[240] *Her*. 12.145-146: *diversi flebant servi lacrimasque tegebant – / quis vellet tanti nuntius esse mali?* Cf. Eur. *Med*. 78-81, 187-189; the *nuntius* at line 146 evokes the tragic ἄγγελος (Bessone 1997, 205-206).

[241] For a similar connotation, cf. Dido in Verg. *Aen*. 4.296-306; see also *Her*. 6.79-80: *non equidem secura fui semperque verebar / ne pater Argolica sumeret urbe murum*.

[242] Cf. lines 141-142: *pertimui, nec adhuc tantum scelus esse putabam; / sed tamen in toto pectore frigus erat*.

she felt sad, as though she had a sort of premonition (*mens mea tristis erat*, 148).[243] Medea's (partial) foreknowledge of Jason's marriage also functions as an ominous allusion to the destiny of her children, so line 148 (*mens mea tristis erat*) may be read as an innuendo hinting at this future infanticide (cf. also 149). Before realising that her children will become tools of her vengeance (an awareness that Medea does not fully achieve within the Ovidian letter, as we shall see), the heroine must go through a process of crisis and resolution, which arises from her internal struggle between motherhood/maternal love and her hatred of Jason – and her enemies (cf. 182, above).

Medea's suspension of her motherhood is propelled through the displacement of her children as otherness belonging to the father, not to her.[244] After exhorting his mother to come out (*huc ... mater adi*, 151), one of Medea's sons points at his father, who is leading the procession, and refers to him by his name: *pater ... Iason / ducit* (152).[245] As Medea never refers to Jason directly by name, thus diminishing his status as a hero and downplaying his agency, Medea's son is the only one within the epistle to call Jason by his given name: the naming of Jason is highly stressed, as the child not only pronounces his name but also mentions it immediately after having designated him as his father (*pater ... Iason*; 152). The mention of Jason's name by his (and Medea's) son materialises his active presence within the narrative. For a moment, this mention

[243] Cf. Eur. *Med*. 38 (βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν), 91, 225-226. At line 55, Jason was also said to be *tristis* but (distinct from Medea's negative presages) his hope of gaining help from Medea will be fulfilled. For a link between the adjective *tristis* and revenge, cf. e.g. *Met*. 6.623 (Procne); *Am*. 2.14.31-32 (Procne and Medea): *utraque saeva parens, sed tristibus utraque causis / iactura socii sanguinis ulta virum*.

[244] According to Aristotle's physiology, procreation is actively fostered by the semen of the father and the mother plays no active role in the process, but represents a mere repository (cf. *Gen. an*. 1.1-7; Connell 2000, 405-427). Also according to Roman law (cf. *patria potestas*), the children normally belonged to the father; however, as we have seen, Jason's *patria potestas* is somehow questioned by Medea, who, as a barbarian, is unaffected by Roman rules.

[245] This representation recalls a Roman *triumphus*; cf. e.g. *Am*. 1.2.25-28, 42; Mart. 8.65.10; Deianira's portrait of Iole in *Her*. 9 (see above, 3.2 and 3.3). It is worthy of note that *duco* (152) is also the technical verb featuring in the expression *uxorem ducere* and may thus allude to Jason's marriage with Creusa: cf. *TLL* V 1.2142.51-2144.79, *s.v.* "duco" [Hey].

restores the status of Jason that the heroine has tried to reduce throughout the epistle, by avoiding saying his name and underlining her own prominent role in the trials.[246]

Moreover, the phrasing *pater ... Iason* (152) stresses the connection between father and son, as well as hinting at the child's belonging to the father (note the closeness of the two words). Given the weight of the 'similarity-to-the-father' motif in the previous, and future, literary tradition, which is noticeably addressed by 'wicked' mothers as a reason for infanticide,[247] the irruption of the children in Medea's storytelling, as well as the emphasis on their link to Jason, must be read as a textual marker of the heroine's revenge. This is confirmed by Medea's words at lines 187-190,[248] where she explicitly describes her children as being very similar to Jason, thereby stressing that they belong to their father, as well as bringing forth her disidentification from her role as a mother.[249]

> si tibi sum vilis, communis respice natos;
> saeviet in partus dira noverca meos.
> et nimium similes tibi sunt, et imagine tangor,
> et quotiens video, lumina nostra madent. 190
> (Ov. *Her.* 12.187-190)

By presenting herself as both a *monstrum* and a *supplex*, and by using her children as a rhetorical argument to move Jason, the heroine forecasts their murder, i.e., the enactment of her revenge. The reference to her sons as *communis*[250] anticipates the attribution of her children to Jason, which is expressed more patently at lines 189-190, where the children are said to be *too* similar to their father (*nimium similes tibi sunt*,

[246] "Nur der kleine Sohn nennt den Vater Jason, Medea spricht ihn mit seinem Patronym an" (Heinze 1997, 188).
[247] Cf. Eur. *Med.* 90-118, 894-905, 928-931; Sen. *Med.* 925-957; see also Ov. *Met.* 6.619-622; Ov. *Her.* 6.119-130; Hos. Get. 382-385.
[248] On this plea, cf. Jason's plea at lines 73-88 and Eur. *Med.* 869-905.
[249] Speaking of Seneca's *Medea*, Battistella (2015, 447) observes: "[...] after being forced to lose her role of *coniunx* because of Jason's betrayal, she [scil. Medea] will also give up her function of *mater* ...".
[250] Cf. *OLD* 369-370, *s.v.* "communis".

189).[251] This similarity of the children to their father, which in other circumstances is considered to be a positive feature and a confirmation of legitimacy, here becomes a dangerous and sinister pattern.[252] The ambivalent reference to Medea's tears (*et quotiens video, lumina nostra madent*, 190) enforces this ominous frame, as the tears are supposed to be caused by the fact that Medea's children remind her of Jason's abandonment. Concurrently, as knowledgeable readers would have remarked, the tears also hint at Medea's final resolution to kill her sons. Alongside the possibility that they will be assigned to their *noverca*, i.e. Creusa, Medea's rival (*saeviet in partus dira noverca meos*, 188),[253] the affinity between the children and Jason is what definitively persuades the heroine to accomplish the infanticide.

This passage from the epistle (187-190) represents a transition from maternal instinct to vengeance and anticipates the moment in Medea's myth when her hatred of Jason overcomes the love for her children. Such a moment, which is continuously, almost obsessively, foreshadowed within the letter, is never fully reached by the Ovidian Medea. As both the author of her epistle and the main character within her storytelling, Medea skilfully creates great expectations in the educated reader, but never fulfils them within the letter, thus generating a narratological vacuum. This vacuum hypostasises the fluidity of Medea as a character and subjective narrator, who finds herself in a perennial phase of transition, re-adjustment and redefinition of her self-identity. Such a process of development, which consists of transitional phases, expresses the (self-)construction of Medea as a female subject-in-becoming.

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[251] Cf. Eur. *Med*. 894-905; 928-931; *Met*. 6.624-628 (*invitique oculi lacrimis maduere coactis*, 628: Procne). Medea's tears recall Jason's tears at 91, as well as other heroines (e.g. *Her*. 3.3; 4.175-176; 10.137-138, 148; 15.97-98).

[252] On the ambivalent meaning of these lines, cf. Jacobson 1974, 122; Bessone 1997, 256-257. For the resemblance between father and son, cf. e.g. Ov. *Her*. 8.3; *Met*. 4.290-291; 9.264-265; *Tr*. 4.4.3; *Pont*. 2.8.31.

[253] This is also Hypsipyle's concern regarding the opportunity to send her children to Medea (*Her*. 6.125-130). For the proverbial evilness of stepmothers, cf. Watson 1995, 92-134. This line (cf. *partus*, which is a rather concrete substantive to indicate the children: *TLL* X 1.539.85-540.50, *s.v.* "partus" [Kruse]) allusively hints at Medea's abominable acts against her own offspring.

3.5.2. Medea and becoming: motherhood, metamorphosis and autopoiesis

To demonstrate how Medea's construction of her (heroic) identity can be read as a reflection of her process of becoming and autopoiesis, in this section I read *Her*. 12 through posthuman feminist theory, in particular Braidotti's notion of a rhizomatic or nomadic female subject (cf. above). This posthuman feminist approach is supplemented by Kristeva's theorisation on motherhood and abjection, as well as anthropological perspectives on rites of passage and liminality. As in the previous chapters, the combination of a philological approach and a theory-based reading allows us to explore the most covert aspects of the classical text. Our analysis of Medea's process of becoming starts with lines 113-120, where the heroine recollects some of the stages that have marked her transformation from the naive young girl she was in Colchis to a magical, powerful, demonic, and ultimately murderous creature. Giving her help to Jason, and thus betraying her father, is the first step towards her self-development, which is further nurtured by the murder of her brother.

With a bitter irony Medea remarks that, while fleeing (*fugiens*, 113),[254] she did not leave her brother behind without her (*sine me ... reliqui*, 113), because she killed him (or caused him to be killed): the vocative form *germane* (113)[255] to indicate Absyrtus enhances the pathos and emotional involvement of the heroine.[256] The trauma generated by the recollection of such a dramatic episode reverberates in Medea's writing, which is said to fail "(only) at this point", *deficit hoc uno littera nostra loco* (114).[257] Due to the

[254] The conjunction *at* at the beginning of the line (113) is not only strongly adversative, but also marks a change of scenario from the previous lines (cf. also line 1).

[255] According to Jacobson 1974, 110-111, the form *germanus* indicates that in Ovid's version Absyrtus was the biological brother of Medea, instead of her stepbrother (cf. Ap. Rhod. 3.241-244): this would make Medea's crime even more horrible.

[256] For the episode of the murder of Absyrtus, see *RE* XV 30-64, *s.v.* "Medeia" [Lesky]; Ap. Rhod. 4.225-235; Eur. *Med*. 167; Hyg. *Fab*. 23; Sen. *Med*. 47-48, 131-132, 278, 473-474, 487, 963-964; see also Ov. *Tr*. 3.9.25-32; *Ib*. 433-434; Jacobson 1974, 110-111.

[257] This is the only reference that Medea makes to the epistle she is writing (see Bessone 1997, 173).

use of an apparently generic vocabulary, this line can be subject to various interpretations: the *iunctura* of *littera nostra* (114) can be read either as a metonymy indicating the writing process, or as a more concrete and specific reference to the actual text Medea is writing, which is precisely an epistle (*littera*);[258] *loco* can refer to the particular passage of the text that the heroine indicates, to the relevant episode in Medea's life (the murder of her brother), and/or to an actual geographical place, i.e. Colchis.[259] Medea's ambiguous and polysemous writing style articulates her fluid subjectivity and anticipates her interior struggle between the various versions of herself.

This coexistence of conflicting attitudes and personas is also conveyed by the overlap between writing and life. Medea's right hand, which dared to perform the murder of her brother, is said to be unable to report this in the written text (*quod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere dextra*; 115):[260] the proleptic position of *quod* and *mea* (which is linked to *dextra*) produces a stylistic tension in the line by creating an expectation. The reference to certain past events in Medea's narrative underlines how the writing (of the letter) and Medea's actual life are intertwined, as we have already seen at the beginning of the letter. One may argue that the overlap of storytelling and life does not actually take place in this case, since the writing is apparently not suitable to express reality (i.e. the brutality of Medea's actions). Equally, the heroine's reference to her brother recalls his murder and plays with knowledgeable readers by means of omission (the impossibility of describing the event) and allusion (the actual reference to

[258] For *littera* as *epistula*, see McKeown 1989 *ad Am*. 1.12.2; Barchiesi 1992 *ad Her*. 3.1; cf. *Her*. 6.9; 17.268; 18.9, 15; *Ars* 3.628; for *locus* as a (literary) passage, see *TLL* VII 2.1593.62-1595.48, *s.v.* "locus" [Kuhlmann].

[259] Also in Ap. Rhod. 4.730-738 Medea does not dare to confess the fratricide, which in that case was perpetrated by Jason.

[260] Cf. Hypermestra in *Her*. 14.19-20, *quam tu caede putes fungi potuisse mariti, / scribere de facta non sibi caede timet*. The reference to Medea's hand, which is repeatedly mentioned in the sources, hints at the infanticide: cf. e.g. Eur. *Med*. 1055, χεῖρα δ᾽ οὐ διαφθερῶ; 1244-1246, 1253-1254; cf. also Sen. *Med*. 127-132, 181 (*molitur aliquid: nota fraus, nota est manus*), 479-480, 680-681, 809, 952-953.

the event). By referring to the most violent and murderous version of herself, (Ovid's) Medea also anticipates her prospective infanticide at the end of her epistle.

While Medea's reference to the killing of her brother and the consequent impossibility of writing in more detail about the event hint at the well-known plot of her myth (cf. e.g. the Euripidean and Apollonian intertexts), the mention of her *dextra* ("right hand"; 115) also recalls a widespread motif within the *Heroides*, namely a reference to holding a pen in one hand and a sword (or another weapon) in the other.[261] In this case, Medea corrects this topos with a sort of *variatio* on the same theme,[262] as the hand through which the heroine allegedly pursued the murder of her brother is in fact the same (right) hand with which she is writing the epistle. Leaving aside that the "right hand" may well imply a metonymic or metaphoric value, since it appears implausible (if not impossible) that Medea killed her brother with only her hand, the coincidence of writing and action (i.e. killing) is highly symbolic.[263] This coincidence enhances not only the coexistence of life and storytelling, but also produces an overlap between (female) writing and agency, as well as self-empowerment. The lack of a clear threshold between reality and fiction, or storytelling, is another expression of Medea's construction of her self-identity through her writing, which reflects the instability, discontinuity and fluctuation intrinsic to her process of becoming-subject.

Whilst Medea seemingly claims to be unable to speak of the murder of her brother in her letter, she recalls the episode precisely by denying it a presence within her writing. Insofar as it represents the materialisation of a lack or negation, Medea's writing is the *avant-la-lettre* expression, as well as the literary transposition, of the role of women within a patriarchal society (that is, the Lacanian "Realm of the Symbolic").[264] Medea's writing is as imperfect as women are imperfect or incomplete men, that is, objects

[261] Cf. *Her.* 6.184; 8.60; 9.115-116; 11.19-20.
[262] Cf. Pasquali 1968, 275-282.
[263] As mentioned (n. 259), in Ap. Rhod. 4.730-738, the fratricide was ultimately executed by Jason.
[264] See Irigaray 1985b, 112-129.

shaped by an androcentric perspective: Medea's incapable, lacking, writing translates women's incapability of expressing themselves freely and effectively.[265] However, while denying her role as a trustworthy narrator, capable writer, reliable auto-biographer, and thus as a female independent subject, Medea is literally stressing that role through the allusions to her literary past as well as intertextual parallels, and by equating her writing to her active agency. The interplay between omissions and allusions articulates the fluctuation of Medea's writing style, which parallels the fluctuation of Medea's subjectivity. Medea's alleged inability to write expresses women's struggle to construct themselves as independent subjects. The continuous pursuit of a subjectivity-in-becoming[266] is, in fact, the acknowledgement of this struggle and its intrinsic contradictions, i.e. the non-achievement, a lack of a definition, an aporia.

This ambiguous reference to her writing thus reflects the complexity as well as ineluctability of Medea's process of self-affirmation as an autonomous entity, as a subject on her own, but in a process of continuous change. Such an affirmation implies contradictions, discontinuities and breaks. One of these breaks is represented by the murder of Absyrtus, which can also be interpreted, through an anthropological lens, as a rite of passage leading the heroine to another life stage.[267] By killing a member of her family, and particularly her own sibling, Medea appears to have destroyed a part of

[265] Women have always been perceived (by society) as essentially inferior to men. Such inferiority and deficiency was initially supported by Pythagorean and Aristotelian philosophy. In his *Metaphysics* (986a), for instance, Aristotle lists some principles within the so-called "Table of Opposites": here, "female", together with "bad", "darkness" and "oblong", opposes "male", "good", "light"; see McLaughlin 2004, 7-25.

[266] See Braidotti 2002, 111-116; 2013, 132.

[267] Death and (symbolic) murders, followed by regeneration and rebirth, play an important role in tribal rituals; see Turner 1969, 1-43. For the significance and occurrence of fratricide within Mediterranean cultures, cf. Bremmer 2008, 57-72, where "fratricide" is said to be the "first crime"; Romulus' fratricide, for instance, is what sanctioned the origin of Roman people according to the mythical-historical accounts.

herself, thus enacting the shift towards a new phase of her life.[268] At the same time, the reference to the murder of her brother as being performed with her own hand suggests an appropriation of Absyrtus' traits, tasks and characteristics, as well as his identity, so that Medea in a way replaces her brother and takes on a powerful, dominant *male* role.[269] This overcoming, and destruction, of a version of herself, as well as the embracing of a new (self-)identity contributes to the destabilisation of Medea's subjectivity. The endless process of becoming-subject lies precisely in the permanence of this destabilisation, i.e. the blurring of boundaries between different identities, personas, literary genres and genders.

This search for a self-identity in continuous redefinition and becoming is boosted by the recollection of other murders. At lines 129-130, for instance, Medea refers to the daughters of Pelias and how she persuaded them to kill their father (... *Peliae natas pietate nocentes / caesaque virginea membra paterna manu?*).[270] The reference to the *virginea ... manu* links these lines to 115, where Medea's right hand is said to have accomplished the murder of Absyrtus. While the *manus* are often mentioned to indicate how an action is ultimately carried out, the adjective *virgineus*, which is connected to the sphere of sexuality and eroticism, links the naivety and innocence of the daughters of Pelias to Medea's attitude before she was somehow corrupted by Jason.[271] This *new* Medea, the brutal, violent, yet powerful, version of herself is not only the direct (or, in

[268] According to a pseudo-etymology (cf. Gell. *NA* 13.10.4), a brother (*frater*) was a sort of second self (*fere alter*): "in other words, similarity was the constituting factor of the Roman fraternal identity" (Bremmer 2008, 62).

[269] The murder of Absyrtus can be linked to the process of succession, as well as an appropriation of the dominant male role within patriarchal tribal communities, which is described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (116-187). This was enacted by the sons through the killing, and the subsequent cannibalistic eating, of their own father, who had previously acted as a leader of the community. Although Medea does not actually kill her father (but only betrays and escapes from him), this motif seems to be applicable to the killing of her brother, especially if we read it vis-à-vis the following mention of the episode of Pelias' daughters (129-130). The daughters of Pelias, in fact, are not only deceived and then convinced by Medea to kill their father, but also dismember and cook his body: this may anticipate, as well as allude to, a cannibalistic act.

[270] For this episode, cf. *Met*. 7.297-349; Eur. *Med*. 486-487; 504-505; see also Sen. *Med*. 259-260; 475-476; *Her*. 6.101-102: *atque aliquis Peliae de partibus acta venenis / imputat et populum qui sibi credat habet*. Pelias' *sparagmos* is thematically linked to the murder of Absyrtus.

[271] Cf. *OLD* 2071, *s.v.* "virgineus"; cf. lines 81, 111.

other versions of the myth, indirect) author of murderous actions, but is also the instigator of other murders, as well as being responsible for the corruption and defilement of other innocent girls, whose naiveté and credulity is linked to her own previous innocence. After a sort of initiation, which is represented by the murder of her brother, Medea discovers and takes advantage of a new nature, which will ultimately lead her to kill her children.[272] This series of *scelera* represents the price Medea pays to construct her new identity and subjectivity, de-objectifying herself.

Although this process occurs as an interior struggle within Medea, it appears to have been catalysed by Jason's sudden appearance in Medea's life, as the heroine remarks that the brutal actions she carried out were meant to please and help Jason in the first instance: while these deeds appear abhorrent to other people, Jason should praise her for them (*ut culpent alii, tibi me laudare necesse est, / pro quo sum totiens esse coacta nocens*; 131-132).[273] Although in this couplet (cf. esp. 132: *sum ... coacta*) Medea entirely attributes her way of acting to Jason, Jason has only *indirectly* started this transformation of her, by inducing her to accomplish certain actions. Later in the narrative, Jason completely loses his control over Medea, so that her decisions and undertakings will be directed against him and/or the people close to him.

The heroine's dangerous potential for Jason becomes more tangible when Medea begins to realise that he is marrying Creusa (137-142): wedding invocations, litanies and songs (*Hymen cantatus*, 137; *socialia carmina*, 139)[274] find their way to Medea's ears (*nostras ... ad aures*, 137)[275] and wedding torches light up the street (*accenso*

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[272] For initiation rites, cf. Van Gennep 1960, 65-115.

[273] Cf. Scylla in *Met.* 8.127-131; see also Sen. *Med.* 280 (*totiens nocens sum facta sed numquam mihi*); 501-503; 522-524.

[274] For *Hymen cantatus*, cf. *Her.* 6.44; *Am.* 2.1.29; *TLL* VI 3.3140.73-3141.29, *s.v.* "hymen" [Rhem]; for the use of *socialis* in relation to a marital union, cf. e.g. *Am.* 3.11.45; *Met.* 7.800; 14.380; *Her.* 4.17, 21.155-156; *Pont.* 2.1.73-74; see Heinze 1997, 182-183.

[275] The reference to a sound, a message or a song coming to the *aures* often forecasts catastrophic events: cf. e.g. Sen. *HF* 414-415; *Pha.* 850; *Ag.* 398; *HO* 1128-1129, 1944-1946; see also *Her.* 11.73; 3.59-60; *Met.* 14.749.

lampades ignes micant, 138).[276] The festive atmosphere of the wedding procession is a cause of grief for Medea, and the joyful *tibia*, which celebrates Jason and Creusa (*tibiaque effundit ... vobis*, 139), changes into a funeral *tuba* for Medea (*at mihi funerea flebiliora tuba*: note the strong adversative conjunction *at*, 140; cf. line 1).[277] The opposition between wedding and funeral is a *Leitmotiv* throughout the *Heroides*.[278] In this passage, the coexistence between marriage and death confirms Medea's ability to overcome expected, well-established, categories, as well as to blur the boundaries between dichotomies.

The blurring of opposite elements is amplified by the coexistence of different times, i.e. the past, present and future. Medea's premonition at 141-142 anticipates her ominous feelings at line 148 (*mens mea tristis erat*; see above): even though the heroine was unaware of the precise events (141),[279] her entire heart was permeated by coldness (*sed tamen in toto pectore frigus erat*, 142).[280] In these lines, (Ovid's) Medea plays with various temporal dimensions and narratological levels, as the *Medea* who is writing the epistle in the present (the narrating-I) is aware of the outcome of the events, while the *Medea* of the past (the narrated-I) was only able to foresee what was about to happen. The uncertainty and liminality between different temporal dimensions, as well as the precognition of the following events, are further developed in the final lines of the letter, when Medea foreshadows her infanticide. This multi-temporality, the fluctuation between different attitudes and narratological levels, as well as the permeable threshold between storytelling and reality, demonstrate that Medea is a subject in constant

[276] Cf. *Her*. 14.25; *Met*. 12.247.

[277] Cf. Prop. 2.7.11-12 (*a mea tum qualis caneret tibi tibia somnos, / tibia, funesta tristior illa tuba!*). The *tibia* was, in fact, a traditional instrument used during wedding ceremonies (cf. e.g. Plaut. *Cas*. 798; *RE* VI A 1.2.808-812, *s.v.* "tibia" [Vetter]), while the *tuba* was used in funerals (Hor. *Sat*. 1.6.42-44; Verg. *Aen*. 11.192; Tac. *Ann*. 14.10; cf. *RE* VII 1.749-752, *s.v.* "tuba" [Lammert]).

[278] Cf. *Her*. 2.117-118; 6.42, 45; 7.95-96; 11.103-106; 14.27.

[279] Cf. *Her*. 12.141, *pertimui, nec adhuc tantum scelus esse putabam*; cf. Eur. *Med*. 586-589; Sen. *Med*. 117, *vix ipsa tantum, vix adhuc credo malum*.

[280] Other heroines also experience a similar kind of feeling: cf. *Her*. 1.22; 15.112; 19.192; see also *Met*. 1.495-496, *sic pectore toto / uritur*.

development and becoming, as her self-construction is characterised by a continuous metamorphosis across temporal, metaliterary, thematic, textual and narratological dimensions.

These processes of becoming and development of a nomadic subjectivity are crystallised in Medea's motherhood. At lines 191-198, the heroine mentions her children in order to convince Jason to rethink his decision (of abandoning her and marrying Creusa). This plea, however, is highly ambiguous and serves as anticipation, as well as justification, of the infanticide. Medea starts her plea by invoking the gods (*per superos oro*, 191),[281] the *avitae lumina flammae* (191),[282] her help to Jason (*meritum*, 192),[283] and eventually her children, *natos ... duos*, who are said to be their shared pledge, *pignora nostra* (192).[284] The reference to the sons as *pignora* finds many parallels within the *Heroides*, but as usual, Medea's discourse is highly ambiguous since it plays with the double meaning of *pignus* as "child" and *pignus* as "guarantee".[285] While the existence of the children was supposed to secure Medea's yet unofficial union with Jason, that is, to be a "guarantee", the *pignora* are not actual *pignora*, that is the "children" do not represent an actual "pledge" or "guarantee" for the heroine. The negation of the *pignora* as a "guarantee" foreshadows and parallels, both discursively and ontologically, the rejection of the *pignora* as "children", which will be effected through their murder.

The infanticide is the 'absent referent' from the last section of Medea's letter, who casts the final lines of her epistle as a rhetorical speech to proleptically justify the killing

[281] Medea's plea recalls Jason's plea at lines 77-80; cf. also Sen. *Med*. 478-482.
[282] For the variant readings of this line, see Bessone 1997, 259-260.
[283] For this motif, cf. lines 21, 82, 197; *Her*. 5.155; 7.179-180; 10.141; see also Verg. *Aen*. 4.317: *si bene quid de te merui*.
[284] The mention of the *pignora* hints at the infanticide also present in *Her*. 6.122, 130, and Sen. *Med*. 1012-1013; see also *Ars* 2.378 (*ardet et in vultu pignora mentis habet*), where the word *pignora* anticipates the reference to Medea and Procne.
[285] Cf. e.g. *Her*. 4.120; 9.150; see above, 2.2; *OLD* 1379, *s.v.* "pignus"; *RE* XX 1.1239-1284, *s.v.* "pignus" [Manigk].

of her children. The imperative expression *redde torum* at 193[286] anticipates the following imperative form, *redde* (202), which refers to Medea's *dos*.[287] That this *dos* is represented by Medea's support for Jason is suggested by the remainder of line 193, where the heroine indicates the marital bed (*torum*, 193) she shared with Jason as the reason why she recklessly left so many things behind her (*tot res insana reliqui*; 193).[288] By asking Jason to be consistent with his words and to return her favours (*adde fidem dictis auxiliumque refer*, 194),[289] Medea points out both his inconsistency and unreliability, which is a *Leitmotiv* of the whole epistle; concurrently, this couplet implies a certain degree of tragic irony. Not only is Medea *the writer* (the narrating-I) perfectly aware that Jason will not come back to her, but Medea *the character* (the narrated-I) has also already realised that there is no hope in this regard. Her plea thus serves only to forecast, and justify, her future decision to kill her children.

The following four lines (195-198) further contribute to creating the premises for Medea's murders. By claiming that she is not urging Jason to overcome the *tauros* and *viros* (195) as well as the dragon (*serpens*, 196),[290] Medea refers *via negationis* to the crucial role she played in Jason's trials. The heroine scores a further rhetorical point by underlining that she is not asking Jason to accomplish these deeds at the present moment simply because she never asked for it before; on the contrary, Jason begged her for her intervention (cf. 73-88). Far from merely expressing her complaint and

[286] Similar imperative forms are quite recurrent in Seneca's *Medea*: cf. e.g. 245-246, 272-273, 482, 489. The *torus* may refer, through a metonymy, to the presumed lawfulness of Medea and Jason's union; cf. lines 82, 86; *Met*. 7.91 (*promisitque torum*); Ap. Rhod. 3.1128-1129; for a similar metonymy, cf. e.g. Prop. 3.12.6; 4.4.62.

[287] As we have seen, Medea's letter is characterised by a certain insistence on legal language: the form *redde* also hints at a legal frame (cf. e.g. Plaut. *Aul*. 829; *Ars* 3.449-350; Petron. 57.5; Sen. *Ep*. 18.14; Mart. 9.72.7-8).

[288] Cf. *Met*. 7.59-60, *quemque ego cum rebus, quas totus possidet orbis, / Aesoniden mutasse velim*: the adjective *insana* alludes to the motif of *furor* (cf. Eur. *Med*. 483-485; *Met*. 7.17-18; Sen. *Med*. 52, 123, 140, 157, 174, 383, 386, 392, 396, ...).

[289] Cf. line 72; *Met*. 7.46-47: the motif of the violated *fides* is rather recurrent in elegy and is mainly drawn from Catullus (cf. e.g. Cat. 2.26; 6.41; 7.8, 57, 110; 10.78; 17.40; 20.7).

[290] As observed, the trials recur insistently throughout the epistle: for the defeat of the dragon, cf. 49, 60, 107, 171; see also *OLD* 1553-1554, *s.v.* "quiesco" (6a).

desperation, Medea both enhances the dominant role she has taken on within her relationship with Jason and undermines his status as a hero.

By taking on a dominant role, Medea masculinises herself, and accordingly her reasoning follows masculine codes, where her honour is comparable to the *kleos* of a male (epic/tragic) hero. Therefore, she rightly demands that Jason gives her what she deserves (*merui*) and what he promised to her, as a sort of obligation for her contribution to Jason's achievements (*te peto, quem merui, quem nobis ipse dedisti*; 197).[291] Similarly, Medea restates her rights to her children, as though she were a *pater familias* (the head of the family), by claiming that she has been made a parent by Jason in the same way that Jason became a parent by her, thereby de facto expunging their gender difference (*cum quo sum pariter facta parente parens*, 198). The adverb *pariter*, together with the polyptoton, or *adnominatio* (*parente parens*), suggests that Medea thinks she has (at least) the same rights as Jason over her children.[292] Accordingly, as the father has the *ius vitae necisque* over his children, so Medea also feels entitled to judge, and decide, on their lives (and deaths). As observed earlier, (Ovid's) Medea plays with Roman laws within her epistle, and this mockery of Roman institutions is a part of her self-empowerment.

The (re)interpretation of Medea's construction of her identity and self-empowerment through the filter of contemporary posthuman theory shows us that her power derives precisely from her transitional state, her continuous becoming as well as non-unitary identity, which contribute to creating a self-conscious subjectivity.[293] As a subject undergoing an uninterrupted process of becoming, the heroine overturns and departs from patriarchal-based categorisations, casting herself as an "Other of the other", i.e. a

[291] Cf. Jason's plea at line 82; *Her*. 6.131-138; 16.35; *Met*. 8.92.

[292] Cf. line 187, *communes ... natos*; *Her*. 6.61-62, *quod tamen e nobis gravida celatur in alvo, / vivat et eiusdem simus uterque parens*; cf. Sen. *Med*. 921-925; 933-935: *scelus est Iason genitor et maius scelus / Medea mater – occidant, non sum mei; / pereant, mei sunt*.

[293] Cf. Braidotti 2002, 39-41; see also Ferrando 2013, 27.

negation of the objectified version of women. This erasure from the phallic regime is enacted through a continuous metamorphosis, i.e. an endless rejection of the (phallogocentric) "Same" that stigmatises what is different as negative "otherness".[294] Medea's nomadic subjectivity, as well as the overturning and reinterpretation of her sexuality, becomes, in Braidotti's words, "the force that can break the eternal return of the Same and its classical Others".[295] Since the loss of the mother, as well as the separation from the maternal body, is crucial for the construction of the subject within the "Realm of the Symbolic" (as it entails the break of "the eternal return of the Same"; cf. above), by killing her sons, Medea rejects her children's (and her) inclusion within the patriarchal system, thereby constructing herself as an autonomous subject.[296]

Medea's constant change and fluid subjectivity mean that the rejection of her motherhood will never be fully accomplished within the Ovidian letter, but her maternal instinct is only temporarily suspended, in order to let her pursue the infanticide. This suspension implies that her *maternal* body is simultaneously the stereotypical site of female objectification and the origin of female *jouissance* and materiality, namely the starting point for the construction of female, nomadic, subjectivity:[297] both *becoming* and motherhood cooperate in the formation of Medea's subjectivity as a self-standing subjectivity. The construction of this new nomadic subjectivity, which is characterised by continuous becoming and is founded on a suspension of Medea's maternal instinct, is articulated by the very last lines of the epistle:

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[294] Cf. Braidotti 2002, 48-49; see also Braidotti 1994, 146-190; 2019, 31-61.

[295] Braidotti 2002, 75.

[296] Cf. Braidotti 2002, 7, 44: "...the maternal is the laboratory for the elaboration of the 'other of the Other', that is to say the virtual feminine which is activated by feminists in a process that is both political and conceptual".

[297] Braidotti 2002, 49: "... the maternal body provides both the site of destitution and of recovery for the female feminist subjectivity, understood as a virtual reality of a collectively re-negotiated referential bond. It is the seed of the virtual feminine".

quod vivis, quod habes nuptam socerumque potentis 205
hoc ipsum, ingratus quod potes essem, meum est.
quos equidem actutum — sed quid praedicere poenam
attinet? ingentis parturit ira minas.
quo feret ira, sequar! facti fortasse pigebit —
et piget infido consuluisse viro. 210
viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat!
nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!

(Ov. *Her*. 12.205-212)

Medea claims that Jason owes her not only his own life (*quod vivis*, 205; cf. line 74) but also the fact that he now has a *nuptam* and a *socerum potentis* (205),[298] as well as his ability to be ungrateful: *hoc ipsum, ingratus quod potes esse, meum est* (206).[299] The heroine confesses that something abominable will happen, but that there is no point in revealing it in advance (207-208, *sed quid praedicere poenam / attinet?*),[300] whereas the only thing Medea knows is that her anger is generating *ingentis ... minas*. The verb *parturit* (208), which is a frequentative form of *parior*, is linked to the idea of childbirth, procreation, as well as plotting and writing.[301] The choice of such a word marks a moment of tragic irony, as it foreshadows the infanticide, as well as establishing an opposition between Medea's actual body (the concrete site of procreation) and Medea's *ira*, which metaphorically gives birth to huge threats (208).[302] These lines emphasise how Medea's procreative function shifts from the maternal power of giving birth to an opposing, anti-maternal attitude, which will ultimately lead her to kill her children. Through this last, and most horrible, murder, Medea not only claims back the possession of her own *creations* but is also somehow reversing and

[298] For a similar formula, cf. *Met*. 13.173; see also Sen. *Med*. 19-20; *Met*. 7.23-25. The alternation between the two forms *potentis/potentes* is discussed by Bessone 1997, 273; Heinze 1997, 72, 212.

[299] Cf. *Tr*. 5.9.19-20: *seminecem Stygia revocasti solus ab unda: / hoc quoque, quod memores possumus esse, tuum est*.

[300] Cf. Eur. *Med*. 373-375; 803-806; Sen. *Med*. 146-154, 174-175; the substantive *poena* recalls lines 6 and 120.

[301] Cf. *Her*. 6.157-158: *nec male parta diu teneat peiusque relinquat: / exulet et toto quaerat in orbe fugam*; Sen. *Med*. 25-26, 50, 55, 921-922, 956-957; for the metaphorical value of the verb, cf. e.g. Cic. *Mur*. 84; Hor. *Carm*. 1.7.16; 4.5.26; Liv. 21.18.12; *TLL* X 1.534.51-535-9, *s.v.* "parturio" [Röck-Blundell].

[302] For Medea's *furor*, cf. e.g. Eur. *Med*. 38-45; 287; Sen. *Med*. 174, 410, 856; this is a specifically tragic motif: cf. e.g. *Rem. am*. 375, *grande sonant tragici: tragicos decet ira cothurnos*.

nullifying the process of childbirth. The reversion and annihilation of childbirth are linked to a re-appropriation of her own body, as well as (female) subjectivity.[303] This subjectivity is firstly denied by the appropriation of a male role and subsequently restated through the process of autopoiesis and becoming(-woman).

Killing her sons means, for Medea, to free them and herself from the socio-political categories, as well as the mental structures, that are imposed by heteronormativity. The final four lines of the epistle suggest that this construction of a new heroic identity is pursued through a continuous reshaping and re-adjustment of her own self; rejection, or suspension, of motherhood is only a component of the formation of *nomadic* subjectivity, to put it in posthuman terms.[304] The fluctuation of gender categories and gender self-division (or psychological androgyny) are also elements of this autopoiesis.[305] Medea says that she will follow her *ira*, wherever it will lead her (209);[306] she may repent of her future actions, but she already regrets having trusted an *infidus vir* (209-210: the polyptoton *pigebit/piget* underscores this sense of regret).[307] The god who has taken possession of her heart will take care of what she will do, and what she will become (211), as something greater, though inexplicable, is surely going to happen*: nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit* (212).[308] The reference to both the

[303] In this respect, it may be instructive to quote some lines from Kristeva's subjective description of childbirth, which is characterised by the separation as well as the annihilation of the feminine body, but simultaneously generates a sort of unbreakable bond between mother and son: "My body is no longer mine, it writhes, suffers, bleeds, catches cold, bites, slavers, coughs, breaks out in a rash, and laughs. Yet when his, my son's, joy returns, his smile cleanses only my eyes. But suffering, his suffering – that I feel inside; that never remains separate or alien but embraces me at once without a moment's respite. As if I had brought not a child but suffering into the world and it, suffering, refused to leave me, instead on coming back, on haunting me, permanently. [...] But a mother is also marked by pain, she succumbs to it. 'And you, one day a sword will pass through your soul'" (Kristeva 1985, 138).

[304] See Deleuze and Guattari 1986: *passim*; Braidotti 2002, 65-116.

[305] "Non-unitary identity implies a large degree of internal dissonance, that is to say, contradictions and paradoxes" (Braidotti 2002, 40).

[306] Cf. Eur. *Med.* 1078-1080; Sen. *Med.* 953 (*ira, qua ducis, sequor*); 123, 895, 916.

[307] In Euripides (1078, καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα τολμήσω κακά), by contrast, Medea was aware of the evilness of her actions; see also Sen. *Med.* 989-994.

[308] Cf. Sen. *Med.* 917-919, *nescio quid ferox / decrevit animus intus et nondum sibi / audet fateri*; see also Eur. *Med.* 106-110, 171-172, 907, and one of two extant lines from Ovid's lost *Medea* (*feror huc illuc vae, plena deo*; Sen. *Suas.* 3.7); Procne in *Met.* 6.613-619. The idea of something greater/bigger which is going to happen is quite recurrent in Seneca's tragedies: cf. e.g. Sen. *Thy.* 252-270; *Oed.* 925;

deus (211)[309] and her own mind (*mens mea*, 212)[310] is an expression of not only Medea's divided self, but also hints at the fact that this internal struggle is constitutive and intrinsic of the heroine's subjectivity. The internal conflict leads to transformation, and transformation leads to autopoiesis, self-(in)determination.

The last lines of *Her*. 12 have been rightly said to anticipate the subsequent life of this mythological figure.[311] Beyond foreshadowing the *intertextual* life of the heroine (cf. Medea's full myth, e.g. in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Euripides, Seneca), however, these lines also represent the extra-textual and extra-fictional Medea, i.e. the Medea becoming-subject. This last section of the letter hypostasises the heroine's internal struggle, but this conflict and continuous change, rearrangement and fluctuation, are precisely the elements that shape her identity. The heroine's motherhood not only helps us to understand this process as being intrinsic to the Ovidian Medea, but also articulates her everlasting metamorphosis. In *Her*. 12, her masculine self is not totally embraced; her motherhood is neither fully denied, nor fully accepted. As Medea has no stable identity, her motherhood should thus be seen not as a concept but as a process. The transformation is not merely an intrinsic component of the subject but *is* precisely, and substantially, the *female*, (anti-)heroic, self-determined and self-constructed, new subject.

Ag. 124 (see Seidensticker 1985, 118; Picone 1984, 5-13). Furthermore, the form *maius* recalls the *iunctura* of *maius opus*, which hints at either the epic or tragic genre. While the alliteration characterising this last line appears to also evoke Medea's given name (*mens mea maius*), the concept of *maius agere* recalls the etymology of the name of the heroine – from μέδομαι, the "one who plots" (see Bessone 1997, 285).

[309] The θυμός of the Euripidean Medea (1079-1080) has changed into a *deus* (cf. *Met*. 7.12, *nescio quis deus obstat*). (Ovid's) Medea seems to ironically play with the elegiac topos that depicts *Amor* as a god ruling the soul (cf. e.g. *Am*. 1.2.8, 17; 2.9.27; *Ars* 3.718; Tib. 2.1.79-80; 2.6.17); in this case, however, the *deus* is a darker and more dangerous hypostasis of Medea's plans.

[310] Cf. Sen. *Med*. 45-47, *effera ignota horrida, / tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala / mens intus agitat*; see also Eur. *Med*. 1056; 1078-1080.

[311] See e.g. Hinds 1993, 9-47; Trinacty 2007, 63-78.

Deianira and Medea: motherhood as self-empowerment

This chapter has shown how motherhood enhances Deianira's and Medea's self-empowerment. However, their self-determination and appropriation of a new, more dominant, identity are achieved in different ways. While Deianira (*Her*. 9) insistently depicts Hercules as subjugated and effeminate to reduce his status and humiliate him in front of Hyllus, who is the (implied) addressee of her epistle, Medea (*Her*. 12) establishes herself as an independent female subject through a continuous deconstruction and reconstruction of her self-identity, which lead to the murder of her sons. The two heroines also share very similar concerns about their partners' infidelity, as both of them have rivals (Omphale and Iole for Deianira; Creusa for Medea), who are not only mentioned within the two epistles but become tools of the heroines' vengeance and self-empowerment. The mention of Hercules' servitude to Omphale, for instance, contributes to his de-masculinisation; Iole is also described as a dominant character but, concurrently, she seems to be put on display and *looked-at* as a spectacle, through a sort of scopophiliac gaze that enforces and underscores Deianira's appropriation of a powerful role; Medea's attitudes towards Creusa forecast the murder of her children, which marks the heroine's achievement of her (anti)heroic status.

In one of the two epistles that will be examined in the next chapter, Medea exchanges her role with Hypsipyle (*Her*. 6), thus becoming 'the Creusa', that is, the love rival, within her narrative. Medea, as we shall see, is a pervasive presence in *Her*. 6 and plays a role in Hypsipyle's subjective perception of herself and her motherhood. By contrast, the other heroine featuring in the next chapter, Dido (*Her*. 7), does not have an actual rival, but her love is nonetheless frustrated by many inconvenient circumstances: Aeneas' supposedly heroic mission and destiny; his mother Venus; the gods. These antagonistic and adverse situations will be explored in light of the heroines' motherhood, which occupies a threshold position between reality, or potentiality (see

Dido) and literary, as well as rhetorical, construction. Motherhood shapes the behaviour of Hypsipyle and Dido both as writers (i.e. *external* authors of their story) and actual protagonists within their narratives.

Chapter 4

Motherhood, literary (pro-)creation and the birth of the text: Hypsipyle and Dido

Ell'è Semiramìs, di cui si legge
che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa:
tenne la terra che 'l Soldan corregge.
L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa,
e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;
poi è Cleopatràs lussuriosa.

(Dante, *Inferno* V 58-63)

In the previous chapter, we saw how the subjective reinterpretation, as well as reconstruction, of the maternal experience led to the complete development of a self-standing (female) subject. To do so, Deianira's feminine discourse (*Her*. 9) was first explored through an anthropological approach that drew primarily on rites of passage and performative rituals (Van Gennep; Turner and his followers). The heroine's self-empowerment and ironic subversion of gender categories were then resituated within the theoretical frame of gender performativity (Butler). For Medea, I employed posthuman theory to demonstrate how the construction of her persona may be read – to put it in Braidotti's words – as a "process of becoming(s)".

This chapter analyses Hypsipyle (*Her*. 6) and Dido (*Her*. 7) by focusing on their relationship with their maternal bodies. The *trait d'union* between these two heroines is that they both seem to conceive their motherhood – and thus their maternal bodies – as a constructive process, which ultimately lies in, and is determined by, their subjective writing. Concerning the theoretical framework, the first half of this chapter (cf. 4.1.-4.3.) mainly draws from Ettinger's recent theorisations on the maternal body. Accordingly, Hypsipyle's maternity is interpreted as a border, a liminal space which gives rise to a subjective encounter with her body as well as the products of her body

(her sons): this leads to her recovery and acknowledgement of her material (and maternal) body, as well as subjectivity. The (re-)appropriation of the reproductive process is articulated by another kind of production, namely the production of the artistic or literary work.

The second half of this chapter (4.4.-4.5.2.), which focuses on Dido, further develops the equivalence between the maternal body and the textual body, primarily by using the filter of narrative theory (Barthes), feminist narratology (Cavarero) and semiotics (De Lauretis). I show how (Ovid's) Dido, by means of her *feminine* writing, changes her frustrated expectations about pregnancy and motherhood into subjective storytelling. As explained,[1] I do not consider this writing (the heroines' writing) as being exclusively feminine, nor do I see the necessity to completely obliterate the male poet (that is, Ovid), who stands *behind* the persona of the heroines. Rather, I look at these fictional epistles in terms of a perfect synergy between Ovid's ironic voice and the alternative, discrepant, *othered* voice of the heroines. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this feminine voice amplifies the subversive potential, as well as the artistic and poetic outcomes, of Ovid's poetry.

4.1. Background and sources: Hypsipyle's Medea

The mythological framework of Hypsipyle's story is characterised by at least three macro-narratives, which are marked by different patterns but are also linked quite consistently: the massacre of the Lemnian women; the Argonauts' arrival (and stay) on Lemnos; and Hypsipyle's life after Jason's departure.[2] The most important source for the first two narratives is certainly Apollonius, whereas for the third narrative, we

[1] Cf. above, III-VI.

[2] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 94-95; on the circumstances of Hypsipyle's writing, see Verducci 1985, 96-97; also *RE* IX 436-444, *s.v.* "Hypsipyle" [Jessen].

mainly rely on Euripides' fragmentary drama, *Hypsipyle*.[3] Ovid's *Her*. 6, which is staged as a letter written by Hypsipyle after some time has passed since Jason's departure, does not appear particularly indebted to Euripides' tragedy, as the plot of that drama must have begun with Hypsipyle having already left Lemnos and arrived at Nemea.[4] The epistle, by contrast, has rightly been said to draw primarily from Apollonius (1.609-921), since Hypsipyle's account in *Her*. 6 is characterised by many flashbacks concerning her relationship with Jason.[5] Moreover, for the most part, the letter refers either to events which have to be situated before the heroine is writing, or to Medea's 'parallel' and concomitant love story with Jason.[6] Finally, it ends with some predictions (cf. lines 149-164), which hint at the development of Medea's story taking place both in the *Argonautica,* and particularly in Euripides' *Medea*.[7]

Among the events recounted by Hypsipyle, it is worth mentioning the references to her Lemnian past (*Her*. 6.51-54; 117-118; 135-140), which Ovid seems to draw from Ap. 1.609-639 and 793-833.[8] In the *Argonautica*, the massacre of the Lemnian women is first narrated by the extradiegetic and omniscient narrator (1.609-639), who emphasises how the women of Lemnos, having been punished by the goddess Aphrodite, were left and abandoned by their men; attracted by Thracian women, the men of Lemnos eventually preferred them to their Lemnian wives (1.609-616).

[3] Cf. Zoellner 1892, 7-23; Jacobson 1974, 94-97; *TrGF* 5.2, 743-797 (frr. 752-770). As for other sources, it seems that both Aeschylus and Sophocles wrote a tragedy whose subject was the relationship between Jason and Hypsipyle (*TrGF* 247-248 Radt and 384-389 Radt); cf. also *Il*. 7.467-71; Pindar *Pyth*. 4.251-259; Herodorus *FGrHist* 31 F 6; Asclepiades *FGrHist* 12 F 14; Callimachus frr. 226 and 668 Pf.; ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.9.17; Hyg. *Fab*. 15.254. According to Knox 1995, 171, Ovid may have drawn some details of Hypsipyle's story from Varro Atax' lost *Argonautica* (cf. Ov. *Am*. 1.15.21; *Ars* 3.335; *Tr*. 2.439).

[4] For a summary of Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, see Collard, Cropp and Gibert 2004, 169-183; for a reconstruction of the fragmentary text, see Bond 1963, *passim*; Görschen 1969, 5-61; Cockle 1987, *passim*; for the arrangements of some fragments as well as sections of the drama, cf. Webster 1963, 83-97; Giangrande 1977, 165-175; Cockle 2003, 243; Battezzato 2005, 169-203.

[5] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 94-108; Knox 1995, 170-171; Fulkerson 2005, 43-48.

[6] "As many have noted, Hypsipyle's letter to Jason actually has little to do with the addressee himself" (Huskey 2004, 276); see also Bloch 2000, 197-209; Mosci Sassi 2002, 116-124; Lindheim 2003, 115-117 and 122-125.

[7] Cf. e.g. lines 151 (*Medeae Medea forem!*), 153-154, 156, 159-160 (*quam fratri germana fuit miseroque parenti / filia, tam natis, tam sit acerba viro!*); Knox 1995, 199-201.

[8] "O. follows the account of Apollonius ..." (Knox 1995, 182).

Accordingly, the women of Lemnos resolved to kill all the male inhabitants of the island, including male children (1.617-619).[9] Hypsipyle managed to hide and save from the massacre her father Thoas, the former king of Lemnos, without telling anyone else. After this slaughter, she became the queen of the island, where women ruled and lived without any men until Jason and the Argonauts arrived (1.620-639). Having decided to welcome the foreigners (1.655-699), many Lemnian women started relationships with the Argonauts (1.842-860).[10] After Jason and his fellows left (1.910-921), the Lemnian women returned to their previous lives, until they discovered that Hypsipyle had saved her father, thus betraying them.[11] Hypsipyle was thus forced to go into exile and became, eventually, a nurse to Opheltes, the son of the sovereigns of Nemea.[12] This is the point of the story at which Euripides' drama begins;[13] *Her*. 6, by contrast, must be placed after Jason's departure and before Hypsipyle's exile, as the heroine is still on Lemnos while writing the epistle.[14]

Concerning the principal motifs of the letter, besides the more obvious ones (the complaints of the abandoned woman; the resentment because of Jason's betrayal), it is well-acknowledged that Hypsipyle's references to Medea pervade the text thoroughly.[15] At some points, the heroine seems to be more disturbed by her rival than concerned about Jason's abandonment (cf. lines 113-end). Hypsipyle depicts herself as being antithetical to Medea, but she simultaneously attempts to imitate her behaviour, as well

[9] Cf. Ap. 1.617-619, οὐκ οἶον σὺν τῇσιν ἑοὺς ἔρραισαν ἀκοίτας / ἀμφ᾽ εὐνῇ, πᾶν δ᾽ ἄρσεν ὁμοῦ γένος, ὥς κεν ὀπίσσω / μήτινα λευγαλέοιο φόνου τίσειαν ἀμοιβήν.

[10] Ap. 1.850-852, Κύπρις γὰρ ἐπὶ γλυκὺν ἵμερον ὦρσεν / Ἡφαίστοιο χάριν πολυμήτιος, ὄφρα κεν αὖτις / ναίηται μετόπισθεν ἀκήρατος ἀνδράσι Λῆμνος; cf. Mooney 1912, 122-123.

[11] Cf. Eur. *Hyps*. *TrGF* 752, 752a, 752b, 759a; also Knox 1995 ad *Her*. 6.136.

[12] Cf. Eur. *Hyps*. *TrGF* 752d, 752 h-k (*Hypoth*. 19), 754c, 755a, 757, 759a; see also Hyg. *Fab*. 74; Stat. *Theb*. 5.37-39.

[13] Cf. Collard, Cropp and Gibert 2004, 170-179. An account of Hypsipyle's story in Nemea can also be found in Statius' *Thebais* (5.541-753; see also 5.49-498); for a survey of Hypsipyle's myth across various sources, see Boner 2006, 149-162; for the links between Ovid's and Statius' Hypsipyle, cf. Falcone 2011, 491-498; Martorana 2021b, forthcoming.

[14] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 94-95.

[15] "If, as Hypsipyle claims, Medea rules Jason, she dominates Hypsipyle's thoughts no less, almost entirely effacing the presence of Jason in the poem" (Verducci 1985, 58); see also Bloch 2000, 197-209; Huskey 2004, 274-289.

as incorporating her postures (cf. e.g. line 151). Such an attitude contributes to the heroine's construction, as well as expression of her multifarious and complex subjectivity. Hypsipyle's twin sons, who are still together with her on Lemnos, play an essential role in this construction, as Hypsipyle's motherhood represents an alternative not only to Medea's relationship with Jason but also, and more specifically, to Medea's fatal motherhood, as we shall see.[16]

Hypsipyle's motherhood must have also been a central theme in Euripides' drama, as emerges from some extant fragments.[17] According to certain recent reconstructions, the tragedy focused on Hypsipyle's stay in Nemea (that is also the dramatic moment in which Statius portrays Hypsipyle in the *Thebais*), where she has become a servant of the king Lycurgus and the queen Eurydice after fleeing from Lemnos. More particularly, Hypsipyle is assigned to the care of Lycurgus' and Eurydice's son, Opheltes.[18] In this version, it seems that Jason brought with him Hypsipyle's (and his own) sons, Euneos and Thoas. However, after his death, which in this account occurred during the Argonauts' journey, they were entrusted to Orpheus, who brought them up.[19] From the extant fragments of the drama, it seems that Hypsipyle accidentally causes the death of Opheltes, Eurydice's son, for which she is held responsible by his mother. Hypsipyle manages to defend herself from this accusation with the help of Amphiaraus (one of the

[16] Spentzou 2003 (172) makes a comparison between Hypsipyle, Medea and Dido, stating that Hypsipyle's motherhood is "unambiguous", as in her story Jason is already aware of the existence of the children; moreover, the heroines' gendered references to their motherhood "are meant to disturb and contaminate the codes of the epic".

[17] See *TrGF* 757, 759a; Collard, Cropp and Gibert 2004, 169-258.

[18] Cf. Collard, Cropp and Gibert 2004, 170-179.

[19] It is worth noting certain links between Hypsipyle's story and the Dionysiac framework. First, not only is Hypsipyle Dionysus' granddaughter, but the myth of the Lemnian women has also been connected to the institution of ancient rituals and festivals celebrating Dionysus (cf. Burkert 1970, 1-16; Detienne 1972, 172-184; Hardie 2012, 143-189; also Dumézil 1924, *passim*), as well as to the existence of matriarchal societies (cf. Bachofen 1861, 85-92). Second, according to some versions of the myth, Orpheus will ultimately be torn apart by the Maenads (cf. *RE* XVIII 1.1281-1292, *s.v.* "Orpheus" [Münzer]), who are in fact related to the cult of Dionysus. Finally, Hypsipyle herself causes the death of Opheltes, who is not her son, but is nonetheless the boy she is nursing: in this respect, she may be said to evoke other murderous mothers of Greco-Roman mythology, such as Agave and Medea.

Seven against Thebes) and, at the end of the play, she reunites with her sons and somehow reconciles with Eurydice.[20]

In light of the Euripidean narrative, certain scholars have interpreted Hypsipyle as a symbol of maternal love, which is directed both towards her sons (whom she longs for throughout the entire tragedy) and towards the unfortunate Opheltes.[21] This maternal element appears to be also taken into account by Ovid in *Her*. 6, where Hypsipyle's maternal love is, above all, what distinguishes her from Medea (who will go on to kill her children). Although these murders will take place after Hypsipyle is writing her letter, the heroine as an (educated) *author* seems to be aware of this literary tradition and intertext. In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how Medea starts the process of becoming and redefining her self-identity by suspending her motherhood; in the case of Hypsipyle, by contrast, the process of 'becoming a subject' happens precisely because of her maternal experience. Through the lens provided by Ettinger's theorisation on the maternal experience, in the next pages I will argue that, by giving birth and becoming a mother, Hypsipyle creates a liminal *border-space* through which she can cultivate her multi-layered subjectivity.[22]

The connection between *Her*. 6 (Hypsipyle) and 12 (Medea) is important in many respects. However, since it has already been analysed in depth,[23] I will make only a few remarks that are strictly relevant to the theme of this chapter. In her book on the

[20] Cf. Collard, Cropp and Gibert 2004, 170-179. Although Euripides' *Hypsipyle* takes place in Nemea, it has been noted that the heroine is significantly concerned – almost obsessed – with her past and often refers to the Argonauts: cf. e.g. Scodel 1997, 92-93; Chong-Gossard 2003, 209-231.

[21] Schiassi 1954 talks about Hypsipyle's "materno amore" (13); many other scholars have remarked how the central theme of the drama is indeed Hypsipyle's separation from her sons, as well as the accidental death of Opheltes: cf. e.g. Masciadri 2004, 221-241; Chong-Gossard 2009 speaks of Hypsipyle as the "grieving protagonist" (21), whose suffering, however, is fixed in the past, i.e. it is linked to the loss of her sons and her exile.

[22] Highly relevant here is the concept of "metramorphosis": "Metramorphosis is the process of change in borderlines and thresholds between being and absence, memory and oblivion, I and non-I, a process of transgression and fading away. The metramorphic consciousness has no centre, cannot hold a fixed gaze – or, if it has a centre, it constantly slides to the borderline, to the margin. Its gaze escapes the margins and returns to the margins" (Ettinger 1992, 201).

[23] Cf. in particular, Fulkerson 2005, 40-66; see also Bloch 2000, 197-209; Mosci Sassi 2002, 116-124; Huskey 2004, 274-289; Michalopoulos 2004, 95-122.

Heroides, Laurel Fulkerson stated that *Her*. 6 and 12 appear to have been "written in tandem", as the two heroines – and, more significantly, Hypsipyle – mention, and are aware of, details of Jason's story that they could not infer as intradiegetic characters of their respective myths, but only as omniscient authors of their letters.[24] Accordingly, the two heroines draw from each other's letters, as well as their respective mythological backgrounds. More specifically, Hypsipyle's letter is explicitly centred around Medea: "Hypsipyle is in a peculiar position: not only has she been abandoned for another woman (a situation she shares with many of the heroines), but her rival is the infinitely more famous Medea [...]: she seems to suspect that not only Jason, but her broader reading public, may be more interested in reading about Medea than about Hypsipyle".[25] In Hypsipyle's letter, Medea thus occupies the central position which, within the *Heroides*, is usually devoted to the unfaithful and disloyal beloved. Medea's centrality within the epistle creates, therefore, certain peculiar intertextual links between *Her*. 6 and 12, as well as emphasising the ambiguous relationship between the two heroines as both being *authors* of their letter and fictional personas.[26]

Moreover, Medea's prominence in Hypsipyle's letter conveys the idea that Jason's story is, in fact, *Medea's story*, as is pointedly argued by Fulkerson.[27] Although I mostly concur with Fulkerson, I also believe that Hypsipyle's depiction of Medea (and Jason) may lead us to further considerations. The emphasis on Medea's active role in Jason's story, for instance, seems to be firstly aimed at reducing Jason's status, with a strategy we have also seen in Medea's epistle.[28] According to Sara Lindheim, furthermore, Hypsipyle's self-depiction as another Medea is meant to construct an image of herself

[24] Cf. Fulkerson 2005, 48; also Verducci 1985, 58-59; Bloch 2000, 203-204.
[25] Fulkerson 2005, 47.
[26] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 94-108; Verducci 1985, 56-66; Bloch 2000, 203-204, speaks of Hypsipyle's (future reflexive) irony.
[27] Fulkerson 2005, 47.
[28] Cf. above, 3.5.1.; see Bloch 2000, 200-201.

that corresponds to what the hero (Jason) desires.[29] *Her.* 6, therefore, represents a product of the Lacanian 'Realm of the Symbolic', as it is mainly concerned with building a simulacrum of the woman (Hypsipyle), which can reflect the expectations of the patriarchal system (represented by Jason).[30] While I agree with Lindheim's theoretical framework as a basis for reading Hypsipyle's letter as manipulation of her self-image, I find that this self-portrait serves a completely opposite purpose. Hypsipyle does not shape a new image of herself to annihilate her subjectivity and adjust her persona to Jason's desires but, on the contrary, her self-representation is the first step towards gaining a self-standing subjectivity. However, to get to that point of self-awareness and independence, Hypsipyle needs to go through a process of self-acknowledgement and recognition, which is propelled by her motherhood.[31] The significance that the heroine gives to her sons does not (simply) represent a(-nother) compelling reason for Jason to come back to her, but also symbolises an encounter with a part of herself that exists outside her corporeal borders.[32]

Motherhood thus plays an important role in Hypsipyle's self-definition, just as it did for Medea in *Her.* 12. Maternity, however, is a crucial element of similarity and, at the same time, difference between the two heroines. Hypsipyle, like Medea in Euripides (who sends her children to Creusa; cf. Eur. *Med.* 780-789), considers sending her sons to Jason in order to convince him (or so it seems) to return. However, she hesitates and ultimately refrains from doing this, as they would be received by Medea (125-128).[33] Medea, who is at this point in the story already responsible for the death of her brother and Pelias, has not yet killed her children. Nonetheless, Hypsipyle's concerns about her children seem to hint quite clearly at this mythological frame. While for both Hypsipyle

[29] Lindheim 2003, 114-117.

[30] Lindheim 2003, 114-135.

[31] "Ovid has an affection for the maternity motif" (Jacobson 1974, 96).

[32] Cf. Ettinger 2010, 2: "Feminine-matrixial encounter-eventing means differeciating and differentiating in re-encountering an-other, a non-I, or few other non-I(s), in a duration of pregnance".

[33] For a more detailed analysis of this passage, see below, 4.3; Huskey 2004, 276-277.

and Medea motherhood represents a means to free themselves from the constraints of phallogocentric society, the two heroines interpret their maternal 'self' in two different (almost opposite) ways. Medea gains her independence by suspending her motherhood and enacting a process of autopoiesis, which starts from her intention/plan to kill her children.[34] Hypsipyle, who portrays herself as a 'second' Medea (see e.g. line 151), is tempted by that model, which would lead her to plot against Jason's and her own children, thereby allowing her to establish her self-identity through a rejection of her motherhood, like Medea.[35] At the same time, Hypsipyle seems genuinely concerned about her children's safety, and wants them to stay alive (121-128).

From this *encounter* with her children, from this female *jouissance* conveyed by her motherhood, Hypsipyle creates a marginal, liminal space where she can establish her own identity, although it is fluid and undetermined. To put it in Ettinger's words, this liminal space that articulates Hypsipyle's maternal experience "corresponds to a feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with asymmetrical, plural, and fragmented subjects, composed of the known as well as the not-rejected and not-assimilated unknown, and to unconscious processes of change and transgression in borderlines, limits, and thresholds of the 'I' and the 'non-I' emerging in co-existence".[36] As we shall see in the close reading of the Latin text, it is through this inconsistency, multiplicity and fluidity that Hypsipyle can express *her-self*, place herself in a subject-position, and eventually achieve her independence as a subject.

4.2. Hypsipyle (Jason and Medea): standing alone

Hypsipyle's letter starts with a markedly ironic overtone, which is conveyed by the emphatic position of the verb *diceris* ("you are said") at the beginning of the pentameter

[34] Cf. above, 3.5.2.
[35] This is what seems to emerge from the last lines of the epistle (141-164).
[36] Cf. Ettinger 1992, 176-177; Pollock 2009, 3-5.

and by the hyperbolic description of Jason's achievements.[37] The hero, whose ship apparently arrived safely in Thessaly (*litora Thessaliae reduci tetigisse carina*, 1),[38] is said to be "rich" (*dives*, 2) because of the fleece of the golden ram (*auratae vellere ... ovis*, 2).[39] With a sarcastic comment, Hypsipyle congratulates Jason on his safe return (*gratulor incolumi*, 3),[40] but also adds that she would have expected to be notified of that by Jason himself, at least through a letter: *hoc tamen ipsum / debueram scripto certior esse tuo* (3-4).[41] This putative letter from Jason (*scripto ... tuo*, 4), which never actually existed, would have functioned from Hypsipyle's perspective as a sort of amendment to the hero's physical and concrete absence.

The lack of such a letter is in a patent antithesis to Hypsipyle's text, the epistle the heroine has just started writing. When compared to Hypsipyle's writing and *presence* as a character within her text, the heroine's reference to the absence of Jason, as well as a letter written by him, places herself in an active position, which contrasts with Jason's passivity and lack of initiative. By writing her letter, Hypsipyle implies that she is at least trying to reach Jason, whereas he has not even made the effort to justify his actions and behaviour, and, accordingly, to return to Hypsipyle.[42] The hypothetical letter from Jason has been argued to represent a *pharmakon*, which would aid Hypsipyle's discomfort. At the same time, according to the etymological meaning of the Greek word *pharmakon* (both "remedy" and "poison"), the lack of this letter is what also enhances the heroine's sense of loss and discomfort.[43] We can see how such a direct reference to a missive from Jason at the very beginning of the epistle, as well as the emphasis on the

[37] Cf. Knox 1995, 171.

[38] The substantive *carina* is a common metonymy for *navis* (Knox 1995, 171).

[39] The word *ovis* is a generic way (cf. e.g. *Her*. 12.8; *Am*. 2.11.4; Prop. 2.26.6) to indicate the famous ram of the Argonauts' saga; cf. at line 49 the more specific term *aries*.

[40] Cf. Cic. *Fam*. 13.73.1.

[41] For the expression *certior esse*, see Knox 1995, 172; for variant readings of this line, cf. Goold 1977, 68-69.

[42] Cf. e.g. Hypsipyle's allegations at lines 5-7, 41-46, 75-84.

[43] Cf. Spentzou 2003, 149-150.

fact that the hero could have written and sent this letter in spite of adverse circumstances (*quamlibet adverso signetur epistula vento*, 7),[44] recalls the passage from *Am.* 2.18 where Ovid imagines that some heroines get replies from their beloved.[45] Moreover, this reference invites the reader to appreciate from the very beginning Hypsipyle's imaginative ability, as well as her irony, in constructing and reshaping reality, as one cannot comprehend how this potential letter from Jason could have ever practically reached the heroine on Lemnos. The missing letter is therefore highly significant precisely because it is missing, that is, because of its absence: this absence contrasts with Hypsipyle's writing and her active role as both author of and character within her narrative.

By stating that she deserved to receive Jason's greeting (i.e., a letter from him: *Hypsipyle missa digna salute fui*, 8),[46] the heroine makes clear that she is now entitled to redefine, and decide, what she is worth, thereby presenting herself as the person who is empowered to re-establish the rules of the game through her subjective writing. In this line, moreover, Hypsipyle calls herself by name for the first time: this mention of her name, however, occurs with a certain delay, which raises the reader's expectations.[47] Such a rhetorical strategy, which gives significant emphasis to the heroine's name (which is also emphatically placed at the beginning of the line), points out that Hypsipyle herself is now permitted to outline her identity and shape it throughout the epistle. The heroine is not simply saying "*I* deserve the sending of a greeting", but "*Hypsipyle* deserves the sending of a greeting": *Hypsipyle*, then, is an entity which does not yet exist, but is being formed in the *hic et nunc* of the writing; *Hypsipyle*, as a name

[44] "In her conscience, it is only a letter that can endure most adversities and prevail against them" (Spentzou 2003, 150).

[45] Cf. *Am.* 2.18.33, *tristis ad Hypsipylen ab Iasone littera venit*; see also 2.18.23 (*male gratus Iason*). According to Bloch 2000, 197-199, this mention of Jason may refer to both the epistles of Hypsipyle and Medea; on this passage, see also Hinds 1993, 9-47 (esp. 30-34).

[46] According to Jacobson (1974, 98), this line enhances Hypsipyle's "sense of self-importance", which characterises the whole epistle.

[47] Cf. Knox 1995, 172.

and a subject, marks this process of transition and opposes the idea of a de-personalised, objectified *ego* ("I") – the one which is a mere product of phallogocentrism.[48]

Insisting on the epistle-motif, the heroine asks herself why she has heard about Jason's deeds through *fama* instead of receiving a letter from him (*cur mihi fama prior de te quam littera venit*, 9). The *fama*, which is a recurring motif within the *Heroides* and links Hypsipyle to Dido, can be manipulated, modified, and ultimately transformed into a (slightly) new story.[49] This is precisely how Hypsipyle operates in the following lines, i.e. in the description of Jason's deeds in Colchis (10-14). By listing Jason's deeds, the heroine not only points out how many things Jason failed to tell her (either in person or indirectly, by means of an epistle) but also implies that there is something else which Jason is not keen on confessing, namely that these actions were not accomplished by himself alone, as the emphasis on *dextra ... tua* (12) and *forti ... manu* (14) suggests. So, the men who grew from the seeds were not killed by Jason's *dextra* (12); although the *pervigil* dragon was guarding the fleece (13), nevertheless it was stolen (14): the adjective *pervigil*, which may be an Ovidian *hapax* (Knox 1995, 174; cf. *Met*. 7.149), enhances the irony of this passage, as well as Jason's lack of heroism.[50] Without mentioning it openly, in these lines Hypsipyle hints at the help Jason received from Medea, who is (as we have seen) the actual author of the hero's deeds and the reason for his successes.[51] While reproaching Jason for his absence and not having sent her a message, Hypsipyle also cunningly points to his marginal role in the accomplishment of the trials, thereby reducing his heroic stature.[52] The lack of an account of the tasks in

[48] "The personal narrative afforded by a patronym seems 'real' and free of the taint of fiction, guaranteed as it is by the Law of the Father. On the other hand we may opt for reconception, a dangerous birth or rebirth into the way of the mother, always tainted by its excentricity. This fate or this choice will be crystallised in the proper name" (Maclean 1994, 3); see also Jacobson 1974, 98.

[49] Cf. e.g. *Her*. 7.5-6, 92; 9.143-144; see Jacobson 1974, 99.

[50] "The only clear reference to Jason is to his superfluity in the accomplishment of these great feats [...]. This strange pattern is maintained in the later narrative" (Jacobson 1974, 100).

[51] See above, 3.5.1; 3.5.2.

[52] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 100-101, 105-106; Bloch 2000, 200-201; Michalopoulos 2004, 95-96.

Jason's words (that is, the lack of an epistle by him) allows Hypsipyle to question his heroism. To (re-)construct Jason's story, Hypsipyle relies on a quite undetermined *fama* and, accordingly, on her interpretation of the events. By subtly implying a difference between a potential account from Jason and her own account, Hypsipyle again stresses the independence of her writing and herself as a subject – and as a narrator.

This independence is also achieved by Medea's introduction into the story. Hypsipyle states that she would not complain about Jason's slowness (*quid queror officium lenti cessasse mariti*, 17: *lentus* is a quite marked adjective within the *Heroides,* and also has erotic connotations),[53] if she knew that he was faithful to her (18).[54] However, this is not the case, as the heroine knows that she has been substituted by a *barbara ... venefica* (19),[55] who has replaced her in Jason's marital bed: *in mihi promissi parte recepta tori* (20).[56] Being described as a *barbara venefica*, Medea is portrayed in a negative light from Hypsipyle's very first reference, where she is not even explicitly named. This periphrastic reference emphasises Medea's sinister and demonic nature, as well as foreshadowing her future crimes. Moreover, it also provides a belated explanation for the accomplishment of Jason's deeds, which were recounted as happening without Jason's active intervention (10-14). Finally, by referring to Medea's magical power, Hypsipyle reinterprets the literary tradition, as she is arguing (and will argue) that Jason was captured by Medea's magic *ar*(-t-)*s*, instead of falling in love with

[53] Ovid seems to treat the relationship between Jason and Hypsipyle as an official union, as *mariti* suggests here: this means that Jason is supposed to have some obligations towards Hypsipyle (in terms of procreation and intercourse), which is what the substantive *officium* implies (quite rare within elegy; cf. McKeown 1989 ad *Am*. 1.9.9); see also *TLL* IX 2.520.30-43, *s.v.* "officium" [Oomes]. For some remarks on the adjective *lentus* within elegiac contexts, cf. above, 1.2.; Knox 1995, 88.

[54] Cf. *Her*. 6.18, *obsequium, maneo si tua, grande tuli*: *obsequium* is also very marked in elegy and used "for the indulgences freely granted by a lover" (Knox 1995, 175).

[55] Cf. *Am*. 3.7.79; *Met*. 7.316: both the substantivate adjective *barbara* and the proper adjective *venefica* convey a negative undertone (cf. Michalopoulos 2004, 97-99).

[56] The participle *promissi* (*tori*) also hints at a regular marriage between Hypsipyle and Jason (cf. Knox 1995, 175).

her accidentally or because of divine will, as is attested in most of the previous sources.[57]

The introduction of Medea into the letter, however, does not harm Hypsipyle's construction of herself as a powerful character; on the contrary, it helps Hypsipyle to free herself from her dependence on Jason, as well as contributing to the reduction of Jason's heroic status. By opposing, and simultaneously linking, herself to Medea, Hypsipyle manages to construct her subjectivity. Having been told again of Jason's deeds (31-38)[58] by a *hospes ... Thessalus* (23), the heroine suddenly realises that Jason has forgotten about her and his promises. As opposed to what is reported by other sources, Ovid's Hypsipyle claims that her relationship with Jason was an official and legitimate union (40-44).[59] As certain scholars have noted, this element represents a significant difference from the narrative of the *Argonautica*, where there are no hints at any legal or regulated union.[60] Hypsipyle is therefore *rewriting* and *recasting* again the previous events according to her point of view.

Pushing this rearrangement of her mythological background even further, Hypsipyle repeatedly insists on the lawfulness of her union with Jason, which is far from an illicit affair, *non ego sum furto tibi cognita* (43):[61] the substantive *furtum* recalls a frequent motif within the *Heroides* and in elegy more broadly, where it usually indicates illicit sexual intercourse.[62] By maintaining that *pronuba Iuno* as well as *Hymen* (43-44) sanctioned her union, the heroine establishes a clear intertextual link with Dido, who also claims that her marriage was characterised by an official wedding ceremony (cf.

[57] "The allegation that Medea used magic to capture Jason's love is an Ovidian innovation"; cf. Michalopoulos 2004, 101, and the relevant bibliography.

[58] Cf. Knox 1995, 177-179; "In fact, these two accounts complement, not repeat, each other" (Jacobson 1974, 100).

[59] According to Verducci 1985, 63, in the first part of her epistle Hypsipyle adopts the posture of a proper Roman *matrona*.

[60] Cf. Verducci 1985, 61; Lindheim 2003, 118.

[61] Cf. *Am.* 2.8.3, *mihi iocundo non rustica cognita furto*: the verb *cognosco* may indicate in this context carnal knowledge (see Adams 1982, 190).

[62] Cf. Adams 1982, 167-168.

Aen. 4.166, *pronuba Iuno*; *Her*. 7.93-96).[63] However, distinct from Dido – who, particularly in the Vergilian epos, appears to be persuaded that her union with Aeneas in the cave functioned as an actual marriage[64] – (Ovid's) Hypsipyle builds the circumstances of her marriage with Jason *ex novo*, thus innovating the previous literary tradition. At the same time, the marriage-motif is intended to create an antithesis between Hypsipyle's presumedly lawful relationship with Jason, and Medea's unacknowledged *liaison* with him.[65]

This marriage, however, is strongly connoted by sinister and ominous patterns, which enhance the coexistence of the funerary and the nuptial frame: neither *Iuno*, nor *Hymen* (45) carried the wedding *faces* (44), but rather the *Erinys ... sanguinolenta* (45-46).[66] The essence of Hypsipyle's (presumed) union with Jason thus seems to have changed radically, insofar as the heroine not only tells what might well be a false story or her subjective reinterpretation of the events (i.e. the fact that she and Jason officially married), but she also distorts the memory of this story. The motif of the marriage is recalled by the heroine only to disregard and dismiss it. This negation of marriage eventually marks Hypsipyle's passage from an object in Jason's hands to a subject who tells her own story, as well as symbolising the heroine's break with and re-interpretation of a patriarchal institution.[67]

[63] Cf. also Phyllis in *Her*. 2.117; see above, Medea in *Her*. 12 (3.5.1.); below, Dido in *Her*. 7 (p. 195).

[64] Cf. *Aen*. 4.124-128; 165-172; 307-308; 316; 431.

[65] As we have seen, in *Her*. 12.103-104, Medea herself seems to remark on the contrast between the lawfulness of Jason's relationship with Creusa and the lack of any official ritual in her own union with him; cf. also Verducci 1985, 63-65.

[66] Cf. the wedding of Procne and Tereus in *Met*. 6.428-430; see also Dido in *Her*. 7.96, *Eumenides fatis signa dedere meis*. According to Michalopoulos 2004, 100, Hypsipyle's reference to the Fury may be an allusion to Medea.

[67] "And when will they cease to equate woman's sexuality with her reproductive organs, to claim that her sexuality has value only insofar as it gathers the heritage of her maternity? [...] With 'marriage' turning out to be a more or less subtle dialectization of the nurturing relationship that aims to maintain, at the very least, the mother/child producer/consumer distinction, and thereby perpetuate this economy?" (Irigaray 1985b, 146).

This subversive potential of Hypsipyle's narrative also emerges in lines 51-54.[68] The reference to the *feminea ... manus* at line 52 anticipates the content of the following line, where Hypsipyle ironically points out that the women of Lemnos know too well how to defeat men: *Lemniadesque viros, nimiumque quoque, vincere norunt* (53).[69] (Ovid's) Hypsipyle does not seem as concerned as her Apollonian counterpart about concealing the actual events that occurred on Lemnos.[70] By contrast, she rather emphasises the strength and potential violence of the Lemnian women by choosing words that patently recall a military frame, i.e. *pello*, *castra*, *manus*, *vinco*, *miles* (52-54). By suggesting that she and her *female* companions would have been able to expel the foreigners if they had wanted, Hypsipyle equates the Lemnian women to a band of soldiers (*manus*, 52), as well as placing them at the same level as male warriors, as the Argonauts are. Through this reference, the heroine demonstrates that not only can a community of women exist and survive by itself, but she also states that killing or ejecting the Argonauts – the men – from the island (instead of welcoming them) would have been a better decision. If an all-female community can thus stand alone and prosper without any man, the implied deduction is that Hypsipyle can also live, and express herself, much better after having obliterated and silenced Jason, as well as after forgetting him.[71] Hypsipyle's legitimation of her existence on her own is developed throughout the epistle: grounded in her motherhood, the establishment of Hypsipyle's identity is initially pursued by diminishing Jason's status and differentiating herself from Medea (who is also building her own 'unaligned' subjectivity, as we have seen in the previous chapter).

[68] Cf. Ap. 1.640-652.

[69] According to Jacobson 1974, 105, by choosing to welcome Jason, Hypsipyle fails to take on the masculine role that Medea performs; on Hypsipyle's Lemnian past, see also Verducci 1985, 65; Fulkerson 2005, 51-52.

[70] Cf. Ap. 1.793-833.

[71] This sort of expulsion, *abjection*, death of man, i.e. death of *the Father*, is what gives life to female fantasies, allowing the expression and development of female subjectivity (Kristeva 1982, 159-162).

Hypsipyle's motherhood is first mentioned at 61-62, where the heroine reports Jason's words. Jason refers to the potential child(-ren) who may be hidden inside Hypsipyle's womb and wishes for it/them to live, and for himself and Hypsipyle to share their parenthood: *quod tamen e nobis gravida celatur in alvo, / vivat, et eiusdem simus uterque parens* (61-62).[72] Beyond revealing a somewhat paternal concern,[73] Jason's words also hint quite openly at the corporality of Hypsipyle's maternal experience (cf. *gravida ... alvo*, 61). Accordingly, Jason's reference to his own and Hypsipyle's parenthood appears to be aimed at controlling this parenthood and Hypsipyle's procreative power, as well as the potential offspring that may originate from his relationship with her. Concurrently, the passage can also be interpreted as (Jason's) expression of the concerns with, and the interest in, motherhood that are intrinsic of patriarchal societies. On the one hand, motherhood should give women the potential to contribute to the formation of their children's subjectivity in the pre-Oedipal phase; on the other, the androcentric system annihilates this sort of power and reclaims control over children by stressing their belonging to the 'Realm of the Symbolic'.[74] Jason's preoccupation with his children thus represents the more general concern of *the Fathers* that their children may be raised outside of their control, their *Laws* and, therefore, outside the 'Realm of the Symbolic'.[75] As we shall see in the next section, by reclaiming her control over her own maternal bodily experience and children, Hypsipyle enables herself to shape her subjectivity through the re-appropriation of her motherhood. The formation of this subjectivity can be said to take place in a liminal area, which corresponds to Ettinger's "matrixial borderspace": this liminal territory is

[72] For the construction of *e nobis gravida ... in alvo*, cf. *Am.* 2.13.5; 14.17; Plaut. *Amph.* 111; Hor. *Carm.* 4.16.19-20.

[73] "As O. portrays Jason in Hypsipyle's account, he is considerably more interested in becoming a parent than the figure depicted at *Arg*. 1.901-9" (Knox 1995, 184).

[74] "In sum, motherhood becomes a site of domination and surveillance whereby women are objectified as mothers (and mothers only from then on) and their children are judged based on their sex ('the offspring')"; cf. Leite 2013, 4.

[75] Cf. e.g. Kristeva 1982 (esp. 1-31); 1985, 133-152; Ettinger 2010, 1-24.

the location for the encounter between two subjects, who recognise and acknowledge each other.

> I took the intrauterine meeting as a model for human situations and processes in which *non*-I is not an intruder, but a partner in difference. The Matrix reflects multiple and/or partial joint strata of subjectivity whose elements recognize each other without knowing each other.[76]

The achievement of an autonomous identity is reached through a shift in the letter's focus which, from line 81 (cf. *barbara paelex*)[77] onwards, appears to be centred on Medea. This shift allows Hypsipyle to stress the difference between Medea's and her own maternal experience, which ultimately leads to the construction of an independent identity. At lines 81-82, Hypsipyle claims that she was concerned about other rivals (*Argolidas timui*, 81) and did not expect that Medea would have defeated her in the love battle for Jason (*non expectata vulnus ab hoste tuli*, 82): the well-known military metaphor (cf. *vulnus ab hoste*)[78] anticipates the following reference to Medea's magic powers and arts which, according to Hypsipyle, are the very reason for Jason falling in love with her (82-83).[79]

As previously noted, in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Medea's falling in love with Jason is caused by the joint intervention of Athena, Juno, Aphrodite and Cupid (cf. 3.6-110), whereas Jason's interest in Medea seems mainly due to the purpose of his mission, i.e. gaining the golden fleece (cf. 3.111-209). The fact that Hypsipyle attributes Jason's falling in love to Medea's magical powers is functional to her depiction of Medea as an

[76] Ettinger 1993, 12; see also Pollock 2009, 6: "Ettinger's radically different representation proposes 'pregnancy as a state of being alive in giving life' and she argues, that, in giving life, the maternal subject wants to live beside that given life".

[77] Cf. 19 (*barbara venefica*). Quite interestingly, in *Her*. 12.173 Medea (the illegitimate partner) refers to Creusa (the future legitimate bride of Jason) as a *paelex*; also Deianira in *Her*. 9.121 indicates – more consistently – Iole as a *paelex*; cf. *OLD* 1281, *s.v.* "paelex". This reference to Medea as a *paelex* emphasises Hypsipyle's self-representation as a Roman *matrona*, whose concerns reflect Augustus' moral policy and legislation (cf. Verducci 1985, 63-65).

[78] For a similar metaphor, cf. e.g. *Her*. 12.182; *Am*. 1.9.18; 1.9.26; 2.12.3; Prop. 1.11.7; *Ars* 2.461 (for *vulnus* within an erotic context, see below, 221-222).

[79] In some sources it appears that, by contrast, Jason bewitched Medea – and not the opposite (cf. Pind. *Pyth*. 4.213-219; Lycoph. *Alex*. 310; Hyg. *Fab*. 22; see Jacobson 1974, 99, n. 12).

'evil' Medea. At the same time, this depiction emphasises Jason's passivity,[80] as one can particularly notice at lines 99-100, where Hypsipyle openly claims that Jason's deeds should in fact be credited to Medea and that, accordingly, her fame obscures the achievements of Jason: *adde, quod adscribi factis procerumque tuisque / se facit, et titulo coniugis uxor obest* (99-100).[81] This couplet makes the reversal of gender roles very obvious, while simultaneously supporting what Medea also points out in her letter, namely that Jason's deeds are in fact *her* deeds.[82] Moreover, as Medea's glory obscures Jason's name and fame, in the same way, Medea as a character also annihilates Jason's presence within Hypsipyle's epistle.[83]

Perhaps drawing from Medea's narrative and rhetoric in *Her*. 12, Hypsipyle imagines that some among the followers of Pelias may suggest that "the deeds" should be attributed "to the poisons", Medea's poisons (*acta venenis / inputat*, 101-102),[84] and his words may be believed by the people (*et populum, qui sibi credat, habet*, 102).[85] Some people may have acknowledged that the *aurea terga* of the ram of Phrixus (*Phrixeae ... ovis*, 104)[86] were conquered (*revellit*, 104: literally, "to seize out")[87] by Medea, not Jason, *non hac Aesonides, sed Phasias Aeetine* (103). The use of patronymics and/or epithets (*Aesonides*; *Phasias*; *Aeetine*) may be due to the attempt to convey an epic atmosphere to the description.[88] This epic nuance, which applies to acts that were performed by Medea, creates an ironic effect and downplays Jason's supposed heroism.

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[80] See Verducci 1985, 57; also Bloch 2000, 201-202; Lindheim 2003, 119; for the elegiac motif of the bewitched beloved, cf. e.g. Tib. 1.5.41-44; 1.8.17-29; Prop. 3.6.25-30; 4.7.72.

[81] In this context, the word *titulus* can be translated as "glory" (cf. *OLD* 1944-1945, *s.v.* "titulus", 7); for variant readings of line 100, see Goold 1977, 76; Knox 1995, 191-192.

[82] Cf. *Her*. 12.15-24, 73-88 (Jason's speech), 93-102, 163-166.

[83] Cf. Verducci 1985, 56-66; Fulkerson 2005, 46-47.

[84] "The language suggests a political dispute between supporters of Jason and Pelias" (Knox 1995, 192); for such figurative use of the verb *inputo*, cf. *Met*. 2.400; 15.470.

[85] For a similar depiction of the *populus*, cf. Sen. *Con*. 10.2, *quamvis aliquo tempore suum populum habuerit*.

[86] Cf. *Her*. 12.8, *Phrixeam ... ovem*.

[87] Cf. Stat. *Theb*. 12.699-700; Liv. 45.28.3; *OLD* 1645, *s.v.* "revello".

[88] The epithets *Phasias* and *Aeetine* are not attested in Greek until late antiquity (cf. respectively, Agathias *AP* 4.3.62 and Dionysius Periegetes 490); according to Knox 1995, 192, Ovid may have drawn these forms from a lost Greek poem.

According to Hypsipyle's account, it thus appears that Medea has completely replaced Jason in his role as an epic hero. In her letter, Hypsipyle seems even clearer in, and keener on, attributing Jason's actions to Medea than Medea herself was in *Her*. 12. This attribution is functional to her reduction of Jason's status.

The lines examined so far not only show quite evidently Hypsipyle's attempt to diminish Jason's agency, but also her obliteration of his memory and presence within the epistle. This portrayal of Jason and Medea will lead Hypsipyle to establish herself as a self-standing character. By overcoming Jason, Hypsipyle accomplishes the first step(s) in the process of her self-definition; she then directs her attention to Medea, emphasising her role as well as her power. While Hypsipyle's depiction of Medea serves to stress how different she is from the *barbara venefica*, at the end of her epistle Hypsipyle constructs her self-image as a sort of a second Medea (cf. e.g. line 151) and shows that she is planning to commit violent acts. Having incorporated some of Medea's attitudes, this 'new' Hypsipyle remains different from the Colchian sorceress and eventually manages to stress her peculiarity, thus building an independent personality and presenting herself as a subject on her own. As I have partially demonstrated and will show in more detail in the next section, this differentiation and separation from Medea, which lead to Hypsipyle's self-realisation, are propelled by the heroine's motherhood, as well as her relationship with her maternal body and children.

4.3. The 'Self' and the '(M)Other': encounters, borders and formation of subjectivity

Hypsipyle's self-definition is established through the description and re-appropriation of her motherhood which, from line 119 onwards, becomes the central theme in the epistle. The heroine rather abruptly discloses that she gave birth: *nunc etiam peperi; gratare ambobus, Iason* (119). By apostrophising Jason directly,

Hypsipyle seems to reply to his words at lines 61-62 (cf. above).[89] At the same time, by using the verb *grator*, Hypsipyle refers back to the opening words of the epistle, where she congratulated Jason on his being safe (*gratulor*, 3):[90] given the ironic content of line 3, we may suspect that this section of Hypsipyle's letter is also characterised by a certain irony. This supposition is confirmed in the following lines, where the heroine insistently links her sons to their father, thereby suggesting that the existence of these children is legitimated precisely by their belonging to Jason.

At line 120, Hypsipyle states that the *auctor* (i.e. Jason, the "father" of her sons) made the burden of pregnancy (*onus*, 120)[91] *dulce* for her (*mihi gravidae*, 120). As noted, the word *auctor* is quite frequent in the *Heroides* and embeds multiple connotations, as it can mean both "author" and "ancestor/father".[92] With this line, the heroine implies that her pregnancy and motherhood can be considered pleasant for her insofar as they are linked to her relationship with Jason: Jason is the only reason for the existence of her children and herself as a mother.[93] Furthermore, Hypsipyle's pregnancy is said to be "lucky in number", as she gave birth to twin sons, *felix in numero quoque sum prolemque gemellam, / pignora Lucina bina favente dedi* (121-122).[94] As we have seen previously, the word *pignus* (*pignora*) is highly ambivalent, as it may mean both

[89] Cf. Knox 1995, 195: "under the circumstances, an ironic wish, that harks back to Jason's own words at 62".

[90] The verb *grator* is an archaic form of *gratulor*, which is often used in poetry: cf. *TLL* VI 2.2243.59-60, *s.v.* "grator" [Blatt].

[91] Cf. Ov. *Her*. 4.58; 11.38, 42, 64.

[92] Cf. *TLL* II 1194.47-1213.8, *s.v.* "auctor" [Bögel]; see also *Her*. 7.106, 136; *Her*. 11.8: *auctorisque oculis exigeretur opus*.

[93] Cf. e.g. Irigaray 1993, 10: "If traditionally, and as a mother, woman represents place for man, such a limit means that she becomes a thing, with some possibility of change from one historical period to another. She finds herself delineated as a thing"; Spentzou 2003 (172-173) remarks how Hypsipyle's actual pregnancy is antithetic to Dido's uncertain motherhood (cf. *Her*. 7.133).

[94] Knox notes wordplay in these lines, as *numerus* and *dare pignus* (which in Latin can be used to make a wager; cf. *OLD* 1379, *s.v.* "pignus", 2) may also be referred to the game of dice (cf. *Ars* 3.355). As for Hypsipyle's children, one of them is mentioned in the *Iliad* (7.468: Euneus), while the name of the other is reported either as Nebrophonos (ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.9.17) or Thoas (Stat. *Theb*. 5.465).

"child" and "pledge", so the two sons would represent a guarantee of Jason's return to Lemnos – or so it seems.[95]

This ambiguity is brought forth in the following couplet, where the heroine states that her children are very similar to their father (*si quaeris, cui sint similes, cognosceris illis*, 123).[96] The similarity of children to their father is quite a common motif (particularly in epithalamia) and was meant to stress the fact that they were legitimate.[97] Hypsipyle, however, adds an ironic remark to this conventional motif, i.e. the children are similar in everything to their father, except for the fact that they are unable to lie: *fallere non norunt; cetera patris habent* (124).[98] Previously, Hypsipyle has not only stressed the similarities between her children and their father, but has also emphasised their belonging to him, thereby implying that her sons are, in fact, Jason's sons. At line 124, by contrast, the heroine points out a difference between them and their father. While this emphasis may seem an insignificant detail, it represents the starting point of the heroine's re-appropriation of her motherhood and children, as well as unfolding the ironic meaning of Hypsipyle's words.

By pointing out this subtle difference, Hypsipyle can begin to see her sons not just as Jason's children, but as her own children. This recognition re-establishes a connection between mother and son(-s), the 'Self' and the '(M)Other'. Eventually, this new perception of her children seems to allow the heroine to make the best decisions for them (cf. 125-128; below). Concurrently, the acknowledgement of her motherhood leads Hypsipyle to both distance herself and to experience herself as a maternal figure, namely one who carries the 'non-I' within her and contributes to the construction of a

[95] Cf. Knox 1995, 196; above, 2.2; 2.5; 3.3; 3.5.2.

[96] Cf. *Met*. 4.290-291.

[97] For this theme, cf. e.g. Cat. 61.214-218 (see Fordyce 1961 ad loc.); Hor. *Carm*. 4.5.23; Mart. 6.27.3-4; for moral resemblance to the father, cf. Ov. *Tr*. 4.5.31; *Pont*. 2.8.32; see also *Her*. 12.190-191.

[98] Cf. *Met*. 6.713; Chaucer, *Legend* IV (*The Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea*) 1568-1570: *and of his children two she seyde hym this: / that they ben lyk of alle thyng, ywis, / to Jason, save they coulde nat begile*.

multilayered subjectivity. These subjectivities (co-)emerge through an encounter in a liminal space, which is characterised by the coexistence of an internal and an external component (respectively, pregnancy and the 'Other', the 'non-I'). In this respect, Ettinger's concept of "matrixial borderspace" may be highly instructive to look at Hypsipyle's maternal experience and recognition of concurrent and coexisting subjectivities.

> The Matrix is an extimate zone, where the internal is becoming external and the external internal by virtue of the transgressive potency of the margins. It is a zone of encounter between the intimate and the exterior, where the uncognised Other (as a non-I) and the I co-emerge and co-fade, are separate but together, in a continual attuning of distances in proximity. [...] A borderline discernibility of the uncognised non-I emerges for me and emerges with me, since the Other is indispensable for the matrixial stratum of subjectivization.[99]

This acknowledgement of a part of herself, and her children, as an 'other-than-I' further evolves at lines 125-128, when the heroine considers sending her sons as messengers to Medea. The presence of Medea catalyses, instead of inhibiting, the formation of Hypsipyle's complex subjectivity. By first distancing herself from Medea, then subsequently comparing herself to her (while maintaining her own uniqueness), Hypsipyle shows that she is in a process of (re-)definition of her own identity. As opposed to Medea, Hypsipyle appears highly concerned with her children's safety: she had thought to send them to Jason as ambassadors on her behalf (*legatos quos paene dedi pro matre ferendos*, 125),[100] but her concerns about Medea's cruelty prevented her (*sed tenuit coeptas saeva noverca vias*, 126). While the embassy of the children quite evidently recalls Medea's sending of her poisoned gift to Creusa via her sons (cf. Eur. *Med*. 969-975; 1136-1146),[101] the expression *pro matre* suggests that Hypsipyle's children are literally meant to act, in this circumstance, on behalf of their mother.

[99] Cf. Ettinger 1996, 127-128.

[100] For the syntactic construction of this line, cf. *Her.* 7.16; 18.164; *Am.* 1.4.12; 1.12.22; *Ars* 3.528; *Fast*. 4.548; *Met*. 4.424, 15.472.

[101] "It is quite as if Hypsipyle had read Euripides' *Medea*"; Jacobson 1974, 103; cf. Knox 1995, 196; Guastella 2005, 261-262.

Accordingly, one may say that Hypsipyle is both recognising the children as *her* own children and simultaneously viewing them as a sort of projection of her subjectivity into two other(-than-I) entities, as she imagines entrusting her voice and words to them. The heroine, therefore, is not merely re-appropriating her sons, but she is also 'othering' and distancing them, together with her own maternal experience. The coexistence of 'I' and 'non-I' in Hypsipyle's conception of her motherhood contributes to the formation of her identity.[102]

This coexistence between 'I' and 'non-I' also characterises Hypsipyle's relationship with Medea, whom she both rejects and admires. Medea is both the heroine's enemy and an inextricable part of her 'I', the uncognised, never fully realised, never captured 'non-I' *inside* her. After the earlier *barbara venefica* and *barbara paelex*, she is defined as *saeva noverca* at 126.[103] By indicating Medea as a *noverca*, Hypsipyle is surely exploiting the motif of stepmothers as quintessentially cruel and hostile towards their stepchildren, as well as hinting more specifically at Medea's crimes, which qualify her as a very dangerous woman;[104] concurrently, she is also 'othering' Medea by alienating her behaviour. At this point of the story, Medea has not yet killed her sons, but one may suspect that Hypsipyle, as the writer as well as the omniscient author of her letter, foreshadows Medea's infanticide, which will occur at a later stage in the myth (and which the reader is supposed to be aware of).[105] Given this background, Hypsipyle cannot send her sons to Medea, as this will endanger them: *Medeam timui: plus est Medea noverca* (127). By repeating Medea's name three times (with anaphora and polyptoton; see also line 128, below), Hypsipyle materialises her obscure and

[102] Cf. Ettinger 2010, 2.

[103] Medea also describes Creusa as a *noverca* in *Her.* 12.188: given the intertextuality between Hypsipyle's and Medea's epistles, this reference looks like a clear allusion to Medea's words (cf. Jacobson 1974, 103; Knox 1995, 196).

[104] For the proverbial evilness of stepmothers, cf. above, 2.2.-2.3; see also Otto 1890, 245-246.

[105] "*Heroides* 6 relates far more to events in Medea's later life than to those in Hypsipyle's"; Bloch 2000, 204.

threatening presence within her letter and crystallises her feelings towards her (*Medeam timui*, 127; *Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus*, 128).[106]

Insisting on Medea's dangerous nature, Hypsipyle asks herself why on earth a person who dismembered the body of her own brother should spare Hypsipyle's children (129-130): *spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros / corpora, pignoribus parceret illa meis?*[107] In this couplet, the heroine refers to the *sparagmos* of Absyrtus through a periphrasis, i.e. without mentioning his name:[108] the arrangement of words in the lines (*spargere ... fratris ... lacerata .../ corpora*) conveys the idea of scattered pieces of the body. The substantive *corpora*, moreover, is a metonymy where the whole is used to indicate the parts, which effectively and concretely express the concept of dismemberment. The (fore)knowledge of Medea's dreadful actions justifies Hypsipyle's hesitation in sending her sons to Medea and clarifies her rhetorical question at line 130, where the children are indicated again through the term *pignus/pignora* (*pignoribus parceret illa meis*, 130). This word evokes the motif of the "pledge(-s)" (of love) that can, however, easily turn into hostages, and accordingly victims, of Medea's fury. Moreover, the possibility that Medea might well kill innocent children again recalls, and forecasts, her subsequent infanticide.

Thus, before presenting herself as a *quasi*-Medea, in these lines Hypsipyle stresses how different their respective attitudes are, particularly towards their children. This difference emerges quite patently from the hints at Medea's murderous acts, as well as infanticide, which qualifies Medea as a bad mother, whereas Hypsipyle is apparently concerned about her sons. Motherhood thus becomes a measure of distinction between the two heroines, as well as a means to stress Hypsipyle's subjective *difference*. In this

[106] Cf. Knox 1995, 196-197.

[107] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 103. According to Knox 1995, 197, the version of the murder of Absyrtus Ovid follows is different from Apollonius' account (4.452-481), as in *Her*. 6 Absyrtus is presented as a young boy taken hostage, while in Apollonius he is a grown man.

[108] For the omission of Absyrtus' name in Hypsipyle's epistle, cf. Huskey 2004, 274-289.

respect, it seems that Hypsipyle has experienced the *true* sense of her motherhood not while giving birth (cf. line 119), but after realising that the sons she had with Jason are *her* sons and not only – or not at all – Jason's. This process of acknowledgement, and re-appropriation, of her sons takes place throughout the epistle: it starts with the mention of the actual moment of childbirth (*nunc etiam peperi*, 119), continues with a semi-ironic and provocative attribution of the sons to the father (119-124), and finishes with Hypsipyle's concerns about their safety (125-130). Beyond being a rather evident sign of her maternal love, the heroine's concerns also imply a departure from her children, who are perceived as a hypostasis of her own 'otherness', or alterity, as a mother figure. The concomitant recognition and departure from her maternal self compel Hypsipyle to also distance herself from her erotic drive towards Jason, as well as experiencing *compassion* (to put it in Ettinger's words), which urges her to redefine the boundaries of her multilayered subjectivity.

> The matrixial exposure of the becoming-m/Other is an openness to the uncognized world and to unknown but intimate others by a compassionate Eros that is not a sexual libido in the usual sense. Compassionate Eros and sexual libido are different psychic instances. They might intermix, but they nurture different kinds of love. Where sexual libido takes the lead, Thanatos – death drive – is there too, never too far. In that case, the potentiality for compassionate erotic hospitality is often deformed. By compassionate Eros a non-aggressive thanatos is revealed. Not death, but the non-life as the not yet emerged, the not yet becoming alive, is accessed and intended.[109]

This non-aggressive love is what marks Hypsipyle as unique and differentiates her from other subjects – in this particular case, from Medea. At the same time, *compassion* connects Hypsipyle's subjectivity to the 'non-I' through the liminal space. As with Hypsipyle's sons (but in reverse sequence), Medea is also both appropriated and distanced. Through *compassion*, Hypsipyle carries Medea inside her, insofar as she is both her nemesis but also an unprocessed and uncognised part of her 'I', and a reminder of her 'severality'. This coexistence of subjectivities in a border-space is articulated by

[109] Ettinger 2005, 709.

the heroine's simultaneous distancing from, and then conforming to, Medea's attitudes in the last part of her epistle.

At lines 135-136, Hypsipyle repeatedly stresses her difference from Medea, who betrayed her father (*prodidit illa patrem*, 135), whereas she, Hypsipyle, saved her own father (*rapui de clade Thoanta*, 135);[110] Medea abandoned the Colchians, while Hypsipyle remained on *her* island: *deseruit Colchos; me mea Lemnos habet* (136).[111] Nevertheless, the *scelerata* (Medea) defeated the *piam* (Hypsipyle)[112] and also gained her dowry, as well as her husband, by means of her crime: *et ipso / crimine dotata est emeruitque virum* (137-138). Beyond recalling lines 101-104 (cf. above), this remark of Hypsipyle also evokes *Her*. 12, where Medea claims to have played the dominant role in Jason's achievement of the golden fleece (cf. esp. 199-206). Finally, Hypsipyle acknowledges that she is also guilty (*culpo*) of the *Lemnadium facinus* (139), as *dolor* can lead even the weak to battle (140).[113]

By mentioning the Lemnian massacre, the heroine subtly reminds Jason of what she is able to do, as well as linking her own dreadful actions to Medea's horrible deeds. The difference stressed by Hypsipyle between herself and Medea becomes smaller and less recognisable in the last part of *Her*. 6 (cf. lines 141-151), to the point where the heroine tries to incorporate some of Medea's attitudes. Although Hypsipyle appears to be driven towards a more aggressive and Medea-like version of herself, she nevertheless manages to redirect her instincts, and sublimates her death drives. From lines 141 onwards, Hypsipyle describes how she would react if Jason, together with his companions,

[110] "Hypsipyle's second reference to the Lemnian massacre is used only to score a rhetorical point" (Knox 1995, 197-198).

[111] According to Knox 1995 (198), the expression *me mea Lemnos habet* (cf. Medea in *Her*. 12.35; Bömer 1976 *ad Met*. 7.816; Wills 1996, 241-242) may hint at Hypsipyle's future banishment from the island, which is recounted in other sources such as Euripides' *Hypsipyle*.

[112] Knox 1995, 198, notes the juxtaposition of the two words, i.e. *scelerata* and *piam*; Jacobson 1974, 106, remarks that Hyginus classified Hypsipyle "among the *piissimae*"; see also Guastella 2005, 164-168.

[113] For a discussion on the authenticity of this couplet, see Knox 1995, 198-199. On these lines, cf. also Fulkerson 2005, 52: "Significantly, the offense of the men of Lemnos was sexual, and their wives killed them for it. Hypsipyle's words leave open the possibility that murderous jealousy is simply a defining characteristic of her people".

entered her *portus* (141-142); that is, she would have come out together with her twin sons (143): *obviaque exissem fetu comitante gemello*.[114] This line clearly recalls *Her*. 12.135, where Medea describes the departure from her house after Jason's quasi *repudium* (*iussa domo cessi natis comitata duobus*), thereby enhancing the link between Hypsipyle and Medea. At the same time, it also points out the most remarkable discrepancy between the two heroines, namely that Hypsipyle will not commit infanticide. The presence of Hypsipyle's children, moreover, not only legitimises her claims against Jason and her role as a prominent character, but the heroine's (partial) re-appropriation of her sons also denies Jason's paternity and his right over his children – to put it in Roman terms, his *patria potestas*.[115] In her imaginary narrative, Hypsipyle ironically asks (144-145): *hiscere nempe tibi terra roganda fuit*, / *quo vultu natos, quo me, scelerate, videres?*[116] By stressing that Jason would not dare look at her or his children, Hypsipyle sanctions the final development of her relationship with her children, who now no longer belong to their father.

As for *hiscere ... terra*, while this expression represents a frequent topos within Latin poetry, it may also allude to a somewhat reverse process, a sort of involution.[117] Since the earth is a common metaphor for the 'maternal', the idea that the *terra* may open and swallow Jason evokes a sort of a return to the maternal womb.[118] Thus Jason is

[114] Cf. above, line 121, *prolemque gemellam*. According to Knox 1995, 199, the choice of *fetus* (which usually indicates newborns: cf. *TLL* VI 1.637.5-51, *s.v.* "fetus" [Leonhardi]) implies a certain sympathy for Hypsipyle.

[115] For Jason's loss of his *patria potestas*, cf. above, 3.5.1-3.5.2.

[116] *Quo vultu* is an adaptation of the informal expression *quo ore* (cf. Ter. *Phorm*. 917; Cic. *Phil*. 7.21); for the vocative *scelerate*, cf. the reference to Medea as *scelerata* at line 137.

[117] This is a quite widespread motif within epic (cf. e.g. Hom. *Il*. 8.150; Verg. *Aen*. 4.24) and tragedy (e.g. Sen. *Oed*. 868; *Pha*. 1238; *Tro*. 519-520). See also Daphne's prayer in Ov. *Met*. 1.546-547a (*victa labore fugae "Tellus", ait, "hisce vel istam, / quae facit, ut laedar, mutando perde figuram!*"): however, this is an alternative reading (vs. *victa labore fugae, spectans Peneidas undas, / "fer, pater" inquit, "opem, si flumina numen habetis; / qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram"*; cf. Tarrant 2004 ad loc.), which according to some scholars and/or editors may represent either an interpolation or a second authorial redaction; cf. Bömer 1969, 168-172; Barchiesi 2005, 212-213; see also Briseis in *Her*. 3.63, *devorer ... subito telluris hiatu*; Quint. *Inst*. 9.2.26, *magnae nunc hiscite terrae*.

[118] The metaphor of earth as a mother is very common within Latin literature: cf. e.g. *Aen*. 3.94-98; Livy 1.56.12; Stat. *Theb*. 7.809-810, 815-823; see McAuley 2016, 98, 305-307. For the maternal (earth) imaginary as disturbing for patriarchal societies, cf. De Beauvoir: "The Woman-Mother has a face of

overcome by an overwhelming feminine element; his parenthood is denied, annihilated; he has no power over his children and his own existence; the defeat of Jason stands for the collapse of the *symbolic* order. This weakness, as well as marginality, is also implied at lines 147-148, where the heroine states that Jason is safe (*tutus*) and alive (*sospesque*) only due to her intervention (*per me*, 147) – not because he deserved it, but because Hypsipyle herself was *mitis* with him (*non quia tu dignus, sed quia mitis ego*, 148).[119] Beside evoking once more Medea's words at *Her*. 12.199-206, this couplet is characterised by a complete negation of Jason's heroic status as well as decisive power. After re-appropriating her children and motherhood, the heroine claims the right to make decisions about Jason's destiny and recalls the power that she had over him.

This self-presentation as a powerful and dominant character continues in the following lines, where Hypsipyle quite crudely describes her reaction to an imaginary meeting with Medea: she would have stained her own and Jason's face with Medea's blood (*paelicis ipsa meos inplessem sanguine vultus*, 149).[120] Eventually, Hypsipyle will become a Medea for Medea, *Medeae Medea forem* (151): the polyptoton and repetition of Medea's name at the beginning of the line highlight the abruptness of Hypsipyle's transformation.[121] As mentioned previously, by claiming that she wishes to be a "Medea for Medea", Hypsipyle depicts herself as similar to Medea or as another

shadows: she is the chaos whence all have come and whither all must one day return; she is Nothingness. In the Night are confused together the multiple aspects of the world which daylight reveals: night of spirit confined in the generality and opacity of matter, night of sleep and of nothingness. In the deeps of the sea it is night: woman is the *Mare tenebrarum*, dreaded by navigators of old; it is night in the entrails of the earth" (from Huffer 1998, 8).

[119] The use of two personal pronouns (*tu ... ego*, 148) emphasises the opposition between Jason and Hypsipyle.

[120] For Medea as a *paelex*, cf. line 81; *vultus implere* is metaphoric (cf. *visus implere* in Luc. 9.787 and *oculos implere* in Sil. *Pun*. 3.45).

[121] Cf. Knox 1995, 200; Cic. *Cael*. 18 (*Palatinam Medeam* as a description of Clodia). According to Verducci 1985, 65, this line stresses the unconventionality of Ovid's Hypsipyle and, therefore, overturns the portrait of her as a perfect Roman *matrona*. Lindheim 2003, 123-124, states that Hypsipyle is constructing an image of herself corresponding to the representation of the woman who is now the object of Jason's desire, i.e. Medea.

Medea, after having distanced herself from her. In doing so, the heroine finds, and defines, her own identity.[122]

In spite of Hypsipyle's efforts to become a Medea-like character, she fails in her attempt, as the heroine can only imagine what she would do to Medea, but this idea will never be fulfilled. The only thing that Hypsipyle can do at this point is to wish bad luck to Medea, namely to foretell her ominous and ill-fated future destiny in the final part of the epistle (151-164). In this respect, it is worth noting that the sentence *Medeae Medea forem* establishes an intertextual link with Medea's words at *Her*. 12.182 (*hostis Medea nullus inultus erit*), and ironically responds to that line. Medea is Hypsipyle's *hostis* now; so, if Hypsipyle becomes a 'Medea', then the implied deduction is that her *hostis* (Medea herself) will not go unpunished.[123] The threatening sentence at *Her*. 12.182 is formulated in an impersonal way, and therefore does not necessarily indicate the active intervention of the person who has pronounced it but simply implies that something bad will occur to their *hostis* – which is precisely what Hypsipyle suggests at the end of her epistle.

In the last lines of her letter, the heroine addresses a prayer to Jupiter, asking for Medea (*subnuba nostri*, 153) to suffer the sorrows she has gone through (*quod gemit Hypsipyle*, 153) and to receive the same treatment (to be betrayed) that she has experienced from her (*et leges sentiat ipsa suas*, 154).[124] As Hypsipyle is abandoned as a wife and mother of two children, in a similar way she begs that Medea may be *orba ... viro*: *utque ego destituor coniunx materque duorum, / cum totidem natis orba sit illa*

[122] *Pace* Jacobson 1974 (104), who remarks on the argumentative flaws that this claim of Hypsipyle implies. Moreover, Jacobson maintains that Hypsipyle fails in her attempt to become an "actual Medea" (105-108). By contrast, according to both Verducci 1985, 66, and Fulkerson 2005, 51-52, Hypsipyle manages to become the "Medea of the collection".

[123] As remarked by some scholars (e.g. Jacobson 1974, 94-108; Bloch 2000, 197-209; Fulkerson 2005, 40-55), the epistles of Hypsipyle and Medea are in an intertextual dialogue; so, it is not unreasonable to think that Hypsipyle, in certain passages of her letter, may (also) be replying line by line to some of Medea's claims in *Her*. 12.

[124] Cf. *Her*. 5.134, *et poteras falli legibus ipse tuis*.

viro (155-156).[125] The motif of parenthood and/or the generative imaginary is developed in the following two couplets: Hypsipyle wishes that the ill-fated things Medea engendered (*male parta*, 157: the choice of the verb *pario* and the adverb *male* seems to anticipate the tragic destiny of Medea's children) may be lost and left even worse (157);[126] that Medea may go into exile and seek refuge through the world (*exulet et toto quaerat in orbe fugam*, 158).[127] Finally, Hypsipyle hopes that Medea will be as *acerba* to her sons and partner as she was, as a sister to her brother, and as a daughter to her father (*quam fratri germana fuit miseroque parenti / filia, tam natis, tam sit acerba viro*; 159-160).[128] In Hypsipyle's prophetic words,[129] one can (fore)see the future events that will characterise Medea's myth, namely Jason's betrayal and his choosing Creusa (153-156), as well as Medea's *repudium* and exile from Corinth (157-158); and finally the murder of her children (159-160). It is in this reference to Medea's infanticide that we see the distance between Hypsipyle and Medea: although affected by an ill-fated destiny and tempted to spill Medea's blood (149-151), Hypsipyle will nonetheless never completely become a 'Medea'.[130]

Hypsipyle, therefore, will not kill her sons, as Medea does. By contrast, the appreciation of her motherhood and the recognition of her children as a 'non-I'

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[125] For the variant readings of this line, cf. Goold 1977, 80 (who prints *a*, instead of *cum*); Knox 1995, 60 and 200 (who prints *cum*); and Rosati 1988, 305-309 (who prints *a* and *illa*). In my opinion, Knox' reading and translation ("her husband and the same number of children") are the most convincing in this case.

[126] Cf. also the proverbial expression *male partum male disperit* (Plaut. *Poen*. 844); see Cic. *Phil*. 2.27.65; Otto 1890, 206; see Rosati 1988, 308-309, who in the expression *male parta* rightly sees a reference to Medea's future sons.

[127] Cf. Prop. 2.16.40, *extremo quaerere in orbe fugam*.

[128] According to Knox 1995, 200-201, the adjective *acerba* is an *apo koinou* – as it is constructed with *germana* and *filia*.

[129] Hypsipyle's words have been seen both as a prophecy and a curse; cf. Michalopoulos 2004, 112-113; Fulkerson 2005, 52-54.

[130] Jacobson 1974, 105-108, makes a similar point, but in order to state that Hypsipyle fails to become as cruel and murderous as Medea is (or will be); according to Jacobson, moreover, she is not able to enact that gender role reversal which Medea accomplishes in her letter. Ovid must have been aware of Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, where the heroine is responsible for Opheltes' death (cf. Collard, Cropp and Gibert 2004, 170-176). Although this is a different narrative (it seems that this death happens accidentally and, at the end of the drama, Hypsipyle is even forgiven by Eurydice), Ovid may have hinted at Hypsipyle's responsibility for the murder of Opheltes, which features prominently in the heroine's Statian *Doppelgängerin* (see Martorana 2021b, forthcoming).

contribute to stressing her difference from Medea. The recognition of this difference enables Hypsipyle to begin constructing her identity, as well as her independent subjectivity. This subjectivity can model and determine itself through an encounter with an 'Other' (subject), which happens in a liminal space – the "matrixial borderspace", in Ettinger's words. In the case of Hypsipyle, this encounter takes place in a privileged site of expression of her own subjectivity, her *écriture feminine*. In a sort of circular process, Hypsipyle makes her motherhood a central element in her subjective writing; conversely, her writing propels the process of recognition and acknowledgement of her own and her children's subjectivities via her maternal experience and childbirth. This process can be fruitfully exemplified through Pollock's description of Ettinger's feminine writing.

> Ettinger's writing is an écriture feminine in Cixous's sense, even as it elaborates a theoretical intervention. It involves shifts, moves, repetitions, circlings and a poetic language of created terms. What she is offering is a compassionate admiration and energetic defence of the possibility of there being humanly significant meaning in what she names 'the feminine' not as the attribute of woman defined as the opposite of man but rather as a supplementary, shifting stratum of human subjectivity and meaning. This stratum is delivered to us all, irrespective of later gender alignment and sexual orientation, from the primordial severality of human becoming in the intimacy and sexual specificity of the feminine as a structure of unknown, co-affecting, co-emerging partial transsubjective instances encountering each other across a shared matrixial borderspace. Forget wombs, insides and organs. Think instead of traces, vibrations and resonances, registered sonic and tactile intimations of othernesses, sharing space but never fusing, encountering but never dissolving their boundaries, jointly eventing without ever knowing fully the other's event.[131]

Having incorporated Medea as a 'non-I' within herself, Hypsipyle distances herself from, and no longer wishes to take revenge upon, her (and Jason). The heroine has found a way to express herself freely through her writing, as well as unchaining herself from the obligations that prevented her from building her self-identity. The last sentence

[131] Cf. Pollock 2009, 13-14.

of the epistle (*vivite, devoto nuptaque virque toro*, 164)[132] not only represents Hypsipyle's final (veiled) curse, but also implies a sort of detachment (*vivite*) of the heroine with respect to both Jason and Medea. The last line of the epistle reveals that Hypsipyle has reached the final stage of her personal development and has started to view herself as a subject, that is, independently from Jason, Medea and her previous narrative (still inscribed within the 'Realm of the Symbolic').

As we have seen, Hypsipyle's evolution can be traced throughout the epistle: first, the heroine presents herself as being wounded in her pride and honour (more than in her feelings) by Jason's abandonment; therefore, she is concerned about drawing a clear distinction between herself and Medea; she then tries to appear similar to Medea and incorporates her attitudes. However, Hypsipyle eventually remains different from Medea, as is clear from how each heroine approaches her motherhood and children: it is precisely this difference that makes Hypsipyle a distinct, separate entity and helps her to determine her own and her children's subjectivity. After Hypsipyle has achieved this condition, she needs neither to claim her possession of Jason, nor to violently express her negative feelings or thirst for revenge towards Medea. Medea and Jason, therefore, can keep on living in their cursed marriage bed (*devoto ... toro*, 164), not simply because Hypsipyle can somehow foresee their unhappy destiny (151-162), but because she has mastered her own destiny and future.

This control over her life is linked to the redefinition of her own multifarious identity, which has been achieved through a renewed relationship with her children as well as maternal feelings. As a mother figure, Hypsipyle carries the 'non-I' within herself, but also shapes herself as a subject against this 'other-than-I'. The mother figure is both herself and an 'other(ness)'; this is an encounter in a liminal space, which is

[132] Cf. Cat. 11.17, *cum suis vivat valeatque moechis*; according to Knox 1995, 201, this "valediction" or conclusion is characterised by bitterness and irony.

characterised by the simultaneous negation and affirmation of her subjectivity; it is also a product of her subjective creative process. This renewed conception of motherhood is propelled by her writing, which functions as a work of art.[133] Hypsipyle, as a writer and artist, is the creator of this work of art: she gives birth to both her children and her text, i.e. her creation, but she never fully separates from them.

> The artist in the matrixial dimension is wit(h)ness in com-passionate hospitality. [...] By borderlinking, the artist can bear wit(h)ness and articulate sub-knowledge of/from the other. [...] What is captured and is given form to at the end of such a trajectory is what was waiting to be born and to receive almost-impossible articulation, in a body-psyche time-space of suspension-anticipation that you can only 'view' or glimpse by joining in.[134]

Motherhood and artistic creation both represent a "borderspace", where the encounter between different subjectivities can take place, an encounter that begins a process of continuous self-modelling and self-definition. Motherhood and artistic/literary creation are ultimately interwoven and cooperate in a similar way to the acknowledgement of the difference between an 'I' and a 'non-I', i.e. the 'Self' and the 'M(O)ther'. As we will see in the following sections, the dialectic between pregnancy and literary creation is also helpful to explain Dido's relationship with her motherhood (and maternal body) in *Her*. 7.

4.4. Background and sources: "When Dido *rewrites* Vergil"[135]

The most significant difference between Dido and the other heroines is that Ovid did not draw from Greek models for the construction of this character (and, if there were Greek models, these do not represent his principal and fundamental sources).[136] Ovid's

[133] For the ancient poet as a creator (cf. the Greek word *poietes*), see Lieberg 1982, *passim*.
[134] Ettinger 2005, 710.
[135] Cf. Desmond 1993b, 56-68.
[136] Cf. e.g. Jacobson 1974, 76-93: whether Dido's love story was an invention of Vergil or was attested already in some previous sources, such as Naevius' *Bellum Punicum* and/or Ennius' *Annales*, "we rest assured that Ovid was following one model, the *Aeneid*" (77). For earlier versions of Dido's myth, including the fragmentary account of Timaeus and the *Historiae* of Pompeius Trogus, cf. *RE* V 426-433,

most important and somehow disturbing model consisted of Vergil's poem, the Roman national epic, the *Aeneid*. When focusing on this figure, Ovid was certainly aware that he had to consider, and enter into conversation with, Vergil's depiction of Dido. Accordingly, scholars have generally interpreted Ovid's epistle as an actual challenge to Vergil and, in most cases, decreed Vergil the victorious poet.[137] In other more positive judgments, Ovid has been said to play with Vergil's epic through irony and ambiguity, thereby establishing an intertextual relationship with his model, to subvert its intrinsic (not necessarily imperialistic, but apparently) epic, magniloquent and teleological message.[138] In other words, Ovid's heroine has been interpreted as an alternative version, a *Doppelgängerin*, of Vergil's Dido, and has been said to be empowered to subjectively tell her side of the story.[139] Therefore, the reader of *Her*. 7 is expected to bear in mind Dido's portrayal in Vergil while reading Ovid, that is to say, to keep Vergil's *Aen*. 4 as the *livre de chevet*. Vergil's *Aeneid* can thus be viewed as a prerequisite for *Her*. 7 in order to be fully understood.[140]

Building on this idea of a dialogue with Vergil's epic, this chapter shows that (Ovid's) Dido does not simply approach the *Aeneid* in terms of a conversation or a challenge, nor is s/he preoccupied with the weight of the Vergilian, already traditional,

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s.v. "Dido" [Rossbach]; cf. also Horsfall 1973-1974, 1-13; Harrison 1989, 1-21; Bono and Tessitore 1999, 73-93.

[137] "In this poem we hear not simply Dido struggling with Aeneas, but Ovid waging war against Vergil; and he is doomed to defeat from the start because of his incapacity and unwillingness to appreciate the Vergilian position" (Jacobson 1974, 90); cf. Adamietz 1984, 121-134: "Für den römischen Leser war die Anlehnung an die *Aeneis* im 7. Brief deutlich" (122).

[138] Cf. e.g. Miller 2004, 57-72; Casali 2004-2005, 141-148; according to Kuhlmann 2003, 254-269, *Her*. 7 is not merely a parody of the *Aeneid*, but a critique of the whole Vergilian poetic conception. In respect of the message of the *Aeneid*, scholars have provided two opposite interpretations, often labelled as 'pro-Augustan' and 'anti-Augustan'. Johnson has defined them as "the pessimistic Harvard school" and "the optimistic European school" (cf. Johnson 1976, 9; 11; 15); for other positions within this discussion, cf. e.g. Putnam 1995, *passim*; Perkell 1997, 257-286; Schmidt 2001, 145-171; Grebe 2004, 35-62. More particularly, for Vergil's sympathy towards Dido or other 'alternative' voices within the *Aeneid*, cf. Lyne 1987, *passim*; see also Swanepoel 1995, 30-46.

[139] Cf. Desmond 1993b: "Ovid explores the implications of a gender-based understanding of Vergil's narrative" (56-57).

[140] Cf. Desmond 1993a, 35-36.

though very recent, model, as certain scholars have argued.[141] By contrast, Dido's epistle is complementary to Vergil's epic and establishes a dialogue with its model, not simply to deconstruct it, but to enrich its meaning and construct a new version of its main character and authorial persona. Dido not only handles Vergil's text as an intertext but also incorporates it into her writing, thereby filling in its gaps. To make this point clear, in the coming pages I will navigate certain aspects of Vergil's Dido that are relevant to my argument, before moving on to the close reading of *Her*. 7 in the next section.

In *Aen.* 1, Dido is presented as a powerful ruler (cf. e.g. *dux femina facti*, 1.364),[142] and Carthage is accordingly depicted as a sort of geographic alterity with respect to Rome.[143] The African city is ruled by a queen, instead of a male king; Juno is worshipped as the predominant deity, instead of Jupiter;[144] and, when Aeneas meets Dido, she appears to have superior status to Aeneas, who asks her for refuge and help (cf. 1.613-630).[145] Beyond recalling the meeting between Ulysses and Nausicaa at *Od*. 6.110-250, this episode also shows a reversal of traditional (gender) roles.[146] The male hero, Aeneas, finds himself in the weakest and most dangerous position; he is saved by a woman, who effectively rules an entire city and has taken on male tasks and roles; finally, Dido also shows support and *clemency* like an actual, powerful and authoritative king.

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[141] Cf. Prop. 3.34.65-66, *cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Graii, / nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade*; "[...] the canonical status of Vergil's poetry even in Ovid's lifetime was likely to produce a certain amount of 'anxiety of influence' in a later narrative poet such as Ovid" (Desmond 1993a, 57).

[142] Cf. e.g. Schiesaro 2005, 85-110; Bednarowski 2015, 135-172 (esp. 141-142); for Dido's powerful role and speeches in Book 1, cf. e.g. Bowie 1998, 57-79; Lovatt 2013, 1-17.

[143] Cf. Giusti 2018, 88-147.

[144] See e.g. Schiesaro 2008, 209: "The contrast between the 'Carthaginian' (or Juno's) and 'Roman' (Jupiter's) systems of thought plays itself out, in the narrative structure of the poem, at both the spatial and chronological levels, never to find an unequivocal resolution. They clearly represent more than two possible plot-lines, but involve, at a deeper level, the epistemic and psychological foundations of culture".

[145] In these lines, Dido seems to place herself at the same heroic level as Aeneas, by equating the hero's adversities with her own, as well as mentioning that her experience has made her wiser and prompter to help and assist other unfortunate people (*non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco*, 630).

[146] Cf. Bednarowski 2015, 144-145; for Vergil's Homeric models, see Schmitz 2008, 85-103.

Moving on to Book 4, which is the most relevant to *Her*. 7, it has been stated that Dido's falling in love with Aeneas (*uritur infelix Dido*, 68)[147] seemingly makes her lose her status as a *heroic* (male) ruler, as well as her *dignitas*.[148] The loss of her reputation as *univira* and the departure from her quasi-Roman *pudicitia*, which are determined by her betrayal of the memory of Sychaeus, change Dido into an elegiac lover and reduce her heroic stature.[149] This heroic stature is somehow restored through her suicide, which places the heroine at the same level as other tragic heroes. In this sense, Dido has rightfully been said to be a tragic heroine within an epic frame.[150] This generic interplay reflects the length and complexity of Dido's narrative in *Aen*. 4, which starts with Dido falling in love and assuming that her sexual intercourse with Aeneas functions as an actual *Roman* marriage (4.124-128; 165-172; *pronuba Iuno*, 166; 307-308: *nec te noster amor nec te data dextera quondam / nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido*; 316: *per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos ...* ; 431),[151] and ends with the heroine's suicide and Anna's despair (651-705).[152] For the sake of my argument, it seems particularly beneficial to focus on two aspects of this episode, Dido's potential maternity and her suicide. After accusing Aeneas of having deceived and abandoned her (*dissimulare etiam sperasti, perfide ...*, 305),[153] Dido tries to convince him to stay in Carthage by

[147] For some general observations and bibliography on this episode, see Horsfall 1995, 123-134.

[148] Cf. e.g. Habermehl 2006, 83-84; Zellner 2007, 15.

[149] According to Spoth 1992, 152-153, Ovid's Dido undergoes, in fact, an "elegischen Reduktion"; for the elegised Dido, cf. Cairns 1989, 129-150; for some remarks on Dido's *pudor* as the Greek *aidos* as well as a Roman quality, cf. Collard 1975, 145.

[150] See e.g. Harrison 1989, 1-21; Moles 1984, 48-54, claims that Dido's *culpa*, that is, her tragic *hamartia*, may lie in the breaking of her marriage oath with Sychaeus (cf. also Nappa 2007, 301-313; Jolivet 2014, 295-310).

[151] See Paratore 1978, ad 316: "qui giunge alla suprema espressione il tragico equivoco di cui è vittima Didone ..."; cf. Austin 1955 on 307, *data dextera* (see also ad 316): "in what she wished to believe was a valid marriage-ceremony".

[152] For the ambivalence of Dido's intercourse with Aeneas, cf. Austin 1955 ad 166: "Juno, goddess of marriage, is there [...] taking the place of the *pronuba* ... Virgil thus makes the wedding ritually correct, as one would expect him to".

[153] Dido's speech has been compared to Medea's in *Argonautica* Book 4; the vocative *perfidus* also recalls Ariadne's apostrophe to Theseus in Cat. 64.132 (cf. Paratore 1978, 212).

mentioning, among the other reasons, the lack of a *parvulus ... Aeneas* that may comfort her for the departure of his father:[154]

> saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset
> ante fugam suboles, si quis mihi parvulus aula
> luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret,
> non equidem omnino capta ac deserta viderer. 330
>
> (Verg. *Aen.* 4.327-330)

Dido claims that if she had an offspring (*suboles*, 328), a little Aeneas who could remind her of his father, she would not feel so deceived (*capta*) and abandoned (*deserta*, 330).[155] The reference to a potential child is significant in many respects. First, for political reasons, since Aeneas' child would contribute to reinforcing Dido's legitimacy as the ruler of Carthage, as it would ensure the continuation of her dynasty. By contrast, Dido's power is now in danger precisely because of her love story with Aeneas, which, as we said, lowers her prestige as a queen (cf. Vergil's reference to the jealousy and threats of the native kings at 4.196-218; also 4.325-326). In less attested versions of Dido's myth, which in most cases did not contain any reference to Aeneas, the queen heroically committed suicide to save her people.[156] These versions, which focus on Dido's heroic stature, would be considered and developed by later authors, such as Petrarch and Chaucer.[157] Second, the heroine sees a potential son from Aeneas as a partial replacement for Aeneas himself. Remarkably, in both *Aen.* 4 and *Her.* 7, the references to Dido's offspring are gendered as masculine, as though Dido expects that

[154] For the Latin text, cf. Fairclough 1986.

[155] Cf. Servius' commentary to line 328: *ubi non est iustum matrimonium, liberi matrem sequuntur*. This comment makes us think that Dido may have acknowledged, at least partly, the illegitimacy of her union with Aeneas. While the participle *suscepta* is linked to the act of the Roman father, who *suscipiebat* the newborn, the word *parvulus* recalls Cat. 61.216-217 (an epithalamium where the poet celebrates Torquatus' marriage and wishes him to have a child who resembles his father; cf. above, 3.5.1.) and is the "only occurrence of a diminutive adjective in the whole *Aeneid*"; cf. Austin 1955, ad 328; Paratore 1978, 215. According to Barrett 1973, 51-53, these lines may allude to Cleopatra's son Caesarion and Augustus' rejection of his legitimacy. For Dido as a literary embodiment of Cleopatra, see Giusti 2018, 96, who defines "Cleopatra's Egypt as the 'historical model' for Dido's Carthage"; also Hardie 2006, 25-41.

[156] This is defined as the historical, pre-Vergilian Dido by Desmond 1993a, 24-27; cf. also Jacobson 1974, 76-93.

[157] Cf. Desmond 1993a, *passim*.

the child she could have from Aeneas would necessarily be a *son*. If we look at Dido's hopes for a male child through the lens of modern theory, the specific desire for a son can be interpreted as Dido's abstract and tentative projection into the androcentric world.[158] A male child would allow Dido to enter the 'Realm of the Symbolic' and align to patriarchal norms, whereas the lack of a child prevents this process of integration, so that Dido remains excluded and alienated from the patriarchal frame and, more particularly, from the Roman universe. At the same time, this exclusion also means that Dido is not perceived as a product of male discourse, as the 'other of the Same', but as an alternative, enigmatic, unknown, and therefore potentially dangerous, subject.[159] On the one hand, the lack of a son confirms Dido's otherness and displacement, as well as inappropriateness to Aeneas; on the other hand, a son would have enabled Dido to escape the eternal circularity of the exotic Carthage and to actively enter the linear and historical time of the Roman world, as an *uxor* and a *mater*.[160] In contrast to what one may expect, it is the absence of a procreative and generative process (which quintessentially articulates the repetitive mechanism of perpetuation of species) that keeps Dido bound to an eternal circularity and the continuous return to her previous life and relationship with Sychaeus. This sense of *Wiederkehr* also permeates Dido's portrayal in Book 6, as we shall see.

Concerning the second theme, the heroine's suicide, the way in which Dido arranges a pyre and dedicates her act to the ashes of Sychaeus recalls a sacrificial ritual: *inveni, germana, viam (gratare sorori), / quae mihi reddat eum vel eo me solvat amantem* (478-

[158] See e.g. Rich 1977, 193: "Giving birth to sons has been one means through which a woman could leave 'her' mark on the world"; Kristeva 1982, 13: "The child can serve its mother as token of her own authentication". In this respect, it is worth noting that Canace also genders her still unborn child as male at *Her*. 11.43-44.

[159] Cf. Irigaray 1993, 97-115: "Useful in the elaboration of the Other of the masculine world, women could have only a forbidden Other of their own. Which was often called demonic possession whereas in fact it involves an ability to perceive the divine (daimon) to which man in his shell, his various shells, remains a stranger" (115).

[160] Cf. Moi 1986, 187-213.

479). According to certain views, Dido's suicide is characterised by not only a religious and sacral atmosphere (4.478-498; 504-521), but also makes her appear as an actual sacrificial victim.[161] This nuance creates a link between Dido and other well-known female victims within classical literature, such as Iphigenia or Polyxena, as well as recalling other versions of Dido's myth, where the heroine committed suicide to save her people.[162] From the perspective of a Roman-centred morality, Dido's suicide may eventually represent the dissolution of a transgressing and threatening behaviour, as well as the annihilation of a potentially dangerous character who has delayed and jeopardised Aeneas' mission. In other words, the (self-)destruction of Dido within the narrative fiction articulates the cancellation of each kind of 'otherness', a sort of dissonant attitude or custom with respect to Roman mentality and culture.[163] Being out of the narrative also means being eliminated from the teleological universe of the *Aeneid* and, accordingly, from the foundation of Rome. As we shall see in the coming pages, however, Dido neither completely disappears from the poem after her death, nor from Roman literary tradition.

After Dido's famous monologue featuring her threat against Aeneas' future people (*exoriare, aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor*; 625),[164] the heroine decides to enact her suicide, but before she does, she pronounces her last words: *hauriat hunc oculis ignem crudelis ab alto / Dardanus et secum nostrae ferat omina mortis* (661-662). The digression about her life and deeds recalls the tone of an epigraph (4.653-658; see *Her*. 7.195-196, below), while her very last words represent another curse to Aeneas.[165] Dido's last action consists of throwing herself on Aeneas's sword, which was placed on

[161] See e.g. DuBois 1976, 14-23; Krummen 2004, 63-64; Galli-Milić 2011, 154-166.
[162] See Galli-Milić 2011, 154-166; also Harrison 1989, 1-3; above, 195-196.
[163] Cf. e.g. Giusti 2018, 99-103.
[164] Cf. Austin 1955, ad loc.
[165] "These are infinitely noble lines [...]. Several commentators have remarked on their lapidary quality" (Austin 1955, ad 653); also Paratore 1978, 240-241.

the top of the pyre (662-665),[166] thereby accomplishing a highly symbolic act. By killing herself with a gift from Aeneas, the heroine attributes her death to him, not only as an indirect cause but also in terms of material agency, insofar as the sword translates into Aeneas' responsibility for Dido's death in actual terms, and materialises the consequences of his departure as a proper murder.[167] Furthermore, the sword embeds an erotic connotation, as it alludes to sexual penetration and can therefore be interpreted as another metaphor for Dido's and Aeneas' intercourse.[168] This intercourse with Aeneas, both the actual and the metaphorical, is what has caused (symbolically and literally, as well as directly and indirectly) Dido's death: in this scene, the literal level of the narration overlaps, and is interwoven with, the metaphorical one. In more Lacanian terms, Dido makes the signifier and the signified, the symbol and the *sema*, coexist in the sword. Through this coexistence of metaphorical and concrete meanings, the sword entitles Dido to a heroic and virtuous death, due to its symbolic value as a weapon suitable to honourable men, as well as soldiers and heroes.[169] By using the sword, therefore, Dido restores that heroic and epic status, alongside her male dignity, which she previously lost by her falling in love with Aeneas. This heroic status will also continue to characterise Dido in her following apparition as an *umbra* in the poem, which happens in the underworld (cf. *Aen*. 6.450-476).

In the underworld, Aeneas encounters Dido concealed in the darkness (*obscuram*, 6.453), and starts speaking to her. After realising that he was the main cause for Dido's suicide, Aeneas apologises (456-464) and emphasises that he had to leave Dido against

[166] Vergil does not describe the actual act of self-murder in detail; cf. Austin 1955 on 663; Paratore 1978, 241-242.

[167] For some remarks on Dido's suicide by sword and its significance, see Basto 1984, 333-338; Thakur 2013, 167-198.

[168] For the erotic value of the sword, cf. above, 2.4; 2.5; for the exchange of swords between Aeneas and Dido and its sexual connotation, see Thakur 2013, 167-198.

[169] Cf. Harrison 1989, 1-21; Deist 2011, 67-81.

his own will (*invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi*, 460).[170] With the roles reversed, Aeneas asks Dido to stop and listen to him (465-466), but she looks at him with a fierce expression (*et torva tuentem*, 467),[171] turns her face (*illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat*, 469)[172] and walks into a *nemus umbriferum*, where Sychaeus is waiting for her (473-474); seeing this, Aeneas begins to cry and goes away.[173] On the one hand, Dido's silence and attitude provide her with a heroic stature, which is also confirmed by the parallel with the Homeric, epic Ajax (cf. *Od*. 11.543-564). However, this scene leaves us with the image of a speechless Dido, who cannot (or is not willing to) find any words that have a place within the structure of the poem, as well as in the world of epic, as we have seen. Dido's speechlessness in *Aen*. 6 articulates the circularity of the depiction of this figure throughout the Vergilian epic, bringing us back to the starting point of her story, as well as reminding us of her powerful role (cf. e.g. *Aen*. 1.561-578).[174] This speechlessness, however, produces a lack, a hole, an absence within the poem, which is both textual and narrative.

In this respect, one may suspect that Dido has nothing more to say to Aeneas and her silence is intentional and deliberate. The narrative process, however, is never over and continues as an impulse, even without the control of the narrator and/or the fictional persona.[175] Dido's narrative, her text, seems to escape the control of the author; the small child, i.e. the literary work, eludes the jurisdiction of its father.[176] The 'Law of the *Father*' (of the West, proverbially Vergil) is hence challenged by his own creation: a

[170] Horsfall 2013, 344-345, quotes the passage at 4.340 ff. and, in particular, 361: *Italiam non sponte sequor*; cf. also 12.809, *et Turnum et terras invita reliqui*; Cat. 66.39; see Norden 1934, 254.

[171] "Die kühne Personifikation *torva tuens animus* ist eine τραγική λέξις wie Soph. *Ai*. 955" (Norden 1934, 255).

[172] Cf. Pallas at 1.482, *diva solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat*; Dido at 4.362; see also *Il*. 6.311; Eur. *Med*. 923.

[173] "If Sychaeus were visible, then ought we not also to think of an element of jealousy in Aen.'s parting?" (Horsfall 2013, 352).

[174] See Spence 1999, 93-95.

[175] Cf. Cavarero 2000, 32-45.

[176] For the childbirth metaphor applied to both male and female writing, see Friedman 1987, 49-82, and the relevant bibliography.

different sort of *ultor* will give voice to Dido, thereby filling the gaps of the Vergilian epic. The *ultor* is, in this case, the *other* Dido (of *Her*. 7) who, looking at herself in the (Vergilian) mirror, neither recognises the contours of her image nor acknowledges the boundaries of that written text.[177] These boundaries will be expanded through a subjective rewriting that spreads and (to put it with Cixous' words) *overflows*, eventually crystallising itself in another author, time and literary genre. This (re-)writing is, at least to some extent, intrinsically feminine.

> I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs [...]. Her writing can only keep going.[178]

4.5. Ovid's Dido: creation of the text, continuation of the story

Her. 7 is imagined as being written after (Vergil's) Dido has discovered that Aeneas' fleet is leaving at *Aen*. 4.397-407.[179] This passage precedes Dido's dialogue with her sister Anna (4.416-436), where the heroine begs her to go to Aeneas and ask him for *tempus inane* (433). Accordingly, Ovid's epistle replaces Anna's presumed verbal plea and may be seen as an actual letter handed by Dido to Anna, to be ultimately given to Aeneas.[180] This idea seems to be supported by the last lines of *Her*. 7, where Dido directly addresses her sister before committing suicide (191-194). Filling the gaps left by previous sources, or literally rewriting and recasting (parts of) the relevant mythical episodes, is an Ovidian strategy that we have already analysed while discussing *Her*. 4

[177] Similarly, many contemporary female writers have drawn from the work of Vergil to create their writing, as they were *other Didos*: "the themes [...] will enable us to discern a Virgil who is specifically female. The innate paradox of this notion cannot be overstated. For thousands of years Virgil has been the quintessentially male poet singing of 'arms and the man' and hailed as 'Father of the West'" (Cox 2011, 1-2).

[178] Cf. Cixous 1976, 876; 889; for the equation between women's writing and body within the *Heroides*, see also Spentzou 2003, 151-159.

[179] See Piazzi 2007, 15; Knox 1995, 201.

[180] Cf. Piazzi 2007, 17; Knox 1995, 201-202.

and 9.[181] Like her fellow heroines, Dido not only reshapes her myth but re-creates her new identity as an elegiac, and tragic, character.[182]

Given the weight and significance of the tradition she is bearing, i.e. her *fama* as an epic character in the *Aeneid*, Ovid's Dido is not concerned with providing a background for her story but starts her epistle *in medias res* with the word *sic*,[183] which is intended to link her text to previous facts and events.[184] The opening of Dido's letter is characterised by a metaphor, where the heroine compares herself, or her poem/letter, to a swan: *sic ubi fata vocant, udis abiectus in herbis / ad vada Maeandri concinit albus olor*.[185] Such a beginning has led some scholars to describe this epistle as Dido's swan song, as it is supposed to contain the *ultimissima verba* of the heroine, which are written right before she commits suicide (cf. also the epigraph in the very last couplet of the epistle, at lines 195-196).[186] At the same time, this opening differs from most of the openings of other epistles, where the heroines usually introduce themselves through a formula, a periphrasis or a reference to their own and/or their partner's name or origin.[187]

In this respect, it is notable that *Her*. 7 does not reveal the identity of its author immediately, but there is a sort of suspension in the indication and, accordingly,

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[181] Cf. above, 2.1; 2.2; 3.1.

[182] "Ovid, then, I contend, does not seek to annihilate Virgil's text through his parody. Rather, he uses the *Aeneid* to create a concentration and density of signifying effects that both elevates his own poem as an object of discourse and threatens its very coherence" (Miller 2004, 61); see also Gross 1979, 310; Kuhlmann 2003, 254-269.

[183] This opening may recall Dido's last speech in *Aen*. 4: cf. line 660, *sic, sic iuvat ire sub umbras*.

[184] Some manuscripts report an alternative opening, i.e. *accipe, Dardanide, moriturae carmen Elissae; / quae legis a nobis ultima verba legis*. According to Knox 1995, 203, this opening is spurious and may represent an interpolation of a "medieval reader". Although certain scholars (e.g. Dörrie 1960 and Kirfel 1969) believed it authentic, there are some elements which may suggest that this couplet is not Ovidian: the word *carmen* is never used within the *Heroides* to indicate the poem (the only exception is 15.7); the immediate and abrupt reference to Dido's suicide; the *codices potiores* do not transmit this opening. In light of these elements, and following the main editors and scholars, I will also take these two lines as spurious; for a review of the scholarly debate, cf. Piazzi 2007, 113-115.

[185] For Dido's letter as a swan song, see Jacobson 1974, 76-93; Habermehl 2006, 75-76; Zellner 2007, 14-19; cf. Ov. *Met*. 14.428-430; *Fast*. 2.108-110; Ap. Rhod. 4.1300-1303. According to Adamietz 1984, 123, the comparison to the swan represents an elegiac counterpart to Vergil's description of Dido as a Bacchant in *Aen*. 4.300-303.

[186] See Walde 2000, 131; Habermehl 2006, 88.

[187] See e.g. Knox 1995, 203; Piazzi 2007, 114.

identification of the writer, as Dido only mentions her name for the first time at line 7 (*certus es ire tamen miseramque relinquere Didon*, 7).[188] However, an educated reader would have probably been able to identify Dido as the author of this epistle a couple of lines before, at *Her*. 7.5, where a reference is made to the lost *fama* (reputation), which is a widespread motif in *Aen*. 4 (cf. e.g. 4.173-197; 663-665) and marks Dido's and Aeneas' unfortunate relationship.[189] Yet this hint at the Vergilian Dido only occurs at line 5: why does Dido delay the introduction of herself as the writer and author of the text? This delay is consistent with the way Dido casts herself throughout the epistle, namely as an *auctor* who is completely in control of her text and story, one who enjoys writing it and making it overcome its boundaries and expand in every direction. Therefore, the delay in referring to herself is the earliest expression of Dido's relationship with her writing, which is artistically refined, rhetorically elaborated and characterised by irony and ambiguity; the heroine enjoys the creation of the text and the way she can manipulate it.[190] The spurious opening couplet (cf. n. 184), the metaphor of the swan (1-4) and the reference to the *verba* (6) suggest that the text, even more than its author, appears in the foreground at the start of this epistle and materialises itself as an actual physical and tangible presence.[191]

This prominence of the text enhances Dido's role as a highly ironic (and Ovidian) author (cf. 17-22). The heroine claims that, after having deserted her, Aeneas will have

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[188] Cf. *Aen*. 4.554; *Met*. 11.440; *Her*. 6.51, 15.99 (see Piazzi 2007, 124-125); for the adjective *misera* linked to Dido, cf. Ov. *Am*. 2.18.25 (*quodque tenens strictum Dido miserabilis ensem*); see also Dido's first plea to Aeneas at *Aen*. 4.315 (*mihi iam misera*). Knox 1995 prints *Dido* at line 7 and maintains (204) that "the Greek accusative in *–o* is the only form attested in Latin (*TLL Onom*. s.v. 146.47-9)".

[189] See also *Aen*. 4.322-323 (cf. 317, *merui*; and *Her*. 7.5, *merita*), 547; for a discussion on the variant readings of this line, see Piazzi 2007, 122-123. For Dido's *fama* as ill repute and the reception of this concept in Augustan poetry, cf. e.g. Hallett 2006, 37-42; see also Knox 1995, 204.

[190] Cf. Barthes 1975, 3. Dido's pleasure in writing may reflect a sort of narcissistic pleasure that derives from autobiographical story-telling: "In its silent autobiographical exercise, personal memory turns the narratable self into Narcissus. [...] Like an impossible game of mirrors, the self is indeed here both the actor and the spectator, the narrator and the listener, in a single person" (Cavarero 2000, 40); see also De Lauretis 2008, 23.

[191] "Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of our erotic body. The pleasure of the text is irreducible to physiological need" (Barthes 1975, 17): at lines 5-6, Dido's *corpus* (together with her *fama* and *animus*) is compared to her words (*verba*, 6).

to gain another love and another Dido (17), who, in any case, will be abandoned by Aeneas again (18):[192] *alter habendus amor tibi restat et altera Dido / quamque iterum fallas altera danda fides* (17-18).[193] By mentioning an *alter ... amor* and an *altera Dido*, it seems that the heroine is hinting at Aeneas' future relationship with Lavinia:[194] even though Dido cannot be aware of such a relationship within the literary fiction, the Ovidian character, who has learnt from Vergil's *Aeneid*, is again playing with the Vergilian intertext, showing that she is more cunning and experienced than her epic counterpart. At line 18, however, Dido adds that the *fides* (18; here "pledge", "guarantee") given to this *altera Dido* shall also be disregarded – something which does not seem to happen in the *Aeneid*.[195] Beyond playing with an elegiac topos (the lack of *fides* of the beloved),[196] Dido, while alluding to the *Aeneid*, is also pointing out a possible, unexpected, future scenario that differs from the implied and expected outcome of the story: the happy marriage between Aeneas and Lavinia.[197] In the Vergilian poem, Lavinia is often mentioned but does not play an active role (she appears, in fact, only at 12.64-69). Accordingly, the figure of Lavinia may be said to be a mere construction in the *Aeneid*, the *telos* which guides Aeneas throughout the poem: the reader can only imagine the outcome of the relationship between her and Aeneas.[198] In other words, Dido does not simply hint at Vergil's poem, but is also somehow reshaping, challenging and correcting it by claiming that the events will not necessarily

[192] For the variant readings of this couplet, cf. Piazzi 2007, 133-135.

[193] It is worth noting the anaphoric repetition of *altera* (*alter amor*; *altera Dido*; *altera fides*), "che offre l'immagine caricaturale di un Enea che seduce e abbandona donne 'in serie' ..." (Piazzi 2007, 135); cf. also Spoth 1992, 152; Lindheim 2003, 93.

[194] " ... ma il lettore di Virgilio non può non cogliere in queste parole un'allusione – involontaria da parte dell'eroina, volontaria da parte dell'autore – a Lavinia e ai patti che Enea stipulerà con il re Latino" (Piazzi 2007, 136).

[195] Cf. Verg. *Aen*. 4.371-373, but also Eur. *Med*. 492; "Dido represents Aeneas as a feckless rover, running away from responsibility" (Knox 1995, 206). At Ov. *Fast*. 3.543-694, Lavinia fears that Aeneas is erotically involved with Dido's sister Anna, who is then identified with Anna Perenna.

[196] The lack of *fides* is a widespread elegiac topos starting with Catullus: cf. e.g. Cat. 70, 71, 72, 73, 75; this is also a *Leitmotiv* within the *Heroides*: cf. e.g. Penelope in *Her*. 1 (esp. 75-80); Oenone in *Her*. 5, Hypsipyle in *Her*. 6 and Medea in *Her*. 12 (*passim*); Piazzi 2007, 138-139.

[197] Cf. Barchiesi 2001, 29-48; Liveley 2008, 86-102.

[198] See e.g. Woodworth 1930, 175-194; Graft-Hanson 1976, 65-72; Perotti 2009, 7-28.

go as one (the knowledgeable reader) may expect. The omissions, the unspoken and unwritten contents of the *Aeneid* can ultimately be deconstructed and reconstructed according to a different, elegiac and female, perspective.[199]

At the same time, the *iunctura* of *altera Dido* (17)[200] may also refer to another version of the same character, who departs from the authoritative model of the Vergilian Dido. By hinting at another version of herself, the heroine incorporates into her fictional persona the idea of a proliferation of texts, stories and characters intrinsic to a narration or storytelling, as well as to her own eternal return as a fictional character.[201] In other words, Aeneas will meet 'another Dido' every time his story is (re-)told: in future stories and generations, this story may change and multiplies its potential developments, thereby presenting a different, more powerful version of the same character (Dido).[202] By using the expression *altera Dido* and referring to 'another' version of herself, the heroine stresses the power and autonomous agency of the text that she is writing.

A similar value of the text as a replacement or alternative version of the main (and most famous) source is suggested in the following lines, where the heroine rhetorically asks when Aeneas will be able to found a city like Carthage (*ut condas instar Carthaginis urbem*, 19) and look at his peoples from the citadel (20).[203] Also in this case, Dido hints at the events that will allegedly happen, and are implied, in the Vergilian narrative but are not actually present, nor explicitly told, within the *Aeneid*. From *Her*. 7, the Vergilian poem thus appears as a sort of Michelangelo's "Non-Finito" (sculptures where human figures are carved as though they are struggling to free

[199] It can be said that the Ovidian Dido changes the symbolic language of the *Aeneid* into signs, i.e. her written text, by developing its implied meaning, while also modifying its intrinsic message. Accordingly, she reifies, objectifies that message, and somehow appropriates it; cf. Kristeva 1980, 40.

[200] Cf. *Aen*. 6.89, where the Sybil prophesies that an *alius ... Achilles* shall wait Aeneas in Italy.

[201] Cavarero 2000, 33; 120: "[...] every time and in every circumstance, we perceive ourselves and others as unique beings whose identity is narratable in a life-story. [...] Moreover, we are all familiar with the narrative work of memory, which, in a totally involuntary way, continues to tell us our own personal story"; "The narration, multiplying itself within itself, becomes 'infinite and circular'".

[202] Cf. Desmond 1993a, *passim*.

[203] For some parallels of line 19, cf. *Aen*. 1.5, 33; *Her*. 7.20: *et videas populos altus ab arce tuos?*

themselves from the rough marble piece), since the continuation of the story, characterised by a happy ending, is only implied but not told or openly narrated. In other words, the final product is drafted, but not wholly depicted or sculpted. In these lines, Dido thus seems to overcome the boundaries of the elegiac genre, as well as the text that she is currently writing, in order to change, and challenge, the expected end of the story in the epic poem, the *Aeneid*.

In the following couplet (21-22), however, the heroine appears to return within the limits of her elegiac text, by saying that even if Aeneas finally achieves what he is seeking, he will not be able to find an *uxor* who loves him as she does.[204] By referring to herself as *uxor* (22), Dido implies that her union with Aeneas was an actual marriage, and accordingly misunderstands the meaning of her sexual intercourse with the Trojan hero, just as the Vergilian character does.[205] The use of the word *uxor* recalls a familiar and intimate frame, which characterises other sections of the letter and culminates in Dido's presumed motherhood. The depiction of herself as a legitimate wife of Aeneas and mother of his *potential* child, as well as her emphasis on the incorrectness (and illegitimacy) of her abandonment, play a role, as we shall see, in Dido's shaping of an alternative (subjective) narrative throughout the epistle.

4.5.1. The burden of the past: Dido's (re)construction of reality

After having shown how *Her*. 7 can be interpreted as Dido's literary creation, in this section I further develop this interpretation to demonstrate how the heroine builds her view of reality and reinterprets her *epic* past to explicitly make Aeneas' behaviour towards her appear reproachable. At the same time, she begins to incorporate Aeneas'

[204] *Her*. 7.21-22: *omnia ut eveniant, nec di tua vota morentur / unde tibi, quae te sic amet, uxor erit?*
[205] Cf. *Aen*. 4.171-172, 307-308, 323-324; Piazzi 2007, 139; see also Brescia 2011, 9-11.

(either real or potential) children into the rhetorical manipulation of her literary past, as well as her relationship with Aeneas. To begin with, the heroine recalls the stages of her falling in love with Aeneas, while describing the symptoms of her still-present love for him (23-32).[206] Aeneas does not offer himself as an appropriate *materia* (this is a marked substantive within Ovid's erotic poetry) for Dido's care (*curae ... meae*, 34);[207] his love is illusory (... *et ista mihi falso iactatur imago*, 35), as his character differs from the *ingenium* ("nature", 36) of his mother, i.e. Venus: *matris ab ingenio dissidet ille suae* (36).[208] Certain lexical choices characterising these two couplets (33-36) give Dido and Aeneas' relationship a compelling elegiac aspect (cf. e.g. *coepi ... amare*, 33; *materiam*, *curae ... meae*, 35; *fallor*, 35).[209] Since Dido's unrequited love in *Her.* 7 is (also) depicted through stereotypically elegiac patterns, Aeneas cannot be said to actually contravene the rules of elegiac poetry by rejecting Dido's love, because unrequited loves and unhappy relationships are common motifs, as well as very prominent patterns, in elegy.

In Dido's narration, however, Aeneas does break from the norms of elegy, insofar as he goes beyond its limits as a literary genre. By representing the epic hero *par excellence*, and the epic conception of masculinity, Aeneas merges epic discourse with erotic poetry, letting the heroic elements penetrate elegy. In other words, "following Italy" (cf. *Aen.* 4.361) is what causes Dido's hostility towards Aeneas both as a fictional character (i.e. an abandoned woman) and as a writer of her epistle, since the entry of an

[206] "Throughout this section O.'s heroine writes as if Aeneas were a third party to the 'conversation'" (Knox 1995, 207); for the description of love as an illness, cf. e.g. Thumiger 2018, 253-273.

[207] Cf. e.g. *Am.* 1.1.1-2; 1.3.20 (*te mihi materiam felicem in carmine ... praebe*): "O.'s choice of words is not casual: Dido, cast in the role of the elegiac lover, sounds like the elegiac poet" (Knox 1995, 209); for *cura*, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 4.1, 5, 332, 394, 448. The word *materia* (etymologised from *mater* by Maltby 1991, 371) may recall the maternal theme, which is a *Leitmotiv* in Dido's epistle.

[208] Cf. *e contrario*, *Aen.* 4.12-13: *credo equidem (nec vana fides) genus esse deorum. / degeneres animos timor arguit* .... For a discussion of the variant readings of this couplet, see Piazzi 2007, 152-154; Knox 1995, 209, for instance, changes the form *falso* (35), the reading transmitted by the manuscripts, to *falsae* (past participle); this revision, however, does not seem necessary to make sense of the Latin.

[209] Cf. Knox 1995, 209; Piazzi 2007, 155-158.

epic component into the elegiac universe may disrupt her literary construction.[210] Concurrently, since the *Heroides* are an example of *Kreuzung der Gattungen*, the coexistence of various literary genres enriches, instead of undermining, the essence of these texts.[211] Just as rejected loves and unhappy relationships substantiate elegy, make it exist as a genre and as poetic production, so the mixture of literary genres, that is, the penetration of epic into elegy, gives birth to the text of the *Heroides*. By letting the disturbing content of Aeneas' epic enter her elegiac epistle, Dido, both as a lover and a writer, plays with the intrinsic variety and inconsistency of the genre (elegy) and specific literary work (the *Heroides*).

Enhancing the rhetorical nature of her discourse, the heroine depicts herself as a different character from her Vergilian counterpart to allegedly persuade Aeneas to remain with her. As we have seen, while Vergil's Dido is extremely angry at Aeneas,[212] the Ovidian heroine seems, in most cases, to be not only far more rational but also merciful and forgiving.[213] This attitude emerges from certain passages within the epistle, such as lines 45-46, where Dido claims she is not worth Aeneas taking any risks for, if he is leaving so quickly to flee from her (*dum me per freta longa fugis*, 46).[214] Beyond portraying a different version of Dido, these lines appear to be characterised by a high degree of irony, and must accordingly be interpreted as the result of Dido's rational construction of both her text and reality. By presenting herself as compassionate, as well as displaying calm and good sense, Dido certainly places herself in a good light (cf. also lines 61-70: e.g. 63, *vive, precor!*).[215] At the same time, and

[210] Cf. Piazzi 2007, 155: "... la dimensione metaletteraria risulta particolarmente forte e Didone pare uniformarsi al modello del perfetto poeta d'amore, che vorrebbe trasformare in personaggio elegiaco anche l'eroe epico Enea"; see also Miller 2004, 67-68.

[211] Cf. Kroll 1924, 202-224.

[212] For Dido's pathological *furor* and its link to maenadism and Bacchic madness, cf. Mazzini 1995, 92-105; Krummen 2004, 25-69; Totola 2012, 689-703; see also Schiesaro 2005, 85-110.

[213] See e.g. Jacobson 1974, 76-93; Kuhlmann 2003, 263-266; Habermehl 2006, 91.

[214] Cf. *Aen*. 4.314; Serv. *ad Aen*. 4.328 (*et amatorie et amare: nam haec fugam dicit quam ille nominat profectionem*); Ov. *Rem. am*. 281.

[215] Cf. e.g. *Her*. 5.27 (*popule vive, precor*); 11.125; *Fast*. 3.428.

more importantly, she is demonstrating that she is in control of her feelings and drives, as well as the construction of her subjective narration.

This pattern is expanded at lines 73-74, where the heroine again argues that a safe journey is worth a bit of delay in leaving (*grande morae pretium tuta futura via est*, 74), but this appears particularly developed from lines 75 onwards, when Dido mentions Ascanius, Aeneas' son.[216] With a sharp rhetorical argument, Dido states that she is not so concerned about Aeneas (*nec mihi tu curae*, 75) but for his young son (*puero parcatur Iulo!*).[217] Through her reference to Aeneas' son, Dido recalls the scene from *Aeneid* 1 where Cupid, disguised as Ascanius, was sent by Venus to the queen of Carthage to make her fall in love with Aeneas.[218] By suggesting that she is keen on putting Ascanius' life before Aeneas', Dido presents herself as a proper Roman *matrona*, who is more concerned with the safety of her offspring than anyone else.[219] Concurrently, by hinting at Ascanius as a replacement for his father, as well as a substitutive object, a fetish of Aeneas, the heroine seems to play with a certain incestuous frame already implied in the Vergilian episode.[220]

Furthermore, in the following lines, Dido cunningly attributes the responsibility for Ascanius' potential death to Aeneas, who already represents the reason for Dido's prospected death, *te satis est titulum mortis habere meae* (76): the word *titulus*, which may suggest the frame of a "title" of honour or glory, is here ironically linked to the

[216] The motif of the *mora*, i.e. Aeneas' delay in leaving Carthage, is quite recurrent in *Aen*. 4 (cf. e.g. 51, 433, 566-569); for Ascanius as an argument against the hero's departure, see e.g. Habermehl 2006, 79-80; Casali 2004-2005, 155-156; also *Her*. 7.153-155, 161. In the *Aeneid*, by contrast, Ascanius was presented as a reason to leave as soon as possible: cf. *Aen*. 4.234; 274-276; 353-355; "She reverses the arguments made by Aeneas, asserting that the prudent move on his son's behalf is to wait" (Knox 1995, 215).

[217] Cf. line 77, *puer Ascanius*; see also *Her*. 12.187; Eur. *Med*. 346-347.

[218] Cf. *Aen*. 1.657-660; for the metapoetic implications of the overlap between Cupid and Ascanius, as well as the generic interplay within the *Aeneid*, cf. Ziogas 2010, 150-174.

[219] See e.g. Dixon 1988, 104-140.

[220] "Her perception of Aeneas' son alters dramatically from the beginning of the Trojans' stay in Carthage to the moment of their departure. At first, she holds Ascanius in her lap, captivated by his resemblance to his father, using him as a surrogate in an attempt to cover up and at the same time to feed her passion for the Trojan hero with his substitute" (Rogerson 2017, 74); cf. also Hardie 2006, 26-29; Bowie 1998, 66-68; McAuley 2016, 59-88.

genitive *mortis*.[221] The heroine thus makes herself appear as an attentive mother, whereas Aeneas is depicted as an inconsiderate father, as well as husband/partner: *si quaereas, ubi sit formosi mater Iuli – / occidit a duro sola relicta viro* (83-84).[222] By referring to Creusa through a periphrasis, *formosi mater Iuli*, Dido not only avoids mentioning Creusa's name, she also mentions Aeneas' son for the third time in a few lines (75, 77, 83), as well as linking to him an adjective recalling his beauty and, perhaps, his erotic appeal to her (*formosus*, 84).[223] Through these emphatic and repeated mentions of Ascanius, Dido identifies herself with Creusa (Aeneas' first wife) and, simultaneously, hints at her 'unconscious' desire for his child.[224] Accordingly, the authentic desire of motherhood and the mother's drive towards Aeneas' son as a love object seem to coexist within the heroine.[225]

In the lines hitherto analysed in this section, Dido appears to be characterised by certain tendencies that can be interpreted and further explained through the lens of modern feminist theory. First, by presenting her version of her persona and events (including Aeneas' decision to leave), Dido builds up a new story and manipulates the narration. Such a manipulation, as well as a rational and astute interplay with her Vergilian alter-ego, leads to the construction of a new text, which alters Dido's mythic megatext. This alteration affects and modifies the entire mythological episode

[221] Cf. Piazzi 2007, 197; *Her*. 15.190 (... *si moriar, titulum mortis habere meae?*); 21.176; *Tr*. 1.11.30.

[222] Cf. *Her*. 4.119 (*si quaeras, ubi sit, Theseus latus ense peregit*); 12.199; for *a duro sola relicta viro*, cf. Prop. 2.24.46; *Ars* 3.36.

[223] Ascanius is usually referred to as *pulcher* in the *Aeneid* (cf. 5.570; 7.107; 9.293, 310), whereas *formosus* is generally avoided in the high style; by contrast, it is very frequent in elegy (e.g. Ov. *Am*. 1.14.31; 1.6.63; 3.3.18; 2.1.37; *Her*. 14.88; *Ars* 1.55; Cat. 86.1, 3; Prop. 2.4.9; 1.20.52; 2.28.2; cf. *TLL* VI 1.1110.71-1113.22, *s.v.* "formosus" [Kapp]). On the alternation between two names for Aeneas' son, i.e. Iulus and Ascanius, see Rogerson 2017, 8-11; Knox 1995, 215.

[224] While comparing the Ovidian Dido to Medea, Casali 2004-2005 also remarks (156): "Creusa thus becomes a first Dido, and this Creusa first Dido, quite rightly, inherits also Dido's literary models. Creusa is characterised by Ovid as an abandoned Medea – but now, in the elegiac epistle, appropriately as an elegiac Medea (*Her*. 7, 83-84)".

[225] Drawing from the Freudian Oedipus' complex, the mother's attraction to her own son has been labelled as "Jocasta's complex" (cf. Besdine 1968, 259-277); see also Rich 1977, 186: "The mother as seducer, with whom the son longs to sleep, against whom the incest taboo is strongest: Jocasta, Gertrude. [...] ... it is mother-son incest which has been most consistently taboo in every culture and which has received the most obsessive attention in the literature men have written".

concerning Dido (and Aeneas). Remodelling the story also means changing the shape of reality, which is in fact re-interpreted and renewed by Dido's intervention.[226] Through the production of a subjective text, the heroine eventually departs from the (male-based) heroic narrative in which her story was inscribed, thereby imposing her perspective and surviving as a self-standing subject, instead of an object determined by an external discourse.[227]

Furthermore, this intervention in the narration also contributes to Dido's construction of her subjectivity and, accordingly, her motherhood. By showing her concern for Ascanius, Dido begins to present herself as a suitable Roman mother, and *matrona*. This process of appropriation of Aeneas' (already existing or potential future) child, which will be further developed later within the epistle, expresses the heroine's attempt to appropriate, and take control over, Aeneas' future (see below, 4.5.2.). Beyond being a result of the construction of women as 'Others' and their categorisation as objects of discourse, maternity can also be the site of *jouissance*, and a cause of empowerment, for women, who through their maternal experience reinterpret the semiotics, i.e. the language of reality.[228]

In the case of Dido, besides this ambivalence, the 'maternal' (feeling) brings about Narcissism, as she sees in Ascanius (or the potential child she may have from Aeneas) a hypostasis of her subjectivity. Ascanius, in his function as a replacement of both Aeneas

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[226] Segal 1986a, 52 ff., used the term megatext to indicate Greco-Roman myths when taken collectively to imply a single fictional world, based on the fusion of oral tradition and written sources as well as folkloric tales. In this instance, Dido's megatext can be said to be made up of all sources referring to Dido's mythological episode – and/or some elements/parts of it.

[227] Cf. De Lauretis 1984, 109: "Suppose we were to ask the question: what became of the Sphinx after the encounter with Oedipus on his way to Thebes? Or, how did Medusa feel seeing herself in Perseus' mirror just before being slain? [...] Medusa and the Sphinx, like the other ancient monsters, have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions – places and topoi – through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning".

[228] To put it in Kristeva's words, the "maternal" may be seen as "the ambivalent principle that derives on the one hand from the species and on the other hand from a catastrophe of identity which plunges the proper Name into that 'unnameable' that somehow involves our imaginary representations of femininity, non-language, or the body" (Kristeva 1985, 134).

and an actual son, thus becomes for Dido the love object in which desire for Aeneas and desire for a child (as a reflection of herself) coexist. This desire for a son and the inclination to see herself as a mother are linked to Dido's creation of both her text and reality. The lack of a son is amended by another kind of production, a literary one, through which the heroine shapes the present as an alternative – or parallel – reality for Aeneas' and her own (past, present, and future) story. At the same time, the pleasure involved in the production of the text replaces, and is complementary to, an actual sexual object, of which Dido possesses only the *imago*, i.e. an image, a reflection, a phantom. In this respect, Scholes' words concerning the relationship between artistic creation and eroticism appear particularly instructive.

> The archetype of all fiction is the sexual act. In saying this I do not mean merely to remind the reader of the connection between all art and the erotic in human nature. Nor do I intend simply to suggest an analogy between fiction and sex. [...] In the sophisticated forms of fiction, as in the sophisticated practice of sex, much of the art consists of delaying climax within the framework of desire in order to prolong the pleasurable act itself. When we look at fiction with respect to its form alone, we see a pattern of events designed to move toward climax and resolution, balanced by a counter-pattern of events designed to delay this very climax and resolution.[229]

In *Her*. 7, the desire for (a son from) Aeneas thus changes into a desire of narration, which is prolonged, and extended, through deconstruction and reconstruction of both past events and present reality. Instead of producing a child, the sexual act (between Dido and Aeneas) produces a text, i.e. Dido's letter. By re-interpreting the symbolic, and linguistic, meaning of sexual acts and categories, masculinity and femininity, as well as social and cultural hierarchies, Dido manages to place herself in the position of the speaking subject. Thereby, she changes her status as a narrated character into the reader and, accordingly, the author of her own story – and text. In semiotic terms, Dido simultaneously represents the receiver (the reader), the vehicle (as Ovidian character) and, ultimately, the producer (the writer of the epistle) of a system of signs. In the shift

[229] Scholes 1979, 26, as quoted in De Lauretis 1984, 106-107; see also Barthes 1975, 10.

from her function as a reader (of the Vergilian *Dido*) to her role of author, the heroine re-interprets the source texts from her perspective and gives them a different meaning, thereby appropriating a subjective speech, language and discourse, which are then hypostasised within the text she writes.[230] The heroine's re-interpretation of patriarchal discourse and appropriation of its meaning are accomplished through the construction of her text/writing as a substitutive body, which reflects both her feminine body and the projection of it into a new entity. In other words, Dido's construction of her subjectivity is grounded and dependent on her (whether fictional, actual or displaced) *motherhood*. As I will show in the next section, Dido's presumed pregnancy is what determines, and defines, her self-portrayal.

4.5.2. Control over the future: *écriture feminine*, pregnancy and the birth of the text

The most explicit reference to Dido's alleged pregnancy occurs at lines 133-138, where the heroine suggests that Aeneas might be abandoning a *gravidam* Dido (133).[231]

> forsitan et gravidam Didon, scelerate, relinquas
> parsque tui lateat corpore clausa meo.
> accedet fatis matris miserabilis infans 135
> et nondum nato funeris auctor eris,
> cumque parente sua frater morietur Iuli,
> poenaque conexos auferet una duos.
>
> (Ov. *Her*. 7.133-138)

The adverb *forsitan* at the beginning of the line implies that (Ovid's) Dido is here ironically referring to the Vergilian intertext, as in *Aen*. 4.328-329 the queen complains about the lack of a *parvulus ... Aeneas* (see above, 4.4.).[232] As mentioned, these

[230] De Lauretis 1984, 179: "[...] the interpreter, the 'user' of the sign(s), is also the producer of the meaning (interpretant) because that interpreter is the place in which, the body in whom, the significate effect of the sign takes hold. That is the subject in and for whom semiosis takes effect".

[231] Cf. *Her*. 6.119-120, Hypsipyle's *actual* motherhood: *nunc etiam peperi: gratare ambobus, Iason! / dulce mihi gravidae fecerat auctor onus*; 6.61-62; 11.38.

[232] Piazzi 2007, 248: "La Didone ovidiana invece prospetta la gravidanza come una possibilità reale, quasi un ulteriore e pesante argomento ricattatorio nei riguardi di Enea ...".

references to a child from Aeneas may be read as an allusion to a sort of fetishistic replacement of Dido's love object, as well as her incestuous desire.[233] While still suggesting the possibility of real motherhood, in *Her*. 7 Dido can be said to *give birth* to the text, the epistle itself,[234] which as we have seen, replaces a potential child as "a token of her authentication" and active intervention in the narration.[235] The epistle changes the childless (*Aen*. 4.327-330) and speechless (*Aen*. 6.450-476) Dido into a woman who is entitled to tell her side of the story.

Such an argument finds further evidence in the following lines, where Dido claims that a part of Aeneas (i.e. a child from him) might be hidden in her own body: *parsque tui lateat corpore clausa meo* (134).[236] On a literal level, this sentence refers to Dido's pregnancy and the foetus enclosed in her body. The expression *pars tui*, moreover, enhances the idea of a coincidence of Aeneas and his (potential) child in a unique entity, as well as insisting on the concept that a son from Aeneas would represent the only possible replacement for the departure of the hero. Concurrently, insomuch as the phrasing of this line recalls certain famous passages that refer to the immortality of literary works (cf. e.g. Hor. *Carm*. 3.30.1-9; Ov. *Met*. 15.871-879),[237] the expression *pars tui* may also allude to Dido's (literary) account of Aeneas' narrative, and to Aeneas as a mythological character. In this way, Dido's body, which is said to encapsulate a part of Aeneas, symbolises the heroine's text and subjective storytelling. Her letter is therefore meant to perpetuate the memory of Aeneas' and her own narrative, and to

[233] "There, as here, in an image of considerable erotic power, Dido seeks to console herself with a bodily substitute for Aeneas" (Bowie 1998, 66); see also McAuley 2016, 59-60.

[234] Cf. Grosz 1995, 21-22: "Nevertheless, there are ways in which the sexuality and corporeality of the subject leave their traces or marks on the texts produced, just as we in turn must recognize that the process of textual production also leave their trace or residue on the body of the writer (and reader). [...] the text cannot be conceived simply as an intentional effect, but can also be seen from the point of view of its production and the labor that always leaves its mark in its product".

[235] "She is a condition of writing, for life given without infinity aspires to find its supplement of lacework within words; she is also the black power who points to the ephemeral nature of sublimation and the unrelenting end of life, the death of man" (Kristeva 1982, 161).

[236] For a similar use of the verb *lateo*, cf. e.g. Hor. *Carm*. 4.6.19-20; Ov. *Am*. 2.13.20; Sen. *Med*. 1012.

[237] Hor. *Carm*. 3.30.6-7, *non omnis moriar multaque pars mei / vitabit Libitinam*; Ov. *Met*. 15.875-876, *parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis / astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum*.

some extent (literary) life, despite the "death of its author".[238] The ambiguity implied in the equivalence 'body of a child = body of the text' continues in the following couplet, where Dido imagines that if she were pregnant, her suicide would certainly also bring about the death of Aeneas' child: *accedet fatis matris miserabilis infans* (135).[239] Aeneas, therefore, has to be considered responsible for the death of his potential offspring: *et nondum nato funeris auctor eris* (136). The word *auctor* can mean both "person responsible/cause", "parent (or ancestor)" and "author" (of a text; literary or artistic work).[240] From these words of Dido, it emerges how Aeneas' departure jeopardises the life of the heroine, along with her potential child. Concurrently, the ambiguity of the noun *auctor* hints at a (metaliterary) replacement of the body of the potential child with Dido's literary production, namely the text she is writing.

In the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas leaves Carthage, Dido loses the reason for her existence within the poem as well as her legitimation as a character (and indeed, she reappears only briefly in the underworld, as we mentioned above: cf. *Aen.* 6.450-476). In other words, Aeneas' abandonment also leads to the cancellation and obliteration of Dido as a fictional character: without Aeneas, Dido's story has no reason to continue existing within the Vergilian epos. In the Ovidian epistle, however, while implying her unavoidable destiny, the heroine simultaneously recasts the narrative of the *Aeneid* and keeps on writing her text, managing to perpetuate her existence. Although Dido's suicide seems, inevitably, to conclude her (potential) child's life, as well as that of her own, it also represents a necessary condition for the continuation of her story, which is transmitted to future generations.[241] In this respect, the heroine further adds that her

[238] Cf. Barthes 1975, 27.

[239] For *miserabilis* in reference to Dido, cf. line 7; see Knox 1995, 224.

[240] See above, 2.4-2.5; cf. *TLL* II 1194.47-1213.8, *s.v.* "auctor" [Bögel].

[241] "Contemporary philosophy, acting upon the death of the author, has indeed knowingly immersed itself in the immortal sign of writing – the true paradigm of the text – recognising the way in which this is 'linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life'. The Homeric epic, by contrast, placed the hero at the center – turning his death into an occasion for the immortality of the tale – 'the narrative then redeemed

child – indicated this time as "Ascanius' brother" (*frater ... Iuli*, 137)[242] – will die together with his mother and the same unfortunate destiny will lead away the *conexos ... duos* (138).[243] By referring to the death of Dido's foetus, this couplet adapts the elegiac topos of the simultaneous death of two lovers, who are meant to be buried together after their death, to the relationship between a mother and a son.[244] At the same time, the alleged death of the foetus articulates Dido's correction of the words of her Vergilian *Doppelgängerin*, who complained about the *lack* – not the death – of a child from Aeneas. The heroine's rewriting of, and challenge to, the Vergilian epos is what perpetuates Dido's literary life. If Dido's potential child is bound to die, her text, by contrast, will continue transmitting her memory.

As I showed in the previous sections, Dido's challenge is developed throughout the epistle and turns into an actual negation of Vergil's poem. This is particularly evident from lines 139-140 onwards, where Dido re-reads and, accordingly, rewrites the *Aeneid*. After seemingly acknowledging that Aeneas' departure was ordered by divine will (*sed iubet ire deus*, 139),[245] the heroine states that she wished the gods had prevented Aeneas from arriving in Carthage (*vellem, vetuisset adire, / Punica nec Teucris pressa fuisset humus*, 140).[246] Through this claim, Dido seemingly suggests, and tries to build, an alternative to the well-known narrative of the *Aeneid*. Accordingly, in the subsequent lines, Dido reinterprets and rewrites part of Aeneas' story from her perspective: the hero's travels thus do not appear worth the storms and, more generally, the labours he

this accepted death'; or, rather, the tale took death and immortalized the protagonist" (Cavarero 2000, 121).

[242] "A particularly forceful indictment of the ancestor of the Julian *gens* by Dido; Augustus would probably not have been amused"; Knox 1995, 225.

[243] Cf. *Met*. 2.609, *duo nunc moriemur in una* (a pregnant Coronis to Apollo as she is dying).

[244] Cf. above, *Her*. 11.60, *vive nec unius corpore perde duos*. For this elegiac topos, see e.g. Prop. 2.28, 41-42; Tib. 3.10.19-20; Ov. *Am*. 2.13.15-16; *Her*. 19.149; *Met*. 11.388. According to Casali 2004-2005, 151-152, and Schiesaro 2005, 94, Dido might allude here to infanticide (which cannot be enacted in fact because of the premature death of her foetus), thereby linking herself to Medea.

[245] Cf. *Aen*. 4.345-346, 356-358, 376-379; 6.461-464; in *Aen*. 4.268-275 Mercury urges Aeneas to leave Carthage; see Kuhlmann 2003, 254-269.

[246] Cf. Dido's remarks in *Aen*. 4.657-658; for this motif, cf. also Eur. *Med*. 1-15; Ap. Rhod. 3.773-776; 4.32-33; Cat. 64.171-172; Val. Flacc. 8.432-433.

went through (141-144), especially given that Aeneas is not heading to his homeland (Troy) but to an unknown place, where he will be a *hospes* (146) and have a troubled life (147-148; cf. *Aen*. 4.612-620).

While prospecting a different destiny for Aeneas as well as an alternative version of the story, Dido imagines how Aeneas' life could have been if he had remained in Carthage. The Trojan hero was meant to administer the treasure Dido had stolen from her brother Pygmalion (*advectas Pygmalionis opes*, 150)[247] and rule over Carthage as though it were the new city he had been decreed to found: *Ilion in Tyriam transfer felicius urbem / resque loco regis sceptraque sacra tene* (151-152).[248] By using present indicative and subjunctive forms, the heroine depicts vividly Aeneas' and Ascanius' potential life in her kingdom as though it were an actual circumstance, thereby continuing her construction of an alternative story (153-156). The queen maintains, accordingly, that if Aeneas was looking for war and seeking an opportunity for Ascanius to show his valour in battle, in Carthage there would have been plenty of enemies: *si tibi mens avida est belli, si quaerit Iulus, / unde suo partus Marte triumphus eat, / quem superet, nequid desit, praebebimus hostem* (153-155).[249] Previously in the epistle, the heroine mentioned Ascanius' safety as an argument in favour of Aeneas' stay in Carthage – at least until the end of the winter (cf. lines 73-78; above). In this passage, by contrast, Dido claims that the hero remaining in the city and establishing his kingdom in Carthage would not prevent Ascanius from fighting and obtaining his military glory.

Together with the reference to her potential child, the heroine's mention of Ascanius contributes to the construction of an alternative future for Aeneas and his offspring.

[247] Cf. *Aen*. 1.363-364, *portantur avari / Pygmalionis opes*, and *Fast*. 3.574: this may refer to Sychaeus' treasure, which Pygmalion tried to steal (cf. Knox 1995, 227).

[248] Cf. *Aen*. 1.572-573; 4.214, 374, 597; for the variant readings of this line, cf. Piazzi 2007, 261-262.

[249] In these lines, it seems that Dido is trying to find a balance between epic and elegiac values, i.e. between Aeneas' and her own ethic (cf. Piazzi 2007, 262-263); for the expression *partus ... triumphus*, cf. e.g. *Aen*. 2.578; *Am*. 2.12.16; see also *Her*. 3.122; 21.115.

According to Dido, the Trojan hero does not need to seek and found another city to assure eternal glory to his lineage, but Carthage can offer to him all he needs, including wars and enemies to enhance his own and Ascanius' *triumphus*.[250] Quite ironically, while urging Aeneas' stay in Carthage, the heroine refers to well-known Roman categories, as one can see from the expression *suo partus Marte triumphus* (154).[251] Similarly, at line 156, Dido uses a very marked sentence to indicate Aeneas' potential future rule over Carthage and the nearby peoples, i.e. *hic pacis leges, hic locus arma capit*,[252] which recalls Anchises' mention of Aeneas' mission at *Aen*. 6.847-854 (esp. *pacique imponere morem*, 852).[253] This passage demonstrates once more how, while conversing with the Vergilian intertext, Dido also deconstructs it by presenting a different development of the story from how it is written in the *Aeneid*. The heroine therefore appears in control of Aeneas' and her own destiny, at least within the literary world she builds.

This control is further articulated at lines 157-162 (cf. *Ascaniusque suos feliciter inpleat annos, / et senis Anchisae molliter ossa cubent*; 161-162), where Dido again mentions the advantages of staying in Carthage, which involve not only Aeneas but also his family and companions. In particular, the mention of Ascanius and Anchises, who represent, respectively, the future and the past, seems to hint at Dido's mastery of time

[250] For the Roman *triumphus* within the *Heroides*, cf. *Her*. 9 (above, 3.2-3.3); see also *OLD*, 1979, *s.v.* "triumphus".

[251] According to Piazzi 2007, 263, by using these expressions, Dido is trying to align to Aeneas' ideological and cultural world; for *Marte suo*, cf. *Rem. am.* 469; Cic. *Phil*. 2.95. The triumph was, indeed, a very significant element in Augustan propaganda: the *princeps* celebrated his last official triumph in 29 BC, and then rejected all the triumphal honours the Senate decreed for him. Nonetheless, Augustus manipulated the triumph in such a way that he made it become an exclusive celebration for members of the imperial family. Moreover, although the *triumphus* was not officially celebrated for Augustus, it was a recurrent motif in his propaganda, as well as buildings, monuments and coins; cf. Hickson 1991, 124-138.

[252] Cf. also *Aen*. 4.347, *hic amor, haec patria est*; Circe in *Rem. am.* 283; for *pacis leges*, cf. *Aen*. 4.618; according to Piazzi 2007, the expression *hic locus arma capit* may be read as an *aition* alluding to the future Punic Wars (and recalling *Aen*. 4.622-627).

[253] Cf. Jacobson 1974, 88.

and, accordingly, her intervention in Aeneas' (and her own) narrative.[254] By wishing Ascanius to reach a mature age with a quite programmatic formula (161), Dido implies that this age will only be concretely reached by Ascanius if he remains in Carthage.[255] These alternative narratives are in fact never fulfilled, and seem to be neutralised by Dido's suicide. The way in which the heroine describes her suicide, however, suggests that her narrative will continue, precisely through her subversive writing.

> si minus, est animus nobis effundere vitam;
> in me crudelis non potes esse diu.
> adspicias utinam, quae sit scribentis imago!
> scribimus, et gremio Troicus ensis adest,
> perque genas lacrimae strictum labuntur in ensem, 185
> qui iam pro lacrimis sanguine tinctus erit.
> quam bene conveniunt fato tua munera nostro!
> instruis impensa nostra sepulcra brevi.
> nec mea nunc primum feriuntur pectora telo;
> ille locus saevi vulnus amoris habet. 190
> Anna soror, soror Anna, meae male conscia culpae,
> iam dabis in cineres ultima dona meos.
> nec consumpta rogis inscribar Elissa Sychaei,
> hoc tantum in tumuli marmore carmen erit:
> praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ensem; 195
> ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu.
>
> (Ov. *Her*. 7.181-196)

Referring to her previous request of *tempora parva* (178), Dido claims that if Aeneas is not willing to (at least) give her some more time, she is resolved to kill herself (*est animum nobis effundere vitam*, 181),[256] so that Aeneas cannot act cruelly towards her anymore: *in me crudelis non potes esse diu* (182).[257] The expression *effundere vitam* is very iconic, as the verb *effundo* ("pour out", "spread around") is often employed in connection to liquids. Accordingly, *effundere vitam* figuratively anticipates how Dido is

[254] "Virgil's Ascanius in this way is a paradox, put repeatedly at risk by the same narrative that insists on the necessity of his escape from danger. He is a counterfactual figure in such moments, a reminder of the vulnerability of the narrative itself, a story which so easily could have turned out differently" (Rogerson 2017, 5).

[255] Cf. Casali 2004-2005, 162.

[256] This expression is an Ovidian *hapax* and will be used later by Val. Fl. 6.706 and Sil. *Pun*. 7.678.

[257] This couplet evokes *Aen*. 4.435-436; for *crudelis* in reference to Aeneas, cf. *Aen*. 4.310-311, 661.

planning to kill herself, namely through the sword (so, pouring out her blood).[258] In the following two couplets (183-186), the heroine depicts herself in the act of writing (*scribentis imago*, 183): she is writing while holding in her lap a Trojan sword (*gremio Troicus ensis adest*, 184),[259] which is now stained by tears flowing over her cheeks (*perque genas lacrimae strictum labuntur in ensem*, 185);[260] these tears, however, will be soon replaced by blood spots (186).[261] In this passage, the motif of the tears falling onto a page/piece of parchment, and spotting it, appears slightly modified, as the tears are said to fall onto the sword Dido is holding. The replacement of tears with blood spots represents both a conceptual, symbolical and concrete metamorphosis of a corporal fluid into another.

This idea of expelling body fluids can be connected to Kristeva's conception of "abjection", as well as filth and defilement, and eventually death. In light of Kristeva's theorisations, tears, blood and suicide, may therefore be interpreted as Dido's attempt to kill a part, or an expression, of her identity (i.e. what would represent its abject component) to create a new, more genuine, version of herself.[262] The process itself of writing, moreover, can also be linked to the notions of expulsion and discharge, as well as release and freeing. These elements give the idea that it is the written text that allows Dido to escape the constraints of the previous literary tradition. At the same time, writing enables the heroine to evade the mirror image of herself, which is determined by phallogocentrism and portrayals of her as an 'other'. As for the sword, this may represent both a male weapon, which would mark Dido's death as heroic, and Aeneas'

[258] Cf. *TLL* V 2.215.18-217.80 and 2.223.29-65, *s.v.* "effundo" [Leumann].

[259] Cf. *Aen*. 4.646-647: the sword becomes representative of Dido's story (cf. e.g. *Am*. 2.18.25; *Ars* 3.39-40; *Met*. 14.81).

[260] For the topos of the tears staining the letter, cf. e.g. *Her*. 3.3-4; 15.97-98; Prop. 4.3.3-6; *Met*. 9.521-522.

[261] See Canace in *Her*. 11.1-6, who describes herself as writing while holding a sword: she also maintains that her letter will be stained by her blood spots.

[262] See Kristeva 1982, 3: "... I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself. [...] it is thus that *they* see that 'I' am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death".

symbolic sexual penetration.[263] This metaphorical value is expressed most clearly at lines 189-190, where Dido claims this is not the first time her breast has been wounded by a weapon (*nec mea nunc primum feriuntur pectora telo*, 189), as it was already the seat of the *vulnus amoris* (190):[264] beyond being an elegiac topos, the theme of the *vulnus amoris* contributes to enhancing Aeneas' responsibility for Dido's suicide.[265] Such responsibility is also emphasised at lines 187-188, where Dido states ironically that Aeneas' gift (the sword) is highly opportune to accomplish her fate: *quam bene conveniunt fato tua munera nostro* (187).[266] With a cunning rhetorical argument, Dido fully attributes the reason for her (heroic) suicide to Aeneas, insofar as he was not only the cause of her death but also provided the actual weapon that will *help* Dido to accomplish her self-murder.

Dido, thus, dies abandoned by Aeneas and without having given birth to any child from him; by contrast, her writing and story will survive. The final lines of the epistle (191-196) hint at this permanence of Dido and the perpetuation of her memory through her literary production and storytelling. After an invocation of her sister Anna, which recalls *Aen*. 4.9-10 (*Anna soror, soror Anna*, 191: *geminatio* and chiasm enhance the pathos of the line),[267] Dido asks her to give the *ultima dona* to her ashes: *iam dabis in cineres ultima dona meos* (192).[268] Through this expression, the heroine entrusts to her sister her last words, which represent the epigraph on her tomb, how Dido wants to be

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[263] For the sword as an epic (masculine) weapon, cf. above, 2.1; 2.4-2.5, *passim*; for the meanings of Aeneas' sword in *Her*. 7, cf. Kahn 1968, 283-285; see also Basto 1984, 333-338, and Thakur 2013, 167-198, for Aeneas' sword within the *Aeneid*.

[264] This can be said to be an example of "realization in the narrative of events initially figurative" (Hardie 1986, 232-233) or a "Realisierung der Metapher" (Spoth 1992, 130); also the *vulnus* (of love) of *Aen*. 4.67 becomes the literal wound for Dido's suicide at *Aen*. 4.689; see also *Fast*. 3.545-546; *Ars*. 3.737-738; *Met*. 7.842.

[265] "The metaphor of love as wound is, of course, as old as love" (Knox 1995, 232); cf. *Aen*. 4.1-2.

[266] The substantive *munus* has a quite ambiguous value. In this passage it primarily means "gift", but since *munus* is often used in reference to the offerings to the dead, it also seems to hint at Dido's death: cf. *TLL* VIII 1665.66-78 and 1666.50-1667.56, *s.v.* "munus" [Lumpe]; Cat. 101.3; *Aen*. 4.646-647.

[267] For a similar chiastic anaphora in Ovid, cf. e.g. *Am*. 2.5.43; *Ars* 1.99. By invoking her sister (for the first time), Dido seems to break the borders of the epistolary genre and play the role of a tragic heroine: as observed, this code-switching is a pattern intrinsic to the *Heroides*.

[268] Cf. Dido's invocation in *Aen*. 4.622-624.

remembered (cf. 194, *hoc tamen in tumuli marmore carmen erit*). However, in contrast to the epilogue of Dido's episode in the *Aeneid* (cf. 6.450-476) and to what the heroine herself suggests throughout the epistle, Dido claims that she does not want to be thought of and commemorated as *Elissa Sychaei* (193),[269] but instead asks for an inscription which briefly summarises her story (194):[270] *praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ensem; / ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu* (195-196).[271] In this last couplet, Aeneas is said to have provided the fundamental and primary cause for Dido's suicide (the abandonment), as well as supplying the actual and more immediate agent of Dido's death, his sword: as previously mentioned, several levels – metaphorical and real, as well as *literary* and *literal* – appear here to be combined and coexistent.[272] If the sword clearly belongs to Aeneas and has come from him as a gift, the heroine, meanwhile, emphasises that the hand which accomplishes the suicidal act is her own (*ipsa sua Dido ... manu*, 196): this final emphasis on the suicide as her own action and, to some extent, independent decision, enhances the heroic nature of Dido's death.

By anticipating, and describing, her death and planning her suicide, the heroine keeps on rewriting the *Aeneid*. While in *Aen*. 6 her faith to Sychaeus appears to last even after her death, in this passage, Dido indissolubly links herself to Aeneas.[273] Moreover, this closing of the epistle also suggests that Dido will survive after her death through her writing, her literary production. Her writing will not only replace Dido as a living being

[269] Cf. Phyllis' auto-epitaph at *Her*. 2.145-146 (*inscribere meo causa invidiosa sepulcro: / aut hoc aut simili carmine notus eris*); see also *Met*. 10.198-199; cf. Lindheim 2003, 97. As for *Elissa Sychei*, a simple, appositive, genitive is used to indicate a marital union: cf. Luc. 2.343-344; Val. Max. 1.5.4 (cf. Knox 1995, 233).

[270] Cf. Dido's last words in *Aen*. 4.653-658, where the epitaph-motif is implied by the verb *vixi* (653); for epitaphs within the *Aeneid*, see Sullivan 1955, 17-20; Janko 1988, 259-260. For auto-epitaphs, cf. Phyllis in *Her*. 2.147-148 (*Phyllida Demophoon leto dedit hospes amantem: / ille necis causam praebuit, ipsa manum*) and Hypermnestra in *Her*. 14.129-130; see also *Fast*. 3.549-550 (where Dido's epitaph is formulated with the same words) and *Ars* 3.39-40 (*et ensem / praebuit et causam mortis, Elissa, tuae*).

[271] The word *carmen* may also indicate a funeral inscription: beyond *Her*. 2.146 (quoted above), cf. e.g. Verg. *Ecl*. 5.42; Prop. 4.7.83; *Am*. 2.6.59-60; *Met*. 14.441-442; *Fast*. 3.547-547 (see *TLL* III 465.74-466.4, *s.v.* "carmen" [Hey]).

[272] In rhetorical terms, this can be defined as a syllepsis, as the verb *praebeo* has a concrete value in respect to *ensem*, but an abstract one in respect to *causam*; cf. Piazzi 2007, 305; also lines 64 and 136.

[273] "When Aeneas meets Dido in the underworld in the *Aeneid*, he asks incredulously (6.458), *funeris heu tibi causa fui?* O.'s Dido answers" (Knox 1995, 233).

and entity but will perpetuate her story, as a child, Aeneas' potential child, would perpetuate her lineage. This writing eventually reshapes the previous narrative related to Dido as a mythological figure as well as her literary past. *Her*. 7 can thus be understood as a surrogate for the heroine's lack of children and subjective speech in the *Aeneid*. In this respect, the epistle is complementary to the Vergilian epic and reconciles its discontinuities. Concurrently, Dido's writing represents an extension of her own body and subjectivity, and a product of her soul, as a child would be a product of her womb.

> "Flash – an instant of time or a timeless dream; atoms swollen beyond measure, atoms of a bond, a vision, a shiver, a still shapeless embryo, unnamed. Epiphanies. Photos of what is not yet visible and which language necessarily surveys from a very high altitude, allusively. Words always too remote, too abstract to capture the subterranean swarm of seconds, insinuating themselves into unimaginable places. Writing them down tests an argument, as does love. What is love for a woman, the same thing as writing. Laugh. Impossible. Flash on the unnameable, woven of abstractions to be torn apart. Let a body finally venture out of its shelter, expose itself in meaning beneath a veil of words".[274]

As we have said, Dido seems to give birth to the text, instead of a child. As a child would have represented Dido's subjective projection into the world of history,[275] so her autobiographical text allows her to independently construct her subjectivity. Writing, in other words, gives Dido authority both as a character and the writer of her story, as well as perpetuating her narrative; by writing, Dido reproduces a version of herself as a self-standing entity and subject. In *Her*. 7, therefore, Dido can be said to replace an actual pregnancy with being pregnant with her own *text*, and changes her hypothetical motherhood into a literary production, thereby sanctioning "the death of man".[276] The essence, the materiality of her potential pregnancy is therefore replaced by the materiality of the text she is writing: this "material/maternal is the instance that expresses the specificity of female sexuality".[277] By expressing her female subjectivity through her literary production, the heroine constructs a new version of herself as a

[274] Cf. Kristeva 1985, 134.
[275] Cf. Rich 1977, 193.
[276] Cf. Kristeva 1982, 161.
[277] Braidotti 2002, 23; see also De Lauretis 1984, 5-6.

mythological figure, a reader and a woman who (actively) writes and shapes her identity. This empowerment also encompasses a certain *jouissance* in the act of writing, which balances Dido's lack of actual motherhood and childbirth experience. Through the production of a text, Dido eventually gains authority over her own body and sexuality. Her storytelling, finally, expands the borders of her individual existence and allows her to have her (subjective) voice heard throughout literary texts, the ages and dimensions.

> She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history ... By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display. [...] Write your self. Your body must be heard. [...] To write. An act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength.[278]

Conclusion: Hypsipyle and Dido as (M)others of the Text

This chapter has shown that, in Hypsipyle's and Dido's letters, writing and maternal experience, as well as pregnancy and literary childbirth, are interwoven with, and contribute to, self-empowerment and the construction of a self-standing subjectivity. The development of her relationship with Jason, Medea and her sons, alongside the subsequent constitution of a "matrixial borderspace", leads Hypsipyle to the reshaping of her identity, both as a literary persona and as a female subject. This process concurs with the manipulation of the text, which, like motherhood, is an articulation of the matrixial, liminal space that is (still) fluid and undetermined. This fluidity and indeterminacy allow Hypsipyle to remodel and reassemble both her text and identity.

As for Dido, the production of the text functions as an actual replacement of her maternal experience: the text becomes a fetish of the body of a potential child. By representing Dido's efforts to create a new version of her narrative, the epistle helps her

[278] Cixous 1976, 880-881.

to modify and master her subjective identity. The *birth* of a 'new' Dido (which conflicts with the death of Dido 'the Author') is hypostasised both by the materiality of the letter itself and by its content, through which the heroine manipulates reality and re-creates her subjective temporality. Accordingly, Dido gives a new shape to her past, present and future, thereby remodelling the narrative in which she is inscribed. For both Dido and Hypsipyle, finally, the construction of their self-standing identities is catalysed by a shift in the perception of their motherhood, which leads them to a process of self-distancing and recollection of their *authentic* self. This results in a rejection of their categorisation as 'Others' (which is brought forth by phallogocentrism) and culminates in a subjective, conscious, and deliberate embrace of their identity as (M)others.

Epilogue: *mutando perde figuram*

victa labore fugae *"Tellus", ait, "hisce vel istam,*

quae facit, ut laedar, mutando perde figuram!"

Ov. *Met.* 1.544-547a

Overcome by the fatigue of her flight, she cried: "O Earth, open! Or, by transforming it, destroy that beauty that brought me to be damaged!"

victa labore fugae, spectans Peneidas undas,

"fer, pater" inquit, "opem, si flumina numen habetis;

qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram!"

Ov. *Met.* 1.544-547[1]

Overcome by the fatigue of her flight, seeing her father's waves, she cried: "O Father, help! If you, rivers, hold divine power, by transforming it, destroy that beauty by which I pleased too much!"

What is the *difference*? This passage from the *Metamorphoses*, at the climax of the episode featuring Apollo and Daphne, has been one of the most discussed by philologists, since the majority of manuscripts have two verses for line 547.[2] Daphne is running away from Apollo, who is about to chase and – one would expect – rape her, establishing a widespread pattern in the *Metamorphoses*. In the version that is accepted by most scholars and editors, in the moment before being caught, Daphne asks her father, the river Peneus, for help, whereas in the other version she seeks help from *Tellus*, "Earth". Since Daphne's mother is barely attested in the sources (certain authors identify her either as the Naiad Creusa, or as Earth herself) and is not mentioned by Ovid, who refers to Daphne through the patronymic (*Daphne Peneia*; 1.452), Earth, the quintessential 'Great Mother', may thus be considered as a counterbalance here, a female pendant, an *alternative* (reading) to Daphne's father. Therefore, the difference

[1] Cf. Goold 1977.

[2] Cf. above, 186, n. 117.

between the two versions lies in the fact that Daphne is invoking either 'The Father' or ('The Mother') Earth. While there are many good reasons to choose the variant where Daphne invokes Peneus, unsurprisingly most (male) editors of and commentators on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have relegated the 'Tellus version' to the *apparatus criticus* – or simply expunged it. Without making a strictly philological point, I would suggest that this dichotomy between Peneus and Tellus articulates both the challenges and the potential of the aim of my survey, to 'seek the Mothers' ... within a man's writing. As I have demonstrated throughout this study, finding 'the mothers' within male writing and listening to their voices is still possible, despite the issues this quest poses. While these issues have been addressed in the Introduction, it is worth re-addressing and rethinking now, at the end of our journey, one of the fundamental questions that I formulated at the very beginning: "why is it so important to 'seek the *mothers*' within the *Heroides*?" And how can this question expand the borders of Classics as a discipline?

'Seeking the mothers' is not merely an exercise in literary criticism, but has been crucial to uncovering the self-empowerment, agency and subversive discourse of these (Ovidian) heroines. Motherhood makes the rhetoric of the *Heroides* more effective and powerful, the heroines' voices louder. Mothers have been elided and obliterated within ancient (and modern) texts since their potential agency creates male concerns about their reproductive duties, influence over their children, and their status as repositories and treasurers of the human species. The power of the 'Mothers' has been seen as something to be controlled and redirected, so as to serve the purposes and the architecture of patriarchal, androcentric societies. However, the Mothers have always found a way, perhaps subtle, ironic and highly rhetorical (as in the *Heroides*), to express their independence, power and self-construction. Throughout this study, I have provided some alternative views on Penelope, Phaedra, Canace, Deianira, Medea, Hypsipyle and Dido – all of whom are marginalised, minoritarian, voices. Penelope is not merely the

angel of the house, the guardian of Telemachus, faithfully awaiting the return of her husband; Phaedra is not simply the woman crazed by Aphrodite and her love for her stepson, but a skilful poet; Canace is not such a submissive character, nor is she so obedient to her father's will; Deianira is not the poor, unfortunate wife who mistakenly kills her husband out of her jealousy; Medea does not simply reject her maternal instinct by killing her children, but also undermines the ontological and discursive construction that lies behind her children; Hypsipyle is not entirely helpless and dependent on Jason, but instead challenges his heroism, like Medea – and against her; Dido does not bury her memory by killing herself, but perpetuates it.

These subversive heroines show how promising it can be to 'look for the mothers' within classical literature by employing complementary approaches (literary criticism; philology; modern theory) and considering the historical, as well as the political and legal, contexts. Although it has not come close to exhausting the topic of motherhood within Latin literature, this study has hopefully offered a promising path of enquiry for future scholars and piqued the curiosity of readers, thereby encouraging them to dig deeper, to find out more about female figures in the ancient world, history and literature at large. The *Heroides* invite us to go beyond the surface meaning of the text, to inquire about the polysemous discourse of the heroines and admire their metamorphic capability. In most cases, it has been observed how the heroines' self-construction is preceded by their self-destruction, or de-construction; their independence and development of a self-identity are accomplished through subtle allusions, innuendo and polymorphic language. Their protean capabilities blur and obfuscate their images: in fact, it is precisely this partially destructive (self-)transformation that catalyses their re-interpretation and reception as powerful women. A part of their literary, a-temporal, sculptured, de-personalised, objectified and passive "beauty" must be destroyed (*mutando perde figuram*) in order to give them the chance to escape from the (either

figurative or concrete) assault of phallogocentrism, to appear to us in a new light, and to tell an alternative version of their story. To survive.

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