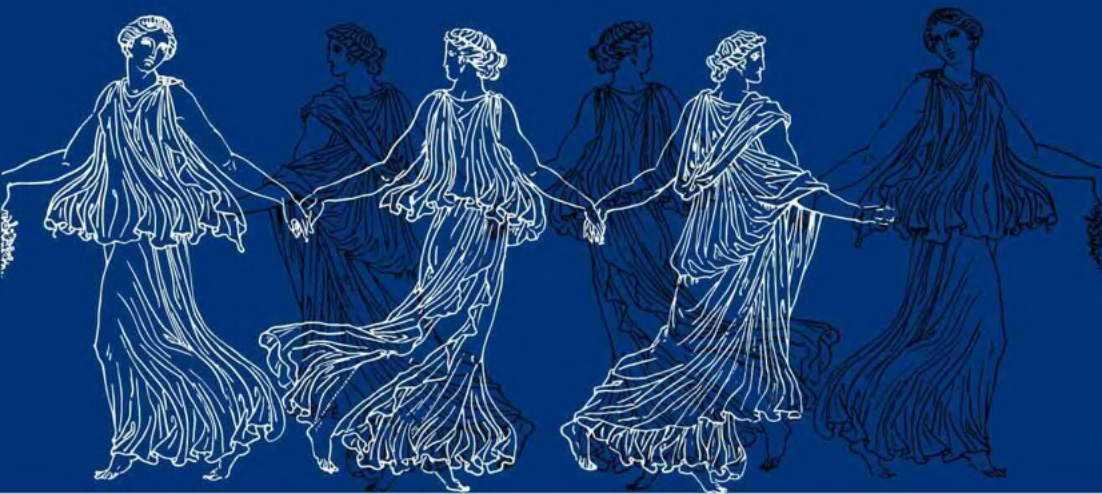


University of Toronto



PLEBEIAN

Journal of the Classics Students' Union



VOLUME XII

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Editor's Note

The field of Classics — and indeed, many disciplines across the humanities — have not had an easy year. As attitudes towards the humanities become increasingly hostile, questioning our importance, our sister programs in Classics across Canada and the United States have seen insurmountable challenges through budget cuts and program dissolution.

It is natural for undergraduates in Classics to become disillusioned by responsibility: being hailed as the “next generation” of a field with an apparently uncertain future is no simple destiny to stomach. But so long as we continue to platform our research and our voices, we can ensure the prosperity rather than the stagnation of a discipline built for change, adaptation, and growth.

Classics does not exist independently of the present. As budding classicists, we are uniquely predisposed to understanding how our contemporary realities have come to be, and how it intersects and interacts with the past. *Plebeian XII* is a testament to the forward momentum of our field, the potential of putting new minds to old stories, and the invaluable capability to recognize the living patterns of history.

This volume of *Plebeian* recognizes that the love of reading and history is not an isolated or apolitical characteristic beginning in university lecture halls, but rather the fruits of privileged environments fostering literacy and education. For the first time, on the behalf of the *Plebeian* and CLASSU this year, we have raised 100+ books to be donated to the Children's Book Bank in Toronto, allowing low-income families in our city to freely access books and literacy initiatives.

Helming *The Plebeian* has been my dream since high school, and I feel incredibly lucky to have arrived here at last. My sincerest thanks go to everybody who supported this project and most of all to the authors who trusted me with their research. I shall leave you with a final reminder: it is not an easy time to be a classicist; it's an important one.

*Prisca iuvent alios: ego me nunc denique natum / Gratulor: haec aetas moribus
apta meis.*

Elisa Kogan Penha, Editor-in-Chief

April 2026

Christianizing the Classics: The Evolution of Dante's Personification of Love in the *Vita Nuova*

Olivia Pontecorvo

Abstract

This paper argues that Dante Alighieri strategically engaged with classical sources in the *Vita Nuova* to affirm his identity as a poet, allowing him to establish a new approach for composing love poetry. It examines how his use of the prosimetric structure allows him to reframe earlier poetry, composed in the 1280's, through exegetical and narrative commentary and direct his readers' interpretations of those poems according to Christological significances. Beginning with a close reading of the twenty-fifth chapter, this paper explores how Dante justifies his poetic authority by commenting on classical authors' use of personification, and how this practice enables him to propose a new method for composing love poetry within his Christian context. Then, it studies how love was personified in the classical and courtly poetic traditions, analysing the beginning of Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*, and a poetic exchange between Alighieri and a contemporary poet. Finally, it compares Dante's poem, "To Every Captive Soul and Loving Heart" "To mi senti' svegliar dentro a lo core" in its earlier form without exegetical framing to its inclusion in the *Vita Nuova* of the 1290's to understand how his commentary effectively Christianizes his earlier poetry. Through comparing Alighieri's earlier descriptions of love personified to its presentation in the *Vita Nuova*, my analysis highlights a shift in Dante's presentation of love, from being rooted in classical and courtly trends to offering a new Christological and spiritual dimension.

Introduction

In his early work, the *Vita Nuova*, Dante Alighieri re-elaborates classical sources and modes of writing both to legitimize his identity as a poet and demonstrate his novelty in the field. Written in the mid 1290s, the *Vita Nuova*, also known as the "little book," or *libello* in Italian, narrates the poet's evolving perspective on two interdependent subjects: Dante's experience of loving Beatrice and his quest for poetic authority.¹ Through adopting a new system of poetic praise for his Lady,

¹ For the purposes of this essay, I refer to the divisions of Dante's texts put forth by Barbi. I use "libello," as a synonym for the work's title, meaning "little book," a name which Dante himself uses to describe the poetry book as of the first chapter, "io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento

Dante develops a new genre of love poetry, one which is inherently Christological.² The *libello* begins with Dante recounting his corporeal anguish over his unrequited love for Beatrice, until he is prompted to turn to writing about her to simply offer praise. Disinterested love becomes the new means to express his affections. This change in theme marks Dante's conversion from loving Beatrice in her corporeal nature to loving her as a spiritual figure representative of Christian charity, or *caritas*. In laying the ground for this thematic novelty, Dante consciously manipulates traditional uses of literary devices for his transgressive poetic agenda.

In the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante digresses from the narrative of his *libello* to scrutinize the use of rhetorical devices, specifically personification as applied to love, a thematic *topos* of this text. This digression stems from the previous chapter (XXIV), in which Alighieri reconfigures his personification of love, which, as I will demonstrate, he does to transgress traditional conceptions of love. In doing so, he offers a glimpse into his authorial ambition: that of making himself “the sum of all former traditions and the best vernacular poet.”³ This essay will study the digression's function as an entry point to examine Dante's multi-faceted use of his literary antecedents, both classical and coeval. In doing so, it will bring to light their role in Dante's self-conscious self-fashioning as an authority, or *auctoritas*, a title which holds classical prestige and allows for further self-legitimization. It will begin with an overview of the chapter to explain how his canon of classical authors exists as an essential justification for his own diverging poetic mission. Then, it will explore personification's use in the medieval literary landscape to shine a light on how this rhetorical device, dependent on its fictitious features, can function within Dante's Christian framework. Lastly, it will discuss previous conceptions of personified love as seen in Ovid, a poetic exchange (*tenzone*) between Alighieri and Dante da Maiano, and finally, the sonnets *A ciascun "alma presa e gentil core* and *Io mi senti' svegliar dentro a lo core*” from before and after their inclusion in the *Vita Nuova*. The aim of examining Dante's earlier poetry is to illustrate the progression of his use of personified love as a young poet, writing according to the courtly trends of the 1280s, to his re-elaboration of such trends in the *Vita Nuova* in the late 1290s, a time he tells us comes after acquiring deeper philosophical knowledge.⁴

d'assemblare in questo libello”; “It is my intention to copy into this little book the words I find.” For a synthetic presentation of the *Vita Nuova* and Dante's poetic mission within, see: Elisa Brilli and Giuliano Milani, *Dante's New Lives: Biography and Autobiography*, trans. Mary Maschio and Eva Plesnik, (Reaktion Books, 2023): 118-21.

2 Brilli and Milani, *Dante's New Lives*, 119, refer to this as the “spiritualization of love that characterizes the lover's journey.”

3 Brilli and Milani, *Dante's New Lives*, 120.

4 All quotations of the *Vita Nuova* are taken from the edition by M. Barbi, (Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960); the English translation is by Mark Musa, (Indiana University Press, 1973). Both accessed online through *Società Dantesca Italiana's*, <https://www.danteonline.it/index.html>.

I. Introduction of *VN* XXV and Dante's Interaction with Classical Authors

In order to understand how chapter twenty-five functions within the *Vita Nuova*, it is important to recognize the effects of the self-referential nature of the *libello*. The *Vita Nuova* is a selection of Dante's earlier poetry, composed in the 1280s, with which he ordered into a sequence of poems to create a comprehensive narrative. He adds accompanying prose to each poem, which serves to enhance the narrative by introducing and exegesis the content and composition of the poem. Through this prosimetric mode of self-conscious writing, influenced by Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Dante may guide his readers to the intended meaning behind, and effect of, his poetry. Through this, Dante affirms his "poetic license,"⁵ which permits him to transgress the traditional narratives of love poetry.

An example of this practice is purposely made visible in the twenty-fifth chapter, where he, in prose, responds to anticipated doubts regarding his presentation of love as a figure embodying human qualities, such as speaking and feeling.⁶ Indeed, this digression is anticipated as early as chapter XII, where he states that his audience might question who he speaks to in second person—that being love personified. Beyond explaining the content represented in the rhetorical device, the digression in chapter XXV enables Dante to discuss his own use of personification as in line with that of the classical *auctores*. Through this narrative move, he equates his own authority to theirs, notably Virgil, Lucan, Horace, and Ovid. These four classical authors form part of Dante's canon, and are referenced as his models throughout his works. In his treatise on the vernacular, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, he argues that by replicating the works of the *auctores*, one is able to write poetry more correctly: "Incirco accidit ut, quantum illos Proximus imitemur, tantum rectius poetemur" / "the more closely we try to imitate the great poets, the more correctly we write poetry."⁷ Pointedly, in *DVE* II, vi, 7, he names the classical authors who represent the prime examples of writers, of which three—Virgil, Ovid, and Lucan—are referenced in chapter XXV of the *Vita Nuova* for their exemplary use of rhetorical devices, specifically for their personification of love.

Having established that vernacular rhymers can be poets as authoritative and skilled as the Latin poets,⁸ Dante goes on to discuss how thirteenth-century

5 Brill and Milani, *Dante's New Lives*, 120.

6 "Potrebbe qui dubitare persona degna da dichiararle onne dubitazione, e dubitare potrebbe di ciò, che io dico d'Amore come se fosse una cosa per sé, e non solamente sustanzia intelligente, ma si come fosse sustanzia corporale" / "At this point it may be that someone worthy of having every doubt cleared up could be puzzled at my speaking of Love as if it were a thing in itself, as if it were not only an intellectual substance, but also a bodily substance" (*VN* XXV, 1).

7 All quotations from the *DVE* are from Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, ed. Firenze P. Rajna, (Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960); and the trans. Steven Botterill, (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, II, iv, 3.

8 "dire per rima in volgare tanto è quanto dire per versi in latino, secondo alcuna proporzione" / "to compose rhymed verse in the vernacular is more or less the same as to compose poetry in Latin using classical meters." (*VN*, XXV, 4).

vernacular poets can use their poetic methodology. Dante thus sets a standard that vernacular poets must reach if they wish to compose adequate poetry. For their use of devices such as personification, the subject of this chapter and occasion for the digression, he states that classical poets had not composed lyrics “così senza ragione,” / “in the way they did without a reason,”⁹ and as such, neither can the vernacular poets. Such that if a poet were to dress their words “di figura o di colore retorico, e poscia, domandato, non sapesse denundare le sue parole da cotale vesta, in guise che avessero verace intendimento,” / “in images and rhetorical coloring, and then, being asked to strip his poem of such dress to reveal its true meaning, would not be able to do so,”¹⁰ it would be a “grande vergogna,” / “veritable cause for shame.”¹¹ But, if they were to follow the model of the classical authors, employing reason behind their use of literary devices, they would be deserving of their same esteem, which could make them—and thus himself—*auctores* in the same degree.

Through its self-reflective prose, Dante’s text establishes his *auctoritate* status. As Ascoli notes, Alighieri presents himself as an author whose understanding of his own text is identical to his intention while writing it. More than just having authority as a poet whose work circulated in his surroundings, his authority as *auctoritas* takes on a more sophisticated level than his peers, precisely because it results from his self-conscious writing tactics.¹² In stating precisely how one should use rhetorical devices with intention, his view that one’s *auctoritatem* should be discerned through reading and interpreting their texts becomes clear. As Dante writes his own work, and in it, explicates its meaning, he legitimizes its significance. He recognized that his authority could not be assumed by an audience and needed to be crafted within the presentation of his narrative. His role as a self-interpreting author allows him to assume both roles of the writer, reader and interpreter, further transcending coeval and classical notions of *auctor*—an author whose authority is self-evident—and creating a “proto-modern” idea of an author whose responsibility it is to govern his works.¹³

II. Prosopopeia in Medieval Christian Landscape

After highlighting the wider purpose of the digression, it is now necessary to unpack the reason for, and thematic subject of the chapter: the personification (or prosopopoeia) of love.¹⁴ Dante uses this rhetorical device to animate the concept

9 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 10.

10 Alighieri, XXV, 10.

11 Alighieri, XXV, 10.

12 Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 190.

13 Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, 199.

14 Dante acknowledges in book three of the *Convivio* the fact that prosopopoeia, which is virtually a synonym for personification, is used by the poets—the ancient poets—very often: “usanla molto spesso li poeti.” (*Cvo*, II, ix, 2) in Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. F. Brambilla Ageno, (Le Lettere, 1995). Accessed through Società Dante Alighieri, <https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index.php>, Prosopopeia more

of love “come se fosse una cosa per sé, e non solamente sustanzia intelligente, ma si come fosse sustanzia corporale,” / “as if it were a thing in itself, as if it were not only an intellectual substance, but also a bodily substance.”¹⁵ He explains that love is an “accidente in sustanzia,” / “accident in a substance”¹⁶ such that it is an unprovoked experience that one is subjected to.¹⁷ According to his own reasoning, Dante’s treatment of love as a corporeal substance, “sustanzia corporale,”¹⁸ must be done with “ragione” (“reason”)¹⁹ to serve a hermeneutical purpose. Thus, he immediately declares that his treatment of love as a substance “secondo la veritate, è falsa,” / “is patently false.”²⁰ Through this acknowledgement, Dante clarifies his active use of *prosopopeia*, inviting readers to reflect on the meaning behind his use of the device and recognize his authority as a poet. Paola Nasti discusses Dante’s use of personified love in light of his coeval poetic landscape, highlighting that he is not only hyper-conscious in following the established rules he sets out for the use of rhetorical devices, but goes further, adding christological significance to his personification of love.²¹ The Christological significance is a key aspect of Dante’s mission with the *Vita Nuova*, to redefine how love should be written about to fit a more radically explicit Christian framework. Albert Ascoli presents a potential issue with Dante’s use of personification that challenges this Christianizing goal; describing an emotional experience as though it were a living individual was understood as a pagan practice in Dante’s Christian landscape.²² Hence, it was imperative that Dante ensured readers understood the figurative nature of his device.

Furthermore, Nasti explores medieval discussions around personification in *ars dictaminis* and *ars poetriae*, rhetorical manuals from thirteenth-century schools. With a reference to Dante’s metaphor of literary devices as words being dressed, “vesta di figura,” / “should dress his poem in images,”²³ she integrates Dante’s use of personification within the medieval rhetorical practice of *integumentum*. This exegetical device served to analyze classical literature as fictitious

explicitly refers to attributing human-like qualities, such as speaking and behaving in an articulated manner, to inanimate beings.

15 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 1.

16 Alighieri, XXV, 1.

17 Michelangelo Picone, “Per Ovidio parla Amore...”: Dante “auctor” della “Vita nova” in *Studi in onore di Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo per i suoi settant’anni, a cura degli allievi padovani*, (SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007), 47, rephrases this idea to say that love does not exist as the colour red does not exist, while objects that are red do exist, just as people who experience love exist: “non esiste quindi l’amore, ma la persona innamorata; così come non esiste il colore rosso, ma il vestito o il tavolo rosso.” Such that one can conceive of love as feelings unintentionally inhabited by an individual.

18 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 1.

19 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 8.

20 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 11.

21 Paola Nasti, “Vita nova XXV-XXVII Literature as Truth” in *Dante’s Vita Nova: A Collaborative Reading* ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Heather Webb, (University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 222-223.

22 Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, 200.

23 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 10.

narratives wrapping, or dressing, the true meaning of words. Authors thus “appropriate[d] classical literary fictions so that they would be accepted by Christian readers as valuable [showing that they could] reveal higher moral and spiritual truths.”²⁴ This practice represents the ethos of Dante’s reuse and re-elaboration of the classics—his allusions to classical literary tropes, events, and plotlines, as well as his reference to classical authors, are meant to legitimize his own poetic authority.²⁵ Here, in chapter XXV, he reveals the functional purpose he attaches to classical poetry, and particularly their presentation of love: it serves as a model to transgress to present his more explicit Christian perspective.

III. The Uses of Love Personified (1. Ovid; 2. *Tenzone* with Dante Da Maiano; 3. In the *Vita Nuova* II, III, XXIV, and XXV)

Throughout the *Vita Nuova*, Dante re-elaborates traditional conceptions of love to fit a Christian perspective. To do this successfully, he persistently reminds readers of classical and coeval depictions of the topic to subvert their authority, thereby allowing for his own presentation to appear authoritative.²⁶ His model of the *libello* as a prosimetrum facilitates this purpose, as it grants him exegetical space to present his transformation and transgression of thematic norms. To demonstrate how Dante goes beyond classical and medieval ideas of personified love, as well as how he re-elaborates his own idea of love from his early poetry to the *Vita Nuova*, I will delve into Ovid’s treatment of love in the *Remedia Amoris*, for which he is noted as a medieval authority on the subject. Then, I will look at the poetic exchange between Alighieri and Dante da Maiano, looking at his earlier conception of love’s effects on the lover. Lastly, I will explore how Dante first personifies love in the second and third chapters of the *Vita Nuova*, comparing it to the twenty-fourth chapter to understand his change of perspective, which is what initiates the digression of chapter XXV.

a. Ovid.

Among the examples of classical uses of personification in the *Vita Nuova*’s twenty-fifth chapter, Dante’s choice of Ovid demonstrates his knowledge of medieval

²⁴ Nasti, *Vita nova XXV-XXVII Literature as Truth*, 223.

²⁵ Nasti, *Vita nova XXV-XXVII Literature as Truth*, 223. She argues that Dante’s quotation from Ovid regarding his personification of love was not done because he agreed with Ovid’s view on love, or even approved it, but was rather a part of a larger mission of proving himself to be knowledgeable in the poetic tradition.

²⁶ Brilli and Millani, *Dante’s New Lives*, 119.

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discourse surrounding love. The passage Dante cites as the exemplar for personification speaks to his conception of previous poetic understandings and uses of love. Donato Pirovano, in his commentary to this reference to Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*²⁷, notes that Ovid was recognized as the praeceptor amoris in the Middle Ages, an incontestable authority on love frequently referenced by poets²⁸ Thus, by citing Ovid, Dante demonstrates his knowledge of Medieval conceptions of love as understood and used by other vernacular poets within his circle. Moreover, he quotes from Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*—Love's Remedy—a text outlining the cures for personified love torment²⁹ He quotes from the opening lines of the treatise: “Bella mihi, video, bella parantur ait,” / “‘Wars’, said he, ‘wars are in store for me, I perceive.’”³⁰ This is the first line of dialogue in the work, dictated by Love in response to seeing the title of the book, “legerat huius Amor titulum nomenque libelli,” / “Love read the name and title of this book.”³¹ Here, Ovid personifies Love to question the title to create tension between himself as a poet and the subject of this work. Through Love's accusatory tone, which implicitly claims that the book's topic will bring wars against him, Ovid highlights the power imbalance between Love and himself as the poet. Ovid thus identifies Love as an imposing human-like figure and commanding authority to which he, as the narrator, will have to reaffirm his submission to, “nec te, blande puer, nec nostras prodimus artes,” / “Neither thee (Love) do I betray, O winsome boy, nor mine own craft”³² in defending the composition of his book. Through this quotation, Dante reminds his readers of the association between love and violence. The personification of love in Ovid, therefore, takes the form of a being that forces the poet into submission. This presentation of the relationship between personified love and the poet-narrator lends to a corporeal and emotional reaction to the figure's oppressive force, introducing a topos for personified love which will remain consistent throughout the Middle Ages.

27 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 8.

28 Pirovano commentary to the *Vita Nuova* in Dante Alighieri, *Le opere*, eds. Enrico Fenzi, Donato Pirovano, Marco Grimaldi, Paolo Mastandrea, and Enrico Malato. (Salerno Editrice, 2012), 214.

29 See: Gianpiero Rosati, “The Art of *Remedia Amoris*: Unlearning to Love?” in *The Art of Love*, (Oxford University Press, 2007) for further information regarding the mission of the *remedia*, to go beyond and offer solutions to poetic mistreatments of love. The reference to Ovid's *Remedia* in Dante is as follows: “Per Ovidio parla Amore, sì come se fosse persona umana, ne lo principio de lo libro c'ha nome Libro di Remedio d'Amore, quivi: “Bella michi, video, bella parantur, ait,” / “In Ovid, Love speaks as if it were a human being, in the beginning of the book called, *The Remedy of Love: Bella Michi, video, bella parantur, ait.*”

30 All quotations from Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* can be found in: Ovid, J. H. Mozley, and G. P. Goold. *The art of love and other poems*. 2nd ed. / rev. by G.P. Goold. (Harvard University Press, 1979); Ovid, *Remedia Amoris*, 1.2.

31 Ovid, 1.1.

32 Ovid, 1.11.

b. From the tenzone with Dante da Maiano to the Vita Nuova: the effect of the prose

Ovid's conception of love, personified as an overbearing force, remains visible throughout the poetry of the Middle Ages. Specifically tied to Ovid's *Heroides*, I 12, the idea that love begets suffering is frequent in Provençal and Sicilian poetry. Indeed, this trend can be seen in Dante's contemporary, Guido Cavalcanti, who frames love as "doloroso" ("painful" or "distressing") following the medical model of characterizing love-experiences.³³ A poet within Dante's circle, Dante da Maiano, wrote a sonnet to Alighieri, beginning a tenzone to ask his thoughts regarding potential remedies for an individual overpowered by love. In this poem, da Maiano directly references Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*, stating, "D'Ovidio ciò mi son miso a provare / che disse per lo mal d'Amor guarire," / "I have set myself to test what Ovid prescribed as remedy for lovesickness,"³⁴ demonstrating his adherence to traditional Ovidian perceptions of Love. In his response, Alighieri does so as well by following in Ovid's footsteps from the *Remedia Amoris*. He reiterates his friend's submission to Love's domination, advising him not to oppose Love in order to acquire higher virtues: "Onde se voli, amico, che ti vaglia / vertute naturale od accidente, / con lealtà in piacer d'Amor l'adovra, / e non a contastar sua graziosa ovra," / "Therefore, my friend, if you want natural virtue or any added quality to be of use to you, set them to work faithfully to do Love's will, and not to oppose his gracious working."³⁵ As this lyric is left outside of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante does not provide any context to reveal his intention behind its composition, leaving readers exclusively with the words in the poem.

This earlier, and more importantly, uncontextualized sonnet represents a view of love that remains consistent throughout the courtly poetic trends Dante used in his corpus of poetry during the 1280s. In 1295, at the more mature age of thirty, Dante included a number of these poems in the *Vita Nuova*. In order to guide readers towards the deeper meaning behind those earlier verses, Dante added contextual framing through narrative and exegetical prose. His use of the prosimetrum, therefore, allows him to alter and re-elaborate the meaning of his earlier poems to fit his mature view on love and life.

33 Luca Marcozzi, "Dal Poeta Dei Remedia al Maestro della Bella Scuola: L'Evoluzione del Percorso Ovidiano di Dante Tra Vita Nova, Convivio, e Commedia" in Cattermole, Carlota, and Marcello Ciccutto, eds. *Miti, figure, metamorfosi: l'Ovidio di Dante*, (Le lettere, 2019), 69-70. See Roberto Rea, "L'amore come errore della virtus estimativa in Cavalcanti e Dante." (*Filologia medievale*. "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2019), for more on Medieval poetic renditions of Love, even as specifically referring to earlier poems in Dante's corpus.

34 Dante Da Maiano, "Rima XLVI," trans. K. Foster & P. Boyde, ed. Michele Barbi, in *Testo critico della Società Dantesca Italiana*, (Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960), accessed September 20, 2024, Princeton Dante Project, <https://dante.princeton.edu/pdp/rime.html>.

35 Dante Alighieri, "Rima XLVII," trans. K. Foster & P. Boyde, ed. Michele Barbi, in *Testo critico della Società Dantesca Italiana* (Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960), accessed September 20, 2024, Princeton Dante Project.

Such a view is informed by his newfound appreciation of academic sources, including Boethius' *Consolation* and Cicero's *De Amicitia*, which he accessed after the death of Beatrice in 1290, according to his own account in *Convivio* II, xii.³⁶

In the chapters II and III of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante's personification of love follows the characteristics of the Ovidian and courtly traditions: "D'allo-
ra innanzi dico che Amore signoreggiò la mia anima," / "Let me say that, from
that time on, Love governed my soul."³⁷ Indeed, personified Love's first words
to Dante are "Ego dominus tuus," / "I am your lord."³⁸ Therefore, the first inter-
actions between Love and Dante-poet follow the traditional poetic idea of Love
as a dominating force that subjugates the poet. This idea comes alive in the
first poem of the libello, "A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core," / "To every cap-
tive soul and loving heart," where Dante describes the bodily figure of love as
a lordly man whose memory causes him terror: "quando m'apparve Amor subi-
tamente / cui essenza membrar mi dà orrore," / "when suddenly Love appeared
before me / (to remember how he really was appalls me)."³⁹ In this chapter of
the *Vita Nuova*, Dante writes to his contemporary poets, who are the dedicatees
of the sonnet written in 1283, to ask for help in interpreting the meaning of this
dream and thus of Love's actions. At the time, he received responses to this re-
quest; however, in prose, he declared that nobody was able to decipher the true
meaning, "verace giudicio"⁴⁰ of the poem. This misinterpretation, perhaps, could
be owed to their courtly and Ovidian understandings of love.⁴¹ He ends the chapter
in prose, saying that his audience, and even himself, was only able to understand
the truth behind the vision, and thus the sonnet, "ora" ("now").⁴² The acquisition of
philosophical and theological knowledge between the time of writing this sonnet
and composing the *Vita Nuova* thus enabled him to understand his earlier poetry.

Teodolinda Barolini evaluates the evolution of Dante's poems from their
original status as single rime to how they were re-elaborated to fit into the *Vita
Nuova*, to highlight how the prose narrative greatly affects their meaning. In con-

36 Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, II, xii ed. F. Brambilla Ageno, (Le Lettere, 1995), accessed through Soci-
età Dante Alighieri, <https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index>.

37 His description too, of being "un signore di pauroso aspetto" is noted to be a reference to the person-
ification of Love also in works by Dante's friend, Guido Cavalcanti, XXIII 1-2: "Io vidi li occhi dove
Amor si mise / quando mi fece di sé pauroso." In using similar language, Dante is calling attention to,
and reminding us, of traditional depictions of Love's personified form, from the work of his very own
friend—whose perception of Love he is here setting the groundwork to surpass in chapter XXIV. Luca
Carlo Rossi, "Commentary to *VN* III, 3" in Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, ed. Luca Carlo Rossi, (Mon-
dadori, 2016); Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, II, 7.

38 Alighieri, III, 3.

39 Alighieri, III, 11.

40 Alighieri, III, 15.

41 Teodolinda Barolini, Andrew Frisardi, and Dante Alighieri, *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Poems of Youth
and the Vita Nuova (1283-1292)*, trans. Richard H. Lansing (University of Toronto Press, 2014), 60.
Barolini highlights Dante da Maiano's response who diagnoses Alighieri as delirious and with lovesick-
ness, a consequence of Love's force.

42 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, III, 15.

sidering this poem alone as a *rima*, Barolini characterizes it as “thin” in comparison to the revised, and more importantly Christianized, version in the *libello*, accompanied by prose, which is “succulent and rich with details.”⁴³ Specifically, it is only in the prose where he associates the unnamed Madonna with Beatrice, and further, uses the vision as a foreshadowing of her death and placement in heaven.⁴⁴ This sonnet, being the first selected among the poems of his youth, thus becomes, as Barolini puts it, “a point of departure for a new ideological adventure,” serving “a much more mature ideology” revealed through the refashioning of his earlier lyrics, and thus, the re-writing of himself.⁴⁵ The novel “ideology,” in effect, is his presentation of Beatrice as representative of a kind of spiritual love.

This new “ideology” is evident when examining the progression from this early view of personified love following the courtly tradition to that of the twenty-fourth chapter of the *libello*, in which the conception of love becomes explicitly altered to fit Dante’s Christian perspective. Here, Dante recounts the arrival of two women, his friend Guido Cavalcanti’s beloved, Giovanna, and his own, Beatrice, using love as a personified figure in the sonnet to state the order of the procession, introducing the women: Giovanna first, as Primavera (Cavalcanti’s poetic name) and then Beatrice, whom Love states “ha nome Amor, sì mi somiglia,” / “the one who is my image is called Love.”⁴⁶ Barolini considers this chapter as representing one of the most obvious examples of a change in meaning from the sonnet, as an individual *rima*, to the *Vita Nuova*.⁴⁷ This is because, through the prose contextualization, the lyrics mentioning Dante and Guido Cavalcanti’s beloved women become associated with Christian theology and are demonstrative of Alighieri’s view of himself as transgressing his friends’, and in fact, all previous poetic depictions of love. Love’s identity even becomes de-classicized, both through his rhetoric and intention; his language moves from Latin to Italian, and the statement that Beatrice resembles love demonstrates his assimilation into the character of Dante’s beloved, changing the traditional personification of love as a dominating force into Christian *caritas*.⁴⁸ Through the narrative prose, he not only describes the procession of the two love interests, but creates an allegory, which works to equate Beatrice to the figure of Christ, effectively making her a *figura christi*.⁴⁹ Giovanna, being called “Primavera” in the prose, is further contextualized in this light; she will be the first seen, “prima

43 Barolini, Frisardi, and Alighieri, *Dante’s Lyric Poetry*, 61.

44 Barolini, Frisardi, and Alighieri, 61.

45 Barolini, Frisardi, and Alighieri, 61.

46 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXIV, 9.

47 Barolini, Frisardi, and Alighieri. *Dante’s Lyric Poetry*, 222.

48 George Ferzoco, “Vita nova XXIV” in Zygmunt G. Barański, and Heather Webb, eds. *Dante’s Vita Nuova: A Collaborative Reading*. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 209; Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, 191. He notes too that Dante changing the language of Love contributes to his desire to bestow authority on the vernacular, elevating its prestige.

49 Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, 192.

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verrà,” / “she will come first”⁵⁰ of the two women. Additionally, the prose reveals that her name originates in that of John the Baptist / “Giovanni,” who in a procession precedes “la verace luce,” / “the True Light,”⁵¹ a periphrasis for Christ alluding to John 1:9,⁵² who is, in himself, conceived and understood as divine love or *caritas* within Dante’s Medieval Christian landscape.⁵³ Thus, Dante transcends the conception of love as he had been using it previously, instead associating it with Christian *caritas*, which is constituent of the blessed Beatrice.

IV. Conclusion

The digression on the use of personification must be placed immediately after Dante the Poet’s revelation of Beatrice being linked to Christ, the ultimate expression of love in the Middle Ages. In doing so, Dante demonstrates his transgression of Ovidian and courtly presentations of love, offering a new and Christianized perspective mutually exclusive with Christian *caritas*.⁵⁴ To achieve this end, as I have demonstrated, Alighieri goes through a systematic process. He begins by justifying his own use of the rhetorical device of personification by applying his reasoning to fit a larger scope of poets, the vernacular rhymers with whom he wrote in the 1280s. He then illustrates his view of proper poetic composition, which exists in the works produced by the poets of classical antiquity, and equates the courtly rhymers—and thereby himself—to this group as a way to legitimize his authority and to make himself worthy of the same esteem and poetic license as the *auctores*. It is only by equating himself to classical authors who successfully composed poetry with rhetorical devices that his own use of personification is justified, and it is in the act of doing this that Dante anticipates the self-governing role of a modern author. This digression, however, does not only serve the end of justifying his own *auctoritates* and use of personification, but it also strives to demonstrate an ideological shift that will allow Dante to conceive of himself as having surpassed all his literary antecedents. Through recognizing what traditionally has been, he can pave the way for a new presentation of love, divine love—one where earthly love is celebrated as reflecting and leading one to God.

50 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, XXIV, 4.

51 Alighieri, XXIV, 4.

52 “Erat lux vera quae inluminat omnem hominem venientem in mundum” in *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Robert Weber. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

53 George Ferzoco, “Vita nova XXIV,” 209.

54 Rebecca Bowen, Zygmunt G. Barański, and Heather Webb, eds. *Dante’s Vita Nova: A Collaborative Reading*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 233 suggests even that through this progression of Dante’s depiction of love in the *Vita Nuova*, he strives not to explicitly nor exclusively replace older views of love, but rather expand its definition, allowing for the noun to have many meanings, reflecting many eras, and to fulfil many different purposes. Through not limiting love to a single definition, human creatures are permitted to interact with love in many different ways. If human love is a reflection of divine love, then the more expressions of human love exist allows for more contemplation of the highest good, that being divine love as existing within God.

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Myth and Function: Viewer Engagement Through an Etruscan Bronze Mirror and The Sleeping Hermaphrodite

Yulia Tsz Yau Wong

Abstract

This paper argues that The Etruscan Bronze Mirror Depicting the Judgement of Paris and The Sleeping Hermaphrodite, despite their different backgrounds and functions, depend on the audience to create significance and relay their messages, turning viewership into an active, symbolic experience. Through close analysis and study of these two objects, this paper reveals that while art can be taken at face value or create an impression upon first glance, meaning is produced through the interaction and engagement between art and viewer. By referencing ideas and theories from Rusnack's *The Active Spectator: Art and the Viewer in Ancient Greece* (2001) about spectator engagement, the relationship between viewer and object, and relevant social ideals regarding beauty, gender, and evaluation, this paper examines how these concepts are reflected in the viewing experiences created by The Etruscan Bronze Mirror and The Sleeping Hermaphrodite. The Etruscan mirror combines a reflective, functional surface on the front with the scene of the myth of the Judgement of Paris carved on the back, encouraging the viewer to look into it and evaluate oneself (Salazar 2006, 65) while simultaneously echoing Paris's judgement of beauty and underlining Etruscan ideals tied to beauty, marriage, and worth. Similarly, The Sleeping Hermaphrodite is staged in a way that incorporates the viewer. From the back, the sculpture appears to depict a naked female body, but it is only through moving to the front that its male genitals are revealed, subverting expectations and forcing the viewer to reexamine their sense of perception (Barrow 2018, 77). In both cases, meaning was not fixed nor inherent, but rather created through the act of looking, judging, and engaging. Together, these two objects illustrate that viewing was not a singular act, but a process in which viewer agency was central to the experience (Rusnack 2001, 6–10).

Introduction

While art invites interpretation and observation, works from the ancient Mediterranean demonstrate that significance and meaning are generated through active viewer engagement. Etruscan mirrors, a blend of myth and function, Greek and Etrurian culture, are prime examples of this; particularly the Etruscan Bronze

Mirror Depicting the Judgement of Paris, a circular polished bronze disc from the fourth-third century BCE with mythological scenes carved in the back. Through the combination of myth and function, the Etruscan Bronze Mirror Depicting the Judgement of Paris turns a Greek myth into an interactive experience; by pairing a story about evaluating beauty with a cosmetic implement, it closes the gap between viewer and object, suggesting that beauty for the Etruscans was an active experience involving continual choice, judgement, and self-reflection.

Similarly dependent on viewer engagement, the Sleeping Hermaphrodite is an originally Hellenistic (second-century BCE) but recreated Roman (second-century CE) marble sculpture of Hermaphroditus from Rome. At first, the figure appears to be a reclining nude female, but as viewers make their way around it, its male features become obvious. The sculpture's three-dimensional presentation and form invites viewers to walk around and engage, turning the act of spectating into a process involving misjudgment followed by reassessment.

This paper draws from Rusnak's dissertation, "The Active Spectator: Art and the Viewer in Ancient Greece", which argues that ancient Greek art relied on viewer participation to create meaning through the act of looking.¹ Although it makes no mention of the Etruscans, seeing as mirrors are inherently interactive, and given that the Etruscans adapted and took inspiration from Greek myths, culture and style,² it is safe to say that his ideas are applicable to them as well. In both pieces, there is an initial side that creates the first impression, and only through engaging with the other perspective are deeper ideas about beauty, expectation and judgement revealed. Together, the Etruscan Bronze Mirror Depicting the Judgement of Paris and the Sleeping Hermaphrodite illustrate that ancient Mediterranean art constructed meaning with viewer engagement, shaping social expectations of beauty and gender.

The Etruscan Bronze Mirror

The Etruscan Bronze Mirror Depicting the Judgement of Paris is a round mirror made of bronze, with a scene depicting originally Greek mythological figures incised on its back.³ While the Etruscans had their own pantheon and mythology, many of their deities and stories, despite carrying different names, were borrowed from or eventually syncretized with the Greek pantheon.⁴ Here, the Greek myth

1 Terrance J. Rusnak, Jr., "The Active Spectator: Art and the Viewer in Ancient Greece" (PhD diss., Bryn Mawr College, 2001).

2 Francesco de Angelis, "Etruscan Bodies and Greek Ponderation: Anthropology and Artistic Form," in *A Companion to the Etruscans*, ed. Sinclair Bell and Alexandra A. Carpino (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 369–70.

3 Refer to Plate 1 in "Bibliography of Material Culture."

4 Sara H. Salazar, "Etruscan Women's Lives: Re-envisioning the Role of Women in Myths, Mirrors, and Other Funerary Artifacts" (PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 2006), 48–50.

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is Etruscanized visually through its Etruscan late Classical art style, characterised by longer and stylized bodies.⁵ The depiction of the myth, figures, and story is very similar to Greek renderings on painted amphorae,⁶ but the Etruscan placement of the scene onto a mirror emphasises a unique evaluation of beauty, suggesting that they understood it not through singular, one-time judgement, but rather through continuous, repeating evaluation, and assessment of the self.

On the left Elcsntre (Paris) sits on a pedestal or chair, wearing a tunic and jewelry, and holding a mirror, while the goddesses, Menrva (Athena), Uni (Hera), and Turan (Aphrodite) stand in a line facing him.⁷ Uni wears jewelry and holds both her hands up to his head, Menrva wears a helmet, Turan is barefoot, and the deities Thesan and Vilae watch over them from above and below.⁸ The earlier Greek account, preserved in later retellings such as the *Fabulae*, precedes the events of the Trojan War, and serves an important role in inciting the conflict. At the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, Eris, the goddess of strife, creates chaos between the three goddesses, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, who cannot agree on who is the fairest.⁹ Paris, a shepherd, is made the judge, and must decide by awarding the most beautiful goddess with a golden apple. Hera offers him power over Europe and Asia, Athena offers to make him a brilliant warrior, and Aphrodite offers him the most beautiful woman, Helen, wife to King Menelaus of Sparta.¹⁰ Paris, most enticed by Aphrodite's offer, gives her the golden apple, and together, they abduct Helen from Sparta. Menelaus, her husband, rallies together with his allies to seek revenge, and thus, the Trojan War begins.¹¹

5 Jocelyn Penny Small, "Etruscan Artists", in *A Companion to the Etruscans*, ed. Sinclair Bell and Alexandra A. Carpino (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 363–64.

6 "301613, ATHENIAN, PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, F31," *Classical Art Research Centre*, 2025.

7 Alexandra Ann Carpino, "Etruscan Relief Mirrors: Origins, Functions, and Cultural Significance" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1993), 187–188.

8 Carpino, "Etruscan Relief Mirrors", 188; refer to Plate 1 in "Bibliography of Material Culture."

9 Shaun Gamboa, *The Rhetoric of Judgment: The Judgement of Paris* (Montreal: Concordia University, 2018), 6.

10 Anna Zourgou, "The Judgement of Paris in Ancient Greek Art and Literature" (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2017), 7.

11 Hyginus, *Fabulae*, in *In Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae*, trans. Stephen M. Trzaskoma and R. Scott Smith, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 92.4–5.



Plate 1. Judgement of Paris, 4th-century BCE. Bronze mirror. Photography by the Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington.

In Etruscan society, while the mirror functioned practically as a tool to help one inspect one's own image, it was more than a utilitarian object: it helped perpetuate cultural expectations, specifically among the upper class. Since bronze mirrors were used and buried with elite women along with other cosmetics, this indicates that these objects were considered essential and important possessions during their lives. Since marriage and motherhood were among the most central elements to Etruscan society,¹² the worth of elite women would be tied to their ability to secure a marriage, and self-presentation was even more crucial. They were lifelong gifts passed down from woman to woman, often inscribed with their names, and almost always engraved with mythological or everyday scenes.¹³

¹² Salazar, *Etruscan Women's Lives*, 48–50

¹³ Salazar, 63.

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Through the physical plane of the mirror, the relationship between mythological figures, cultural norms, and owners manifests. The mirror serves as more than just a reflective surface, but also a physical symbol of social identity, revealing the importance of beauty and adornment for elite class women in Etruscan society.¹⁴

This particular mirror, engraved with the Judgement of Paris, accentuates this symbolic and social function through its mirroring of Etruscan cultural norms. The mirror further demonstrates how beauty and vanity were important aspects to being a woman in Etruscan society. One's beauty was equivalent to her worth; it signified marriage, prestige, status, and fertility. Therefore, beauty was a social practice.¹⁵ The mirror, then, became a tool that gave women the capability to improve upon their appearance and increase her worth, reinforcing the value and power of beauty within Etruscan standards.¹⁶

Stylistically, the bronze mirror highlights the use of syncretism and adaptation rather than direct imitation of Greek myth. This is evident in features such as modest clothing and longer bodies. Greek figures, on the other hand, were more naturalistic and less clothed, and even Aphrodite was depicted in the nude starting from the Late Classical Period, demonstrating how the blending of styles, cultures, and motifs was part of the Etruscan style.¹⁷ Additionally, the intentional pairing and connection between the specific myth with the mirror shows that the viewer-object-interaction often present in Greek art,¹⁸ was not foreign to the Etruscans and their work. Indeed, the ancient viewer was anything but passive, they actively engaged, whether symbolically or physically, with art and sculpture, encouraged to create their own interpretations, judgements, and meaning.¹⁹ In the case of the bronze mirror, its reflective surface encourages viewer agency by prompting one to engage with and evaluate themselves using the object, through the act of looking into one's reflection.

14 Richard Daniel De Puma, "Mirrors in Art and Society," in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London: Routledge, 2013), 1056.

15 Nancy Thomson de Grummond, "THE ETRUSCAN MIRROR," *Notes in the History of Art* 4, no. 2/3 (1985): 34.

16 Bridget Sandhoff, "Malevolent or Meaningful Beauty? Female Aesthetics in Etruscan Society," in *Transgressive Womanhood: Investigating Vamps, Witches, Whores, Serial Killers and Monsters*, ed. Manon Hedenborg-White and Bridget Sandhoff (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 15-21.

17 Carpino, "Etruscan Relief Mirrors", 1.

18 Rusnak, "The Active Spectator", 6-7.

19 Rusnak, 6-10.

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Plate 3. *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, 2nd-century CE Roman copy of a Greek original, white marble and Carrara marble. Housed in the Louvre Museum, Paris. Photo by Ferbrl.

Several Hellenistic sculptors took careful consideration in orchestrating the way the audience should move around the work and linking the two together in any way possible. By blurring the boundary between the viewer and sculpture, they created a deeper and more emotional experience. Other works like the Aphrodite of Knidos and the Farnese Herakles also function similarly: the former depicts Aphrodite in a modest *pudica* pose from the front, with the back uncovered and her body meant to be admired from all angles;²⁴ and the latter depicts a tired Herakles, whose hands hold the golden apples of the Hesperides only when viewed from his back.²⁵ However, the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* is far more provocative. The viewer here is meant to approach the statue from the back, encountering characteristically rounder feminine features as well as the side of a breast. Then, they are meant to walk around to the front, only to see the phallus.²⁶ Perceiving the feminine from one angle, and the masculine from another, the viewer is then forced to retrace and reexamine what they saw.

The sculpture reflects tensions and nuances of identity through the merging of male and female traits into one form, challenging socially established expect-

24 Lara Powell, "The Aphrodite of Knidos and Doryphoros in the Study of the Roles of Women in Classical Greece," in *Bristol Institute of Learning and Teaching Student Research Journal* (2021): 3–4.

25 Gabriel Mazor and Walid Atrash, "Torso of a 'Weary Heracles' Marble Statuette from Horbat Tarbenet in *Atiqot* 104 (2021): 167-169.

26 Barrow, "The Indefinite Body," 77; Refer to Plate 2 and Plate 3 in "Bibliography of Material Culture."

tations of bodies, gender, and sex in Hellenistic society, while also exposing their complex understanding of gender and sexual ambiguity. Building on the Greek viewing practice of viewer-object interaction and engagement, the figure does not gesture widely at the viewer to catch their attention, but is rather fast asleep in a passive position, while the viewers are given agency, actively moving around while questioning, examining, and reacting. Although the Sleeping Hermaphrodite's reveal relies on the shift between the back and front, it is not limited to this specific sequence. Its deliberate, multi-directional, and circular path welcomes it to be observed from all angles, and emphasizes movement in general as part of the process.

Synthesis

While the Etruscan Bronze Mirror depicting the Judgement of Paris and the Sleeping Hermaphrodite differ in origin and function, they both rely on the positioning and interaction between the viewer and object to create meaning beyond their practical purpose. For the mirror, as a cosmetic tool and symbolic object, meaning emerges through the viewer seeing and evaluating her own beauty while, engraved on the back, Paris judges the beauty of the three goddesses.²⁷ For the statue, as a piece of decoration, meaning is born through the viewer's shifting perception on the gender of the hermaphrodite as they move around and interact with it. In both cases, the contact between object and viewer is required for the object's full effect.²⁸

Both objects base interaction on form and design, using the entire body of the sculpture in the Sleeping hermaphrodite's case, and the reflective surface engraved back in the mirror's case, to add to the interest and layers of the interaction, inviting the viewer to continuously interact with and react to the object. Together, one side of the work creates an initial surface level impression, and another prompts deeper ideas about perception, expectation, and judgement.

Unlike the Etruscan Bronze Mirror, the Sleeping Hermaphrodite poses a challenge rather than affirming cultural norms. In the case of the mirror, the viewer sees their own reflection and judges themselves according to socially constructed expectations of beauty. To contrast, the sculpture invites the viewer's judgement based on those same societal assumptions, only to disrupt and rearrange that judgement through the reveal of its other side. Ultimately, by granting the viewer agency in the creation of meaning, both works prevent the viewer from remaining a passive, removed observer. These deeper ideas are not limited to a particular moment in time or its original audiences, but extend to viewers of the future, whose different cultural frames of reference breathe new life and meaning into the works through their own acts of looking.

²⁷ Sandhoff, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall," 13–18.

²⁸ Rusnak, 6–10.

Conclusion

Through the combination of myth and function, the Etruscan Bronze Mirror Depicting the Judgement of Paris turns a Greek myth into an interactive experience: by pairing a story about evaluating beauty with a cosmetic object, it closes the gap between viewer and object, demonstrating that beauty for the Etruscans was an active experience involving continual choice, judgement, and self-reflection. Together, with the Sleeping Hermaphrodite, whose key component also hinges on the interaction between art and viewer, the works reveal how ancient art utilized viewer participation to create meaning through the act of looking, and how it was socially expected for relationships to form between human and object.²⁹ In the context of these two objects, cultural ideals can only be challenged and enforced through the very act of looking.

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Plate 1. Judgement of Paris, bronze, 4th century BCE. Photography by Indiana

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Plate 2. Sleeping Hermaphrodite, white and Carrara marble, from the Louvre Museum in Paris, 2nd-century CE. Photography by Pierre-Yves Beaudouin. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Louvre_-_Sleeping_Hermaphrodite_01.jpg.

Plate 3. Sleeping Hermaphrodite, white and Carrara marble, from the Louvre Museum in Paris, 2nd-century CE. Photography by Ferbr1. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hermafrodita_2.JPG.

The Woman's Voice in Juvenal's Satire 6 and Tacitus' Germania

Elisa Kogan Penha

Abstract

In ancient Roman literature, the speaking (or otherwise noisy) woman signals a societal anomaly or aberration. She is frequently prophesying the doom of heroes, tattling about her or her husband's affairs, and most of all wailing nonsensically. This paper, inspired by Anne Carson's seminal essay *The Gender of Sound*, investigates the use of the woman's voice in two imperial Roman texts: Juvenal's Satire 6 and Tacitus' *Germania*, comparing and contrasting the local (Roman) women as depicted by Juvenal, and the foreign (German) women by Tacitus. I conduct a close reading of select passages from Satire 6 and the *Germania*, putting the texts and authors into conversation through literary analysis and engagement with Latin. I additionally call on contemporary gender studies and sensorial studies regarding the gendered pathos of hearing. I aim to investigate what the writing of the woman's voice in imperial Rome reveals about the manufacturing of both masculine, feminine, insider, and outsider identities, and argue subsequently that Juvenal and Tacitus, taken together, use the woman's voice in their texts as a scapegoat for their perception and anxiety over the fragility of "true Romaness," or the boundaries of Roman identity and manhood.

Introduction

A grape is plucked from its stem with a tear and a pop. Bowls beat against one another. Chewing and laughter reverberate from the walls. The hissing of the sun at dusk is only silenced by the thrushes chirping in open windows. Men dazzle themselves in wine while their wives wait inside. The silence is deafening.

In their introduction to *Sound and the Ancient Senses*, Sarah Nooter and Shane Butler impart that sound, especially ancient sound having already been "sounded," allows for a certain perennial suspense, leaving behind "no directly accessible ruins or residues."¹ What, then, of ancient sounds that never "sounded" at all and in fact were only implied in text? The ancient woman is a particularly apt exemplar with which to probe this question, as she was most often a completely silent figure, only "sounding" through the writing of men. The woman's voice in antiquity was frequently regarded with the same suspense as the intangibility of an-

¹ Shane Butler and Sarah Nooter, *Sound and the Ancient Senses* (Routledge, 2019): 2.

cient sound is to contemporary readers; she tends to signal something unexpected, or is only heard when she is somewhere she ought not to be, saying something she ought not to be saying. The doomed prophetess Cassandra is one such figure, whose voice spells destruction, and whose vocal curse is inextricably related to her womanhood as a failed conquest of Apollo. Building off Anne Carson's seminal essay *The Gender of Sound*, which maintains a primarily Greek inventory of case studies, this paper will investigate how Juvenal's *Satire 6* and Tacitus' *Germania* write the woman's voice, both local and foreign, in imperial Rome.² I endeavour to investigate what the depiction of women's voices in the writing of Juvenal and Tacitus might subsequently reveal about how the imperial role of men is assembled in opposition to that of the woman.

By juxtaposing Juvenal's Roman women with Tacitus' German women, sundry anxieties of Roman identity manifest. I argue that both *Satire 6* and the *Germania* demonstrate the instability of Romanness as a categorical identity or set of identities by using the woman as a synecdoche for Roman fragility, highly manifest in discussions of her voice, articulate or otherwise. In other words, as Christopher Nappa remarks, Juvenal is concerned with a "world made up of the female and alien rather than the male and Roman"³ and Tacitus similarly with the larger project of developing "conceptions of foreign peoples largely as vehicles for reflecting on their own [Roman] character and identity."⁴ Comparative scholarship regarding Juvenal and Tacitus is typically preoccupied with a binary of proclaimed objectivity on the part of the author which conflates or contrasts the "historian" and the "satirist" as either parallel, opposite, or continuous editorial offices. Catherine Keane surmises that "There is a striking contrast between the historian's mandate and the satirist's apparent strategy of unapologetic *indignatio* and burning hatred. What Tacitus declares to be a vice for the historian, Juvenal—perhaps first in his literary line—embraces as a virtue for the satirist."⁵ The presence versus the absence of explicit indignation toward recounted subjects seems therefore to be the "vocational difference" in writing history versus satire; a prerequisite of genre rather than an assertion of authentic opinion.

The method used in comparative works is one primarily interested in discerning the extent to which the writing of Juvenal and Tacitus intentionally intersects. This is done most often by underscoring the influence of Tacitus on Juvenal's "historical satire," but sometimes the other way around through contem-

2 In instances where English translations are not separately cited, translations from the Latin are my own.

3 Christopher Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous: Juvenal and the Anxieties of the Individual* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2018): 131.

4 James B. Rives, "Germania." In *A Companion to Tacitus*, edited by Victoria Emma Pagán (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 50.

5 Catherine Keane, "Historian and Satirist." In *A Companion to Tacitus*, ed. Victoria Emma Pagán (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 409.

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porary allusion and nondiegetic interference.⁶ I am, not oppositely but diversely, interested in how the “shared literary culture”⁷ of Juvenal and Tacitus results in a different and not directly interfering means towards the same anxious end. Thus, my intent is not only to discern parallel allusions in depictions of the woman’s voice, but emphasize contrasting ones, which ultimately perform the same purpose.

Lastly, borrowing from Sigmund Casey Fredericks, I shall view both the *Saturae* and the *Germania* as “‘poetry’ in its broader meaning of the whole range of artistic creation in words.”⁸ By this reading, this paper does not concern itself with if Juvenal was “really” annoyed by the women and wives in *Satire 6* nor what Tacitus “really” thought about the Germans, less so if it is “true.” Rather, I am concerned with the emotional register of responses composed within the texts themselves. Nappa aptly alternates between varying detached titles for the Juvenal-figures recounting each satire, be it “the speaker” or “the character,”⁹ an approach I have adopted in calling the speaker of *Satire 6* variously a narrator or character with regards to the emotional affect of the text, and referencing Juvenal himself with regards to the actual composition of the text, such as diction or word choice. Tacitus, on the other hand, constructed his *Germania* as a compendium of various second-hand sources.¹⁰ Despite not *positioning* himself as a character or persona as Juvenal does, Tacitus might still be read as having a “narratorial costume” in his own right. Finally, I remain throughout this paper in “literatureland,”¹¹ stressing the textual representations of women’s voices as specifically unheard and unrecorded by the authors, and unsaid by the women. This unvoicedness is crucial when regarding the double-voice of male authors: the narration, the fabricated woman’s speech, and the diegetic reaction to that speech. A simulacra of hearing and a fabricated self-response is thus incredibly revealing of the narrator’s perceived emotional reaction to the woman’s voice as they pass judgement upon a premeditated scenario built for the sake of commentary and reception.

Juvenal: Loud and out of Place

Juvenal’s sixth satire, Book 2 of the *Saturae*, is a raging critique of marriage and women by extension. Juvenal’s works are often “charge[d]”¹² with misogyny due

6 Examples of such works are Sigmund Casey Fredericks (1969); John Cahill (1938); and Chapter 4 of Shadi Barscht (2013).

7 Keane, *Historian and Satirist*, 403.

8 Sigmund Casey Fredericks, “‘MOS MAIORUM’ IN JUVENAL AND TACITUS” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1969), 5.

9 Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous*, 5.

10 Rives, *Germania*, 49.

11 Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous*, 14.

12 Susanna H. Braund, “Juvenal—Misogynist or Misogamist?,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (November 1992): 71.

to frequently hostile language toward the conduct of women. This charge, however, is hotly contested, most notably by Susanna H. Braund who rejects it outright. Gergő Gellérfi, on the other hand, recognizes *Satire 6* as a misogynist text with misogynistic features¹³ (though one that cannot be said to have been written by a misogynistic *author*), meanwhile L. Watson dismisses the whole debate as a “false dilemma.”¹⁴ I am most aligned with Gellérfi in that I recognize the institutional critique of marriage as being manifold of misogynistic leanings. In this case as Gellérfi quotes Kate Manne, the sixth satire “target[s] women selectively—for example, those who are perceived as insubordinate, negligent, or out of order.”¹⁵ Such a definition is in this case important because in considering the mistrust and maligning of women’s voices and their “ideological association... with monstrosity, disorder and death,”¹⁶ as well as the use of the female voice to signify a departure from Roman maleness and by extension personhood,¹⁷ I am writing of works that exist within a misogynist cultural canon if not about “misogynistic texts” themselves. I likewise argue that the reverse of Manne’s definition is a true marker for misogynistic features, as I will remark in Tacitus’ work, that the selective praise of women who behave in accordance to the patriarchal schemes of Rome and the Germanic people alike are necessarily exclusive of their deviant counterparts.

Satire 6 is most critical of intellectual wives speaking, or more broadly the idea of a woman who “muscles into male society”¹⁸ through, what Juvenal perceives to be, the performance of intellect by means of extant voice. He rants:

illa tamen grauior, quae cum discumbere coepit laudat Vergilium, periturae ignoscit Elissae, committit uates et comparat, inde Maronem atque alia parte in trutina suspendit Homerum. cedunt grammatici, uincuntur rhetores, omnis turba tacet, nec causidicus nec praeco loquetur, altera nec mulier. uerborum tanta cadit uis, tot pariter pelues ac tintinnabula dicas pulsari.¹⁹

But she’s much worse, the woman who as soon as she’s taken her place at dinner is praising Virgil and forgiving Elissa on her deathbed, who pits the poets against one another and assesses them, weighing in her scales Maro on this side and Homer on the other. The schoolteachers

13 Gergő Gellérfi, “Misogynistic Musings : The Roman Wives in Juvenal’s *Satire 6*,” *Graeco-Latina Brunensia*, no. 1 (2022): 63.

14 Gellérfi, *Misogynistic Musings*, 63.

15 Gellérfi, 63.

16 Anne Carson, “The Gender of Sound: Description, Definition and Mistrust of the Female Voice in Western Culture,” *Resources for Feminist Research* 23, no. 3 (1994): 2.

17 Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous*, 2.

18 Juvenal, Persius, and Susanna Morton Braund, *Juvenal and Persius*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004): 232.

19 Juvenal, *Satires*, 274–6.

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give way, the teachers of rhetoric are beaten, the whole party falls silent, there'll not be a word from any lawyer or auctioneer—and not even from another woman. Such vigorous verbiage pours from her, you'd say it was the sound of people bashing all their bowls and bells at once²⁰.

Satire 6 writes the woman's voice as a means to simultaneously de-humanize her as well as embolden and characterize a masculine oracular office. First of all, Juvenal's unnamed woman-caricature appropriates the dinner party recitation for herself, infiltrating a homosocial space or "male preserve"²¹ of policed yet communal rhetoric. Her imposition dismisses men from their offices, "cedunt grammatici, uincuntur rhetores [...] nec causidicus nec praeco loquetur," / "the schoolteachers give way, the teachers of rhetoric are beaten [...] there'll not be a word from any lawyer or auctioneer" thereby physically displacing men through their removal of speech. She appropriates a "civic space" with unregulated vocal expression²² and in doing so represents the fragility of that space to begin with. In addition, this is an instance of Juvenal weaponizing writing the voice to create a non-space at a non-time; indeed, it is not that this woman had one of each of these men with her at a dinner party, but rather that the ideas of these professional characters are disempowered by the garrulous woman.

Juvenal's character does not claim to be recording any one woman or narrating any one anecdote here, as the character ceases to be named as with the previous wives he'd been lambasting thus far. Furthermore, with "turba tacet," / "the whole crowd is silenced" the woman seems to be achieving something which her husband ought to be doing instead—imposing silence, as the narrator entreats them to do: twice with "don't let" and once with "let them instead." As a consequence, her voice is demeaned as "a way to deflect her [...] from literary centrality" by "the marginalisation of her personality."²³ Additionally, the woman's voice is described as clanging, thus objectifying her through bowls and bells, and then disembodied through music (trumpets and gongs), conceptualizing her. Both these transformations detach her from a human body and dissolve her into a non-entity of pure noise. The satire continues:

iam nemo tubas, nemo aera fatiget: una laboranti poterit succurrere Lunae.
inponit finem sapiens et rebus honestis; nam quae docta nimis cupit et facunda uidericrue tenus medio tunicas succingere debet, caedere Siluano porcum, quadrante lauari. non habeat matrona, tibi quae iuncta recumbit, dicendi genus, aut curuum sermone rotato torqueat enthymema, nec historias sciat omnes, sed quaedam ex libris et non intellegat. odi hanc ego quae repetit uoluitque Palaemonis artem seruata semper lege et ratione lo-

20 Juv., *Sat.* 275–7.

21 Gelléri, *Misogynistic Musings*, 60.

22 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 12.

23 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 6.

quendi ignotosque mihi tenet antiquaria uersus nec curanda uiris. opicae castiget amicae uerba: soloecismum liceat fecisse marito.²⁴

There's no need now for anyone to wear out the trumpets or the gongs. On her own she can give assistance to the Moon in her struggle. Don't let the lady reclining next to you have her own rhetorical style or brandish phrases before hurling her rounded syllogism at you. Don't let her know the whole of history. Let there be a few things in books that she doesn't even understand. I loathe the woman who is forever referring to Palaemon's Grammar and thumbing through it, observing all the laws and rules of speech, or who quotes lines I've never heard, a female scholar. Do men bother about such things? It's the language of her philistine girlfriend she should be criticising. Husbands should be allowed their grammatical oddities. The fact of the matter is that the woman who longs to appear excessively clever and eloquent should hitch up a tunic knee-high, sacrifice a pig to Silvanus, and pay just a quarter to enter the baths.

At this point, gender troubles swell. The narrator invites the noise-woman-thing to take up male sacrificial duties on her own in a figurative apodosis to the condition of if she is going to be behaving like a man anyway; she ought to be genderbent in order to make her use of speech orthodox. The narrator is so threatened by the annexation and occupation of masculinity as part of the "loss of this 'true Romanness'"²⁵ that he is inviting a woman to perform it instead. The narrator equates the talkative woman's speech with both "knowing" and the re-production of information, a Platonic intellectual fecundity which ought to be stalled by the husbands, as the narrator ordered them to do multiple times. This hortatory invitation to stall is a method of "[p]utting a door on the female mouth"²⁶ congruing to and compounding some very physical sounding vocabulary: "having," "brandishing," and "hurling," emphasizing the woman's deterioration into inhuman noise.

Finally, *Satire 6* is specifically interested (annoyed with) the intellectual woman's concern for grammar and the "laws of languages." The narrator himself views husbands as both able, allowed, and even encouraged to transgress such linguistic laws: "soloecismum liceat fecisse marito," / "Husbands should be allowed their grammatical oddities" and notes that the woman should be more bothered by transgressions between other women, alienating them as *subject to* the language, knowledge, and thus to speech, which men are the *lords of*. If epic poems "served to communicate imperial values and inspiration,"²⁷ then the intellectual woman nullifies this communication by quoting poets that neither the Juvenalian speaker

24 Juv., *Sat.* 274–276.

25 Gellérfi, *Misogynistic Musings*, 61.

26 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 5.

27 Peter McMurray, *Acoustics of Empire: Sound, Media, and Power in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press: USA, 2021): 344.

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nor husbands know, castrating the conveyor of information. The woman capitalizes on men's fear or tendency to ridicule women speaking amongst other women, often subject to dramatic exploration, such as "passing references in Aristophanes to a 'woman's language' that a man can learn or imitate if he wants to,"²⁸ and associating them with private and foreign people.

This excerpt of the satire is incredibly preoccupied with justifying sound within the atypical body by transforming the woman into various other things (objects, concepts, men) wherein such speech would instead conform. In addition to this initial crusade against the speaking woman, Juvenal had previously in the sixth satire remarked on the irritating but nonetheless arousing habit of Italian women parading as Greek through linguistic cosplay; yet another vocal metamorphosis for the woman, now ethnicized. The eroticism of Greek language is predicated on its distance from Italian selfhood—it is neither positive nor negative in aspect until, as Juvenal will remark, it begins to impose upon the civic responsibilities of marriage. The narrator rhetorically demands "nam quid rancidius quam quod se non putat ulla formosam nisi quae de Tusca Graecula facta est, de Sulmonensi mera Cecropis?"²⁹ / "After all, what is more nauseating than the fact that no woman thinks she's beautiful unless she's turned herself from a Tuscan into a Greekette, from a woman of Sulmo into a pure Cecropian woman?"³⁰ The cultural outfit is, in this speaker's reading, a means toward aesthetic enhancement beginning with genetic mutation. Juvenal explicates that "omnia Graece: hoc sermone pavent, hoc iram, gaudia, curas, hoc cuncta effundunt animi secreta,"³¹ / "Everything is in Greek. They express their fears and pour out their anger, their joy, their worries, and all the secrets of their souls in this language."³² Aesthetic enhancement is furthered through voice, manifesting in a bodily way the "public trajectory"³³ of the voice's "private interior"³⁴ and signifying excess by the inability to contain.

Moreover, Greek being "poured out" ("effundunt") has a liquid or secreting character to the exit of noise from the body. This projection of the inside to the outside is especially nerve wracking for the narrator, as the parasitic effect of Greek-speaking women suggests that "Italian men are different from their wives not only in sex but also in culture."³⁵ Juvenal's speaker furthers this suggestion by maneuvering the insecurity toward erotic woes:

concumbunt Graece. dones tamen ista puellis, tune etiam, quam sextus et

28 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 9.

29 Juv., *Sat.* 250.

30 Juv., 251.

31 Juv., 250.

32 Juv., *Sat.* 251.

33 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 7.

34 Carson, 7.

35 Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous*, 150.

octogensimus annus pulsat, adhuc Graece? non est hic sermo pudicus in vetula. quotiens lascivum intervenit illud ζωή καὶ ψυχή, modo sub lodice loquendis uteris in turba. quod enim non excitet inguen vox blanda et nequam? digitos habet.³⁶

They have sex in Greek. And while you might allow that in young girls, do you still use Greek when your eighty-sixth year strikes? This language is not decent for an old woman. Whenever that hot “*My life, my soul*” comes out, in this way you are using words in the crowd that should be used only beneath the blanket. Is there any groin that’s not indeed aroused by such a seductive and indecent phrase? It itself has fingers.

This episode is highly emblematic of how Carson epitomizes the woman’s physiological “two mouths” and illustrates a perpetual confusion between “the orifice through which vocal activity takes place and the orifice through which sexual activity takes place.”³⁷ Greek is simultaneously for communicating and for copulating, exposing a woman’s inner Greekness through vocalizations of pleasure. Greek language in this passage is temporally confined to youth and it is one of what Nappa identifies as “two problematic excesses”³⁸ identified in the old woman’s use of Greek. She is a dangerous figure for remaining in an erotic reality despite no longer being an object of erotic appetite by men due to her old age, and thus her sexuality exists unto itself and can be exercised at her own will. In this way, Greekness is dissolving and temporally distorting the Roman erotic age cycle.³⁹

The second problematic excess is that of the public and the private, or “the use of sexual language outside of the appropriate place.”⁴⁰ The Roman women become “more and more foreign”⁴¹ as their erotic habits are manifested “in turba,” / “in the crowd” and contaminate the Italian public. It becomes a crisis of identification. If Italian men cannot tell the difference anymore between the local and the foreign, and if Italian men are copulating with women who are Greek on the inside, how can they continue to police identity? Thus the environment too becomes more and more foreign. Finally, Juvenal revisits the (dis)embodying power of sound as he gives the woman’s seductive “indecent phrase” a tactile character through fingers. She herself deteriorates, only the speech remains. *Satire 6* in these case studies is dominated by the implicit and explicit losses to Romanness demonstrated through women’s use of voice.

36 Juv., *Sat.* 250.

37 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 8.

38 Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous*, 151.

39 Christian Laes and Johan Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire: The Young and the Restless Years?* 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 140.

40 Nappa, *Making Men Ridiculous*, 151.

41 Nappa, 151.

Tacitus: Too Close for Comfort

In Tacitus' *Germania*, I observe that the anxiety of Romanness expressed, while present, is less so "contaminating" as in Juvenal and more so "infiltrating." Instead of the Roman woman metamorphosing into the foreign as she does in *Satire 6*, the foreign women are "enclosed" by the Roman in the *Germania*. Ellen O'Gorman aptly opens her paper "No place like Rome" with the remark that the *Germania* is about Rome,⁴² and further that its effort to taxonomize the German land and people is a means toward constructing and enforcing a Roman character and oneness.

One instance of this self-fashioning may be discerned in comparison to Juvenal regarding the dinner party setting. Where Juvenal remarked that it was as soon as a woman took her place at the dinner table that she began to behave garrulously, Tacitus meanwhile underscores that there is "nullis spectaculorum inlecebris, nullis conviviorum irritationibus corruptae."⁴³ / "no arena with its enticements, no dinner parties with their provokings to corrupt them." Thus, Juvenal uses the familiar dinner scene to depict a distortion of public conduct by the speaking woman whereas Tacitus uses the same setting to depict the conformity of chaste German women. By extension we learn, based on what Tacitus praises, what it is that the text perceives to be proper Roman conduct and, on the other hand, what Juvenal's *Satire 6* speaker lambasts to be improper. Roman women abuse their speech at the dinner, which is incorrect, whereas German women cause no such ruckus. Both authors thus circumvent the same conclusion: that women ought to be silent in public spaces. Furthermore, it is in this way that Tacitus explains the rousing nature of the female voice as he recounts how the Germans are inspired toward bravery in combat by their wives:

effigiesque et signa quaedam detracta lucis in proelium ferunt; quodque praecipuum fortitudinis incitamentum est, non casus nec fortuita conglobatio turmam aut cuneum facit, sed familiae et propinquitates; et in proximo pignora, unde feminarum ululatus audiri, unde vagitus infantium. hi cuique sanctissimi testes, hi maximi laudatores: ad matres, ad coniuges vulnera ferunt: nec illae numerare aut exigere plagas pavent, cibosque et hortamina pugnantibus gestant.⁴⁴

The strongest incentive to courage lies in this, that neither chance nor casual grouping makes the squadron or the wedge, but family and kinship: close at hand, too, are their dearest, whence is heard the wailing voice of woman and the child's cry: here are the witnesses who are in each

42 Ellen O' Gorman, "No Place like Rome: Identity and Difference in The *Germania* of Tacitus." *Ramus* 22, no. 2 (1993): 135.

43 Tacitus, M Hutton, and Peterson. W, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on Oratory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914): 158.

44 Tacitus, *Germania*, 142.

man's eyes most precious; here the praise he covets most: they take their wounds to mother and wife, who do not shrink from counting the hurts or demanding a sight of them: they minister to the combatants food and exhortation.

The gendered use of *ululatus*, “wailing” or simply ululations, is vocal terminology that does “not signify anything except [its] own sound”⁴⁵ for the German woman's wailing as opposed to another sort of weeping delineates foreign noisemaking in accordance with a classical Greco-Roman model, in which “to utter such cries is a specialized female function.”⁴⁶ The German woman's wailing becomes ritualized and Roman if not cognitively dissonant through its subsumption in Latin terminology. However, Valerie Hope does remark that in the case of Virgil, the ululations “evoke a foreign otherness, a lack of self-control and female excess”⁴⁷ when Anna erupts in grief for her sister Dido. Applied to another foreign people, the textual use of *ululatus* depicts the exotic (the German women's cries) through the familiar and digestible (Roman terminologies). The passage also appeals to the woman's maternal nature. Her wailing, in this case, is contingent on the orthodox and expected societal space she occupies as a mother, constructed alongside her crying baby. The nourishing conflation of food and extortions also lend themselves to being read as attributes of motherhood.

In discussing German funerary and mourning rituals, Tacitus once again appeals to the emotional vocalizations of German women and, on the other hand, emotional silence of men. Tacitus writes that “lamenta ac lacrimas cito, dolorem et tristitiam tarde ponunt”⁴⁸ / “weeping and tears they put away quickly, pain and sadness linger” recalling again the physicality of moving sound as though an object in space. He proceeds with the fascinating summation: “feminis lugere honestum est, viris meminisse,”⁴⁹ / “bemoaning becomes women, men must remember.” On this note, Hope aptly remarks while generalizing Roman mourning performances that “Mourning sounds were highly gendered: female mourners were noisy, whereas male mourners were largely silent.”⁵⁰ Again Tacitus' considers German soundmaking through a Romanized rubric.

In considering where sound is stored in the body, and how the expulsion of sound genders noise, this phrase is also significant. Women's sound is characterized by expelling and secretion whereas men's silence is internalized with a head-word, revisiting aforementioned intellectual fecundity which Juvenal

45 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 12.

46 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 12.

47 Valerie Hope, “Vocal Expression in Roman Mourning 1” in *Sound and the Ancient Senses*, ed. by Shane Butler and Sarah Nooter, 1st ed (Routledge, 2019), 61.

48 Tac., *Germ.* 170.

49 Tac., *Germ.* 170.

50 Hope, *Vocal Expressions*, 62.

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criticized the know-it-all wife for essentially being “pregnant” with, as opposed to her husband. In Tacitus, the German women “properly” secrete their emotional sounding through tears. Whereas in Juvenal, the secretion is improper because it exits the body as Greek language. It is curious that, in this way, the German women appear to perform the ideal of Roman femininity, whereas Juvenal’s Roman woman appeared to perform the ideal of Roman masculinity, each being shifted each along their civic hierarchical orientation and thus allowing for the sinister understanding that the “foreign woman” does not actually seem to exist. The panic is clear: if the foreigner dissolves, so then does the Roman.

The lack of a German cultural grammar forces Tacitus to consider the German woman anatomically. In doing so, he configures her “into terms acceptable or understandable to a home community, by an author whose own identity can hardly be disentangled from the act of writing.”⁵¹ Furthermore, in *Germania* 8, Tacitus elaborates upon the role of German women as seers, remarking “quasdam acies inclinatas iam et labantes a feminis restitutas constantia precum,” / “that some lost or losing battles have been restored by the women, by the incessance of their prayers” Tacitus’ use of *constantia* likewise characterizes women as garrulous or excessive, but it is in this case registered positively as restoring or healing German soldiers. Positive, in this sense, refers to their role within the German cultural body described by Tacitus, and not to Tacitus’ emotional perception of the acts of the women as “good.” I am interested in positioning restoration through incessance (“restitutas constatia”) as an inversion of the “social marker”⁵² of Roman “moderating values of self-control.”⁵³ The positive affirmation of excess by the constant prayers of German seeresses services the division of humanity which Carson identifies as “two species: those who can censor themselves and those who cannot,”⁵⁴ in this case denoted by a female vocation (not unlike the oracle) whose purpose is in fact to occupy the latter species and thereby imply the former.

This seeress differs, however, from the Greek oracle and Roman priestesses, as the seers and women otherwise perceived to have prophetic powers⁵⁵ are not religiously regulated in space, confined to a temple or sacred site, and here publicly communicate with the soldiers, civil servants. The prophetic office in the *Germania* blurs the domestic and private space of women with the sovereign and civic one of men⁵⁶ by allowing the power to exist in public. As a mode, prophecy

51 Jaś Elsner, “Describing Self in the Language of the Other: Pseudo (?) Lucian at the Temple of Hierapolis” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23.

52 Paul Belonick, *Restraint, Conflict, and the Fall of the Roman Republic*. 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023): 4.

53 Belonick, *Restraint*, 5.

54 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 7.

55 Tac., *Germ.* 142–143.

56 Kristina Milnor, “Women and Domesticity,” in *A Companion to Tacitus*, ed. Victoria Emma Pagán

is a compelling and gendered kind of speech wherein sound conforms to a female body inasmuch as it reinforces gendered prejudices regarding the female voice. Prophecy is speech women often cannot help but speak, once again embodying excess and unrestraint.⁵⁷ In this regard it is lastly notable that, of the noisemaking women in the *Germania*, the seers alone are represented to use articulate speech whereas other women without that vocational privilege, specifically the mothers, can only wail.

It is remarkable that the same “good old days” which *Satire 6* opens with recalling and which the *Saturae* in their entirety laments the loss of is, among other reasons, described by Cicero as the product of a “lack of *modus*,”⁵⁸ is retained by the Germans contemporary to Tacitus, segmenting the foreigners to the past. Furthermore, while proceeding to describe the mystic and prophetic tradition of the Germans recalls the legendary German seeress *Veleda* as “*sub divo Vespasiano*,”⁵⁹ / “in the reign of *Vespasian*.” Despite, in this case, commenting on a tradition of seeresses particular to the German people, and invoking the example of a German woman by name, Tacitus confines the displays of their prophetic speech to the reign of *Vespasian* and does not further the historiographical approach by naming a corresponding German leader instead. As with his limited mourning vocabulary, Tacitus’ history allows foreign participation in the Roman temporal canon and in fact, I argue, insists upon it. Connecting this to the previous analysis, the example of this specific and those non-specific speaking women help to characterize the Germans as specifically abiding to and being subsumed with an idealized yet primitive Roman past. Milnor likewise recognized this, writing in her discussion of domesticity in Tacitus’ works that Tacitus “clearly sees the Germans as on one level an echo of what the Romans were once and still could be if they gave up their wicked ways and returned to the simple virtues of their ancestors,”⁶⁰ preying in this case upon the woman’s voice to further a “noble savage” reading of the Germans.

Coda

Anne Carson tells us that “It is in large part according to the sounds people make that we judge them sane or insane, male or female, good, evil, trustworthy, depressive, marriageable, moribund, likely or unlikely to make war on us, little better than animals, inspired by God.”⁶¹ How might we pass those judgments when we can no longer distinguish the sounds “we” are making from the ones “they” are

(Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 459.

57 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 6–7.

58 Belonick, *Restraint*, 37.

59 Tac., *Germ.*, 142.

60 Milnor, *Women and Domesticity*, 467.

61 Carson, *The Gender of Sound*, 1.

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making? This is the anxiousness articulated in Juvenal and Tacitus' attempts to write the woman's voice in the texts I have examined: a dissolution between self and other that enriches insecurity of maleness and citizenship by extension. Juvenal's *Satire 6* and Tacitus' *Germania* both approach writing the woman's voice from a policing vantage, whether by judgement or by empirical investigation.

When put into conversation, *Satire 6* and the *Germania* are both agents enforcing a criteria for behaving as an imperial subject, demonstrated in one manner, as this paper has delineated, through the oscillation between the exclusion and inclusion of women from vocal correctness. Shane Butler remarks that, "ancient efforts to write a voice were almost always also efforts to write *the* voice, conceptualized in varying degrees of generality,"⁶² (my emphasis) and it is this generality which has been especially instrumental to the construction of vocal representations of women in imperial Roman literature; the overwhelming amount of caricatures and temporal vagueness constructing a model 'other' from which to construct a Roman self. I find, to conclude, that Juvenal and Tacitus both write the woman's voice as a means toward demonstrating how fickle Roman identity has become; in other words, how non-Roman imperial Rome has become, and on that account how permeable Romanness is due to the deterioration of this boundary. Roman identity has become fragile, and the woman's voice, it seems, is the scapegoat for this. A perpetual state of civic emergency concerning lost identity is embodied through the speaking woman in both texts, whether Juvenal and Tacitus are "vocally anxious" about that displacement or not.

62 Shane Butler, *The Ancient Phonograph* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015): 13.

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Imagery and History in Two Passages of Ammianus

Marcellinus

Eli Vodarek-Berman

Abstract

This paper examines Ammianus Marcellinus' use of imagery in two short passages from the opening chapter of Book 25 of the *Res Gestae*. While recent scholarship on Ammianus has seen a growing interest in literary problems such as intertextuality (Kelly 2008) and narrative structure (Smith 1999), the function of imagery in his history remains understudied. Through a close reading of the Latin text, this paper argues that Ammianus' imagery serves to excite emotion in his readers as much as it serves to report historical facts. In the first sentence of Book 25, Ammianus pictures the Roman camp suffering through a starless night, setting a tone of anxious anticipation through his artful word choice and arrangement. His careful focalization of the army's fear pushes the audience to look forward to the dire events that the rest of the book contains. Ammianus' ephrastic description of the Persian cavalry at 25.1.12 assimilates the Persians' bodies to their equipment by applying words to them like *ferreus* ('made of iron') and *imbratteo* ('plate with metal'), which he elsewhere only uses for objects. Ammianus thus constructs the Persians as terrifying, living weapons. Rather than simply conveying information about the past, Ammianus' language constructs affecting verbal images that invest events with historical meaning.

φύσει δέ πως ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις ἅπασιν ἀεὶ τοῦ κρείττονος ἀκούομεν, ὅθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀποδεικτικῆς περιελκόμεθα εἰς τὸ κατὰ φαντασίαν ἐκπληκτικόν, ὃ τὸ πραγματικὸν ἐγκρύπτεται περιλαμπόμενον.¹

Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 15.1.1

Historical discourse is less a matching of an image or a model with some extrinsic reality than a making of a verbal image, a discursive "thing" that interferes with our perception of its putative referent even while fixing our attention on and illuminating it.

¹ "It's natural that in these situations we always pay attention to the more interesting part, and because of that we get dragged from the facts to the thrill of the imagery; the action gets concealed precisely because it is illuminated."

Hayden White, *Figural Realism*, 6

Introduction

Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 330-400 CE) was a Greek pagan born in Antioch. He wrote the *Res gestae*, the last great work in the genre of Latin historiography, after retiring from a military career. While the importance of his work for historians has long been recognized, it is only in recent decades that scholars have begun approaching his *Res gestae* as a literary artifact. This paper is an exercise in rectifying that deficiency and a contribution to the broader scholarly discussion on the boundaries between history and literature. I investigate how Ammianus' representation of past events in a literary discourse invests those events with historical meaning through a close reading of passages selected from the opening chapters of *Res gestae* XXV. I demonstrate that in these passages, Ammianus uses imagery to excite fear in the reader rather than simply convey historical data.

Although Ammianus' work, as the last major work of Latin historiography, occupies a central position in the development of ancient literature, it remains understudied as a literary text compared to other works in the genre. A search on *L'Année philologique* in the literature category, for example, yields 672 hits for Livy, 1064 for Tacitus, but fewer than two hundred for Ammianus. The scholarship on Roman historiography has effectively left the *Res gestae* behind.² This is no accident: as Kelly points out, downplaying Ammianus' literary qualities has been a strategy to increase the historian's apparent reliability since the days of Edward Gibbon, who presented Ammianus as a straight-talking army man without the talent for literary artifice.³

Since Gibbon's time, much ink has been spilled over Ammianus' historical accuracy and whether or how his writing distorts events. While Matthews argues in his monumental 1989 study that Ammianus was a largely unbiased reporter of facts, T.D. Barnes insists that Ammianus' stylization of events "has distorted his depiction of historical reality."⁴ But there is no historical reality until the historian depicts it. Historians give meaning to past events by emplotting them in a narrative: isolated, floating factoids about the past are in no sense historical until incorporated into a historical discourse, and this discourse is as much literary as it is scientific. The literary form of Ammianus' history and the rhetorical and stylistic choices he makes, in other words, are not extraneous to the work's historical content. The form has a content of its own. Both sides of the debate on

2 "[H]is work has benefited little from recent advances in the understanding of ancient historiography as literature" (Kelly, 2009, 349).

3 Gavin Kelly, "Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus' Heir and Gibbon's Guide," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 354–7.

4 Timothy David Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (Cornell University Press, 1998): 16.

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Ammianus' reliability fail to take this into account as they try to reach past Ammianus and extract 'what really happened' from how he wrote about it. Instead of trying to escape Ammianus, this paper lingers with him and seeks to understand his work of literature as literature.

Previous literary forays into the *Res gestae* have avoided treating the details of Ammianus' Latin, choosing instead to analyze his narrative in broad strokes.⁵ I take the opposite approach, employing a sustained focus on the details of the historian's language. Thus, this paper does not offer a treatment of the narrative arc of Ammianus' story of Julian's Persian Campaign: our object of study is Ammianus' literary art on the granular level. With these methodological and theoretical considerations in mind, we may turn to an analysis of Ammianus' imagery at a particularly important juncture in the work, the beginning of Book XXV.

Book XXV is a hinge point in the *Res gestae* as the final installment in the second of the three hexads into which Ammianus' surviving books are organized.⁶ It relates the demise of Ammianus' hero, the emperor Julian (r. 361-3 CE), in battle and the disastrous end of the Persian Campaign that he began. Book divisions structured the narratives of ancient historians, and as T.D. Barnes points out Ammianus Marcellinus was no exception.⁷ Because of its important narrative position as the beginning of the end, Book XXV is an appropriate place to investigate Ammianus' use of imagery in emplotting historical events into his narrative. I first explore Ammianus' scene-setting first chapter of the book, and then turn to his ephrastic description of the book's antagonists, the Persian army.

Framing the End: 25.1.1

Ammianus opens the book with foreboding imagery. The tone of anticipation and fear thus effected gives the reader a proleptic indication of the bleak events that are to unfold. The first sentence of Book XXV picks up on the final chapter of XXIV, in which the army had set up camp amidst a dust storm. Here, Ammianus crafts a sophisticated verbal image of one night passed in the Roman camp:

Et hanc quidem noctem nullo siderum fulgore splendentem, ut solet in artis rebus et dubiis, exegimus, nec sedere quoquam auso, nec flectere in quietem lumina prae timore.⁸

And this night shimmered not by the gleam of any stars; we suffered through it as is usual in matters bleak and doubtful, nor did anyone dare to

⁵ Smith 1999, for example, attempts an analysis of Persian Campaign narrative without quoting a single extended passage of Latin.

⁶ Kelly, "Ammianus Marcellinus: Tacitus' Heir and Gibbon's Guide," 350.

⁷ Barnes 1998, 20ff.

⁸ Ammianus, *Res gestae* 25.1.1.

sit down nor to avert his gaze in rest for dread.⁹

The historian's imagery creates a historical fact from a mess of details: darkness, wakefulness, the movement of the eyes. Each datum is meaningless, without historical interest, until Ammianus works them into a single image. The episode is an impressionistic creation of the historian and only given historical meaning by its place in the narrative. Ammianus inaugurates the book with this episode, singling out the night as of special significance. We need not deny that Ammianus is reporting the fact that the night of June 16 was starless to conclude that the historian invests this detail with narrative significance.¹⁰ *Fulgore* ("flash, glitter", usually "lightning") and *splendentem* are markedly amplified word choices to express the idea that the night was cloudy. Further elevation is achieved with *exegimus*. Contrary to what the rendering in Rolfe and Hamilton as "pass the night" would suggest, *exegimus* does not simply convey the fact that the camp spent the night in the way Ammianus describes. The verb *exigo*, while often used to denote the passage of time, tends to be used for passing the night only in dangerous and frightening circumstances.¹¹ The word is negatively coded, with the suggestion of force and necessity (the usual meaning is 'drive out, expel'), so a better rendering would be "suffered through the night." Ammianus' artful choice of words colours the passage with a tone of anxiety, assigning a historical meaning to the event of soldiers spending a night in their camp. This particular night in the Roman camp, one of many on this campaign, would be a trivial and meaningless detail indeed if placed in a different position in the text or if expressed in a less elevated way: the event only gains its status as a historical fact by its literary representation.

Ammianus builds on his imagery in his poignant image of the soldiers' fear, bringing out the emotional state of the camp and exciting anticipation in the reader. He achieves this through the poeticism *lumina* for eyes, a word choice that marks the fixed gaze of the soldiers as particularly significant. Yet the importance of "nec flectere in quietem lumina prae timore" has been obscured by the misinterpretation of Ammianus' translators, who take this as meaning the soldiers did not close their eyes. As den Boeft et. al. point out in the Dutch commentary, *flectere* is never used for closing one's eyes: the soldiers are instead afraid to *turn away their gaze*. The soldiers are on their feet and staring into the future, signalling that the reader should do the same. As he pictures the army looking on from their camp in fear, Ammianus thus pushes the audience to look forward to the dire events that the rest of the book contains. The soldiers are afraid to turn away their

⁹ All translations, unless stated otherwise, are the author's own.

¹⁰ Jan den Boeft et al., *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXV* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1–2.

¹¹ A search on *Hipparchia* for *exig-* and *exeg-* within three lines of *noctem* yields only a handful of relevant passages: almost all cases are in dire situations: e.g. Petronius, *Satyrica* 115.7.1; Tacitus, *Annales* 3.16.12; Lucan, *B.C.* 10.106. Pliny *Epistulae* 6.20.19.3 is particularly close to our passage: *dubiamque noctem spe ac metu exegimus*.

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gaze from the future, just as Ammianus' readers should be afraid to turn away from his narrative, apprehensive as we are of the approaching death of the hero.

Once he has heightened the tone, Ammianus has the Persians arrive on the scene:

Ubi vero primum dies inclaruit, radiantes loricae limbis circumdatae ferreis, et corusci thoraces, longe prospecti, adesse regis copias indicabant.¹²

When day first grew clear, the shining cuirasses fringed with steel fringes, and the glittering corslets, seen from afar, announced that the king's forces had arrived.

Ammianus takes pains to highlight the Persians' shining armour. The alliteration *loricae limbis* marks the importance of the armour, especially notable since *limbis* is redundant next to *circumdatae*: Hamilton doesn't even bother translating it. Ammianus thus added this piece of nuance to the historical record for the sake of alliteration. *Corusci thoraces* piles on the emphasis, effectively a varied repetition of the previous phrase since the exact distinction between *lorica* and *thorax*, two words for defensive breast coverings, is unclear. Boeft is satisfied to take Ammianus' attention to the Persians' armour as a sign that it stuck out in his memory; this is at best a naive approach to how the historian reported his experiences and at worst outright false since it is unclear whether Ammianus was present on the campaign.¹³ It also fails to appreciate how the armour description fits into the narrative Ammianus is building. Ammianus establishes a contrast between the arrival of the Persian force, with its carefully described brightly glittering armour, and the anticipation of the Roman army during that dark night. Indeed, the proximity of *inclaruit* and *radiantes* suggests an assimilation of the light of the dawning sun and the shining Persians.

The imagery is focalized through the Roman soldiers: we are not presented with a bird's-eye view of the Persian forces arriving. First Ammianus describes the visual experience of the glittering armour and only at the end of the sentence comes the conclusion that the king's forces are present: just as the soldiers in the camp would have perceived it. Ammianus' movement between the first- and third-person throughout the book means that this choice of focalization was not the outcome of the author having seen the events that way himself; it was a literary choice. Ammianus returns to and expands on the theme of the Persians' armour in section twelve of the same chapter, in a particularly effective (and affective) display of his imagery.

¹² Amm. Marc., *Res gestae* 25.1.1.

¹³ Boeft also seems to undermine his own reading by listing parallel passages in other writers pointing out the Persians gleaming armour.

Living Weapons: 25.1.12

Ammianus develops his image of the Persian troop to generate fear as much as to represent technical facts about weaponry and armour.

Erant autem omnes catervae ferratae, ita per singula membra densis lamminis tectae, ut iuncturae rigentes compagibus artuum convenirent, humanorumque vultuum simulacra, ita capitibus diligenter aptata, ut inbratteatis corporibus solidis, ibi tantum incidentia tela possint haerere, qua per cavernas minutas, et orbibus oculorum affixas, parcius visitur, vel per compagibus suppremitates narium angusti spiritus emittuntur.¹⁴

“All of the warbands were iron-clad, thus that each limb was covered with thick plates so that the stiff joints [of the armour] conformed to the joints of their limbs, and the representations of human faces were so accurately fitted to their heads, and their bodies were coated with solid metal, and there only could falling arrows lodge, where through small openings fitted to the orbs of their eyes they could see a little, or on the joints where the tip of the nostrils could exhale breath.”¹⁵

The passage’s rubric is that the cavalry squadrons were all covered in iron and the rest of the section fills this out in ephrastic detail. Ammianus exercises the full degree of his stylistic talents; but the *mimesis* of the Persian forces Ammianus produces thereby is no matter-of-fact description of the effectiveness of their armour, *pace* the Dutch commentators. The imagery indeed produces a clear picture of the armour, as Longinus says imagery does in prose, but the picture is a terrifying one. Ammianus creates a Persian force that is nearly monstrous: they are living weapons. The effect of this vivid imagery is paradoxically to conceal the Persians’ armour at the same time as it illuminates it by drawing us away from the fact and toward the feeling generated by the author’s words.¹⁶ The effect of this imagery is as much to inspire fear in the audience and set up an enemy for the hero Julian to vanquish as it is to show the audience what the Persian army ‘was really like.’

Ammianus marks the passage with the choice of *caterva* for the Persian units, a term often used in the context of barbarian forces as opposed to Roman

14 Amm. Marc., *Res gestae* 25.1.12.

15 I try to keep some sense of Ammianus’ contorted Latin in this translation; more comprehensible renderings can be found in the editions of Rolfe or Hamilton.

16 Longinus, *On the Sublime*. trans. by Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C. Innes, W. Rhys Roberts and revs. by Donald A. Russel. Loeb Classical Library 1999 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 1995: 15.1.1.

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ones.¹⁷ Earlier Ammianus has used *copia*,¹⁸ *turma*,¹⁹ and *multitudo*²⁰ for groups of Persian soldiers, making his choice of *caterva* in such a prominent position in the passage striking. As the subject of the first sentence, *caterva* sets an unsettling tone. An element of menace is added with the almost metonymic *ferratus* (“furnished with iron”), a term Ammianus almost always uses for inanimate objects like “arrows,” “towers,” and “door-bolts.”²¹ Transforming the quality of “iron-furnished” from the armour to the cavalry companies themselves, he plants the seed for his image of the Persian forces as living weapons.

The description crescendos as Ammianus uses the device of *auxesis* or amplification to increase the effect of his imagery.²² Den Boeft et. al. point out that elsewhere Ammianus uses *imbratteo* for the covering of objects in metal, never for people. Rather than *induo* or another word used for humans putting on clothing, the historian has chosen *imbratteo* to represent the Persians as weapons. *Humanorum* is emphatic, and gives a universal, elevated tone distinct from the more mundane *hominum* or *virum*. *Orbis oculorum* is a redundancy, and *supremitas* is an extremely rare word, used only one other time in Ammianus, where he uses it to mean “death.”²³ The result of this sustained amplification is a lofty tone imbued with grandeur, positioned to excite fear in the reader. That the helmets are crafted in such a way as to be a *simulacra*, images or likenesses, of human faces perhaps recalls the ancient stock-praise for art, that it was impossible to tell apart from life. This is perhaps a subtle nod to the historian’s skill in imitating the appearance of the Persians’ armour in written form: the ecphrasis is after all a *simulacra* of events.

The Dutch commentators suggest that this ecphrasis of the Persians’ armour is purely functional: Ammianus is simply conveying that no part of the Persians’ body was unprotected as evidence for his claim that arrows cannot harm them. We may reply with Longinus that mixing in reasoned arguments with vivid description is another literary technique to enhance the effect of imagery.²⁴ The vividness of Ammianus’ imagery, the rococo elaboration of his language, defy a scientific explanation.

Conclusion: Historiography and *Mimesis*

Ἄρα εἴ τις Ὀμήρω τῷ γενναίῳ καὶ Θουκυδίδῃ τῷ Ἀθηναίῳ μὴ
ικανὸς ἐξαγγεῖλαι παραπλησίως πολέμους καὶ μάχας ἀνθρώπων, σιγῇ τῷ τοιοῦτῳ

17 Lewis and Short, s.v. “caterva.”

18 Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 25.1

19 [Longinus], *Subl* 25.3, describing both Roman and Persian troops.

20 [Longinus], *Subl*, 25.3; 25.11.

21 Jan den Boeft et al., *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXV* (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 23.

22 See [Longinus], *Subl*. 11–12 for an ancient treatment of *auxesis*.

23 Lewis and Short, s.v. “supremitas.”

24 [Longinus], *Subl*. 16.9.

ἀνδρὶ παραιτέον εἰς τὰ βασιλεία.²⁵

Themistius, *Orationes*, 15.1

scribant reliqua potiores aetate et doctrinis florentes. quos id
(si libuerit) aggressuros, procudere linguas ad maiores moneo stilos.²⁶

Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 31.9

Modern opponents of applying literary theory to historical discourses maintain that there is a strict distinction between a historian's relationship to his material and a fiction writer's.²⁷ While the one must faithfully represent real events, the other has free creative range. But for Ammianus' contemporary, Themistius, worthwhile reporting should resemble Homer's representation of mythical events and Thucydides' representation of real ones alike. This suggests that for some ancient subjects, the boundary between history and literature could be more fluid than some modern critics would have it. It is not important to Themistius that Homer relates mythical events. So the 'literary' concern of giving events their appropriate gravity and elevation comes before a strictly 'historical' concern with representing the past 'as it really happened.' Ammianus shares this concern with Themistius.

At the end of the *Res gestae*, Ammianus exhorts his would-be historiographical successors to write about subsequent events "ad mairos [...] stilos" (lit. "toward greater pens"). As Kelly argues, this phrase has an important double meaning.²⁸ On the one hand, Ammianus encourages imitation of the grand style of classical writers; on the other hand, he implies the specific style of panegyric, which the phrase *mairos stilos* is used to mean in contemporary authors. So for both Themistius and Ammianus, investing events with the proper gravity by imitating classical models is equally important to telling the truth about those events. Or put another way, the failure to encode historical events into their appropriate literary form was no less a distortion of the past than lying. The idea that certain historical events require certain literary forms presupposes the conviction that historical writing gives meaning to events at the same time as recording them. Historical mimesis, in other words, involves not the mere representation of events in a written discourse, but the constitution of those events through the historian's creative art. By the constitution of events is meant that the historian gives events

25 Themistius, *Orationes* XI. "Obviously, if someone can't narrate the wars and battles of men in a way that comes close to the noble Homer and the Athenian Thucydides, he should come to the palace in silence." [i.e. he shouldn't make a speech like Themistius is making].

26 "Let men more vigorous in age and in the flower of their learning write what remains. As for the ones who will take this on, I advise them to forge their tongues to greater pens."

27 Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020): 15–16.

28 Gavin Kelly, "'To Forge Their Tongues to Grander Styles': Ammianus' Epilogue," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, 1st ed., ed. by John Marincola, (Wiley, 2007), 455–6.

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meaning by their place in the narrative and their literary employment. The gleam of the Persian's cuirasses and one cloudy night are so many moments of perception in the blooming buzzing confusion of details before the historian picks them out and arranges them into a story.

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Speech and Blame in Arrian's *Anabasis*

Raquel Lewin

Abstract

The murder of Cleitus (4.8-9) is a pivotal moment within Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*, where Arrian constructs an evaluative framework for interpreting Alexander's character using the rhetorical conventions of *parrhêsia* (παρρησία). This paper builds on Dana Field's recent work on the rhetorical construction of *parrhêsia* in Roman literature during the Second Sophistic. Fields' work provides valuable insights into the rhetorical uses of *parrhêsia* in sophist literature. Nevertheless, the genre of history has been understudied through this lens. This paper advances three main claims: First, Cleitus's death contextualizes the death of Bessus as a moral turning-point by changing the text's chronological form. Second, Arrian depicts Cleitus's death as the fault of his own failed perlocutionary speech; Cleitus dies because he fails to use the force of frank speech. Third, Arrian shifts Alexander's culpability away to the influence of the "Eastern" flatterers, portraying both Alexander and Cleitus as having fallen to their corrupting influence. While Arrian asserts his work as an objective history—presenting himself in contrast to the literary styles of the time that used historical characters to present moral arguments—by dramatizing the death of Cleitus, he falls into the same rhetorical strategies he opposes.

Introduction

In 328 BCE at Marcanda, now known as Samarkand, Uzbekistan, during Alexander the Great's conquest of the known world, Cleitus, co-commander of the elite companion cavalry, disrupted a banquet by engaging in a drunken dispute with Alexander, king of Macedon. Alexander, provoked by Cleitus' insulting speech, killed him in a fit of rage. This paper concerns how Arrian rhetorically constructs the scene in *Anabasis* as an evaluative tool for assessing Alexander's character. I argue that Arrian absolves Alexander by using speech to emphasize court flatterers' and Cleitus' social transgressions rather than Alexander's, in doing so treating the scene as a diagnosis of Alexander's fatal flaw: his uncontrollable passion. First, the death of Cleitus is part of a broader rhetorical strategy in which Arrian disrupts his narrative's chronological order for the purpose of highlighting Bessus' death as a pivotal moment in the text. Second, Arrian depicts Cleitus' death as the fallout of an act of failed perlocutionary speech; Cleitus died because he failed to persuade the audience he was speaking frankly. Third, Arrian shifts blame onto the scene itself by framing both Alexander and Cleitus as the drunken victims of Eastern customs.

Methodology

This paper incorporates Dana Fields' recent work on *parrhêsia* (παρρησία) and frank speech in Roman literature. Fields uses the concept of "frankness" to examine how Hellenistic and Post-Classical Roman authors construct Greek history through speech. Frankness is "a performative concept that is expressed via uses of *parrhêsia* and other Greek terms." It is "a value to which practically everyone lays claim, often, though not always, by ascribing to oneself or otherwise associating oneself with *parrhêsia* in its more positive sense."¹ For example, *parrhêsia*, meaning "the ability to say all," is the clearest literal example of "free speech." Yet the term's specific identity, associations, and contexts are situated in distinct temporal and geographical contexts.² *Parrhêsia*, as it will be discussed in this essay, does not relate to the relationship between speech and the functioning of a democratic society, but rather how it is used by Arrian in *Anabasis* to signal the virtuous aspects of democratic society which authors in his literary period valorised. While Fields' book largely focuses on biographical and moralising literature, this essay aims to extend her contributions into the realm of historiography through Arrian. Frankness is a valuable lens for examining how Arrian uses speech to construct and evaluate Alexander's character in the *Anabasis*, because it engages with the tension inherent between the historian's neutral perspective and the unique view of history they wish to present. In examining the speech and its function within the text, this paper seeks to clarify how the literary conventions of frankness crystallise Arrian's view of Alexander.

Fields draws on speech act theory to argue that literary expressions linked to *parrhêsia* function as actions themselves, not just representations of actions. Speech act theory originates from J.L Austin's 1955 book *How to Do Things with Words*, where he examines the agency of language and its various parts. Austin asserts that speech is capable of changing reality as well as describing it. For example, if a judge says, "guilty," the utterance does not describe the verdict; it prosecutes the defendant, changing legal reality.

Central to this essay is the division of locution, illocution, and perlocution of speech embedded in Fields' definition of frankness. At the literal level, locution is the act of speech itself, as in utterance of certain words that have the agency to change reality. Illocution is the force of the utterance, how a thing is said. It is important to note that the same locution can have different illocutions. For example, "You are okay" can be used as an assertion or a question. Building on these simpler illocutions, Fields argues that "the frank speaker constitutes himself as a particular kind of person (free, a man, a philosopher, etc.) through

1 Dana Fields, *Frankness, Greek Culture, and the Roman Empire* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2020): 2.
 2 K. A. Raafaub, "Aristocracy and Freedom of Speech in the Greco Roman World" in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, ed. I. Sluiter & R. M. Rosen (Brill, 2004), 46.

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speaking in this culturally encoded way.”³ Illocutionary force not only constructs the boundaries for locution’s action, but it also reflects back on the speaker’s identity. Returning to the previous example of a judge, “guilty” is only a locution because it has the power of the law behind it. This is a vital characteristic of frank speech, because “the performance of frankness is determined not simply by the content of speech but also by its critical mode. In addition, like other illocutionary acts [...] it requires particular conditions to be valid, key among which is risk.”⁴ Frankness is not just an illocution; it is also a perlocutionary act. A perlocutionary act is the act performed by uttering a certain locution with a certain illocutionary force. For example, uttering the words “Carthage must be destroyed” with the right illocutionary force could perform the perlocutionary act of ordering someone to invade and destroy Carthage.

The Death of Cleitus as a Digression from the Linear Narrative

Arrian’s digression from the main narrative in Book Four is a rhetorical strategy emphasizing the moment where Alexander begins losing control over his passions. Arrian draws attention to the significance of Bessus’ death by disrupting the chronological procession of events shaping the text. The events jump from the death of Bessus in 329 BCE to the murder of Cleitus in 328, to an ambiguously dated scene involving Callisthenes, and then to the conspiracy of the pages in 327. Arrian’s decision to depart from chronological order marks a significant break from his objective historiographical method.

Arrian positions his narrative in opposition to other accounts of Alexander’s life by foregrounding what are, in his estimation, credible sources over the abundance of mutually conflicting secondary sources.⁵ This approach is significantly different from Plutarch’s biographical account, where he prefaces his work by stating he is:

Writing Lives not history, and the truth is that the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues or vices of the men who performed them, while on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of a man’s character than battles where thousands die, huge troop deployments or the sieges of cities.⁶

Arrian signals his opposition to the historiographic quality of his predecessors’ work on the same subject. As a historian, Arrian dramatizes the process of his historical inquiry so as to draw a distinction between history and biography as a genre.⁷

³ Fields, *Frankness*, 2.

⁴ Fields, *Frankness*, 2.

⁵ Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, ed. J.R. Hamilton, trans. A. de Sélincourt (Penguin Publishing Group, 1971): 1.1.

⁶ Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander*, trans. I. Scott-Kilvert and T.E. Duff (Penguin Publishing Group, 2011): 1.

⁷ D. W. Leon, *Arrian the Historian: Writing the Greek Past in the Roman Empire* (University of Texas Press, 2021): 24.

At the centre of this distinction is how either author understands the truth of a man's character. For Arrian, truth is the result of thorough labour to record the events in a man's life as they happened. For Plutarch, truth is found in the memories of a man's character, even if the remarks about a man's character are not literally true. Plutarch believes they must hold enough poetic truth to them to reveal something inherent about the man. Plutarch's biography is a methodological foil to Arrian's history because it demonstrates contested understandings of how to represent the past in the most accurate manner. Yet, by removing the episode on Cleitus from its chronological context and placing it after the murder of Bessus, Arrian emphasizes the dramatic elements of Alexander's life, even though he wants to defend his work as a history by stressing that his pursuit of historical inquiry is objective.

Arrian uses the murder of Cleitus to comment on Alexander's flawed character.⁸ He demonstrates this by thematically connecting Bessus' and Cleitus' deaths:

I have no praise for such conduct; but in my opinion, at least, the splendid achievements of Alexander are the clearest possible proof that neither strength of body, nor noble blood, nor success in war even greater than Alexander's own—not even the realization of his dream of circumnavigating Libya and Asia and adding them both to his empire, together with Europe too—that none of these things, I say, can make a man happy, unless he can win one more victory in addition to those the world thinks so great—the victory over himself.⁹

Arrian interprets military conquest as a legitimate means of attaining greatness while also observing that happiness comes from conquering one's own passions. In doing so, Arrian moves the emphasis of the narrative away from his compassion towards Bessus and towards the question of Alexander's ethics and character.¹⁰

Arrian attributes Alexander's unnecessary violence towards others to his pursuit of a morally fragmented path; in conquering the world, Alexander fails to conquer himself, as demonstrated by his disregard for the wishes of his army to retreat after he conquers Persia. Though Arrian depicts Alexander's previous acts of unnecessary violence, such as the destruction of Thebes, as partially justified because other Greek *polises* saw Thebes as a traitor to Greece,¹¹ the murder of Cleitus articulates the murder of Bessus as a turning point in how the reader should consider this behaviour. The digression scenes signal to the reader that the murder of Bessus is where the relationship between Alexander's military con-

⁸ Arr., *Anab.* 2; Leon, *Arrian the Historian*: 24-6.

⁹ Arr., *Anab.* 2.

¹⁰ Bogdan Burliga, "The Philosopher and His King" in *Arrian's Anabasis: An Intellectual and Cultural Story* (Foundation for the Development of University of Gdańsk for the Department of Mediterranean Archeology, 2013), 97.

¹¹ Arr., *Anab.* 1.9.

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quests and personal decline begins to crystallize into a larger motif of Alexander's life—the more he succeeds militarily, the less inner control he has, and the more destruction it causes.

Cleitus and Frank Speech

Examining Cleitus' speech, he is not just uttering locutions with the illocutionary force of frankness; he is also performing a perlocutionary act by using his speech to try to associate himself with a particular type of person, in this case, a frank speaker. Thus, in the digressions, the attempted perlocution of frank speech is the point at which the speaker either succeeds or fails to persuade their audience that they are a frank speaker. Accordingly, Cleitus died because he failed to commit the perlocutionary act of persuading his audience that he was a frank speaker.

In Arrian's account, Cleitus was brought to rage because Alexander deviated from Macedonian custom, as well as adopting new habits offensive to the Macedonian cohort. Arrian begins the scene by outlining the circumstances that brought Cleitus to anger during the feast; Alexander deviates from the normal tribute to Dionysus in favour of the Dioscuri, a practice that was not widely adopted in Macedon,¹² but the sycophants in Alexander's court declare Alexander's achievements extend his status above even that of Polydeuces, Castor, and Heracles.¹³ The comparison between Alexander and immortal figures is thus offensive to Cleitus because Alexander's status is derived from profaning the achievements of the gods.¹⁴ The speech of Alexander's court undermines the cultural hierarchy present within the army by allowing speech altering the court's social hierarchy. Flattering speech foregrounds the Eastern sect of the military, which Arrian, like Cleitus, views as barbaric.

Cleitus' response is perlocutionary because his speech politically affiliates him with the older attitudes of the Macedonian establishment. There are few primary sources on Cleitus' political background. Nonetheless, Cleitus is often represented as a significant figure within the Macedonian command by ancient sources. Arrian attributes Alexander's decision to promote Cleitus to co-commander of the companion cavalry to the worry that one man—or more importantly, one man's interest—should have control of so great a force within the army.¹⁵ Scholars suggest his promotion to co-commander of the companion cavalry was part of a broader effort to appease the political faction within the Macedonian army that believed Hephaestion was involved in the murders of Philotus and Parmenio.¹⁶ Giving Cleitus power over half the companion cavalry formalised Cleitus' influence within

12 A.B Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary On Arrian's History Of Alexander* (Oxford, 1995, Oxford University Press): 53.

13 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

14 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8; Bosworth, *Commentary on Arrian*, 56.

15 Arr., *Anab.* 3.27.

16 Elizabeth Carney, "The Death of Clitus," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 22, no. 2 (1981), 150.

the army while also ensuring that it would always be monitored by Alexander's ally, Hephaestion. However, at the time of his murder, Cleitus had been recently moved from his position as co-commander of the cavalry, offered satrapy of Sogdiana, and was murdered right before he could take his post.¹⁷ Though, Arrian leaves this timeline of events out of his history. Nonetheless, Cleitus' political power and status are substantial to the force with which his speech can affect Alexander. Fields argues that frankness plays a central role in defining ethical and class-oriented identities because speech is a determination of status in relation to others, rather than an expression of one's status.¹⁸ When Cleitus speaks critically of Alexander at the feast, he's affirming his aristocratic position within the army; though he was no longer the co-commander of the cavalry, Cleitus had recently been given the Satrap of Sogdiana, where the banquet took place. The illocutionary force with which Cleitus speaks associates him with the aristocracy, simultaneously performing the perlocution of asserting that an aristocrat of his standing has the privilege to speak freely to the king.

Cleitus' speech attempts a more perlocutionary act: persuading Alexander of his own arrogance. This is evident throughout Cleitus' speech: "'This is the hand,' he cried, holding it out with a flourish, 'that saved you, Alexander, on that day.'"¹⁹ This exclamation reminds Alexander to be humble and to recognize that his success is attributable to the entire Macedonian flank of the army, not to him alone. Cleitus' speech, though critical, is not treasonous because of the relationship between kingship and his aristocratic court.

In the corpus of literature concerning the ideal king, there is a recurring trope that sets friends and flatterers in opposition to each other. This relationship initially develops in the fourth century BCE alongside the formalisation of class hierarchies.²⁰ In the early Roman empire, these ideas of kingship persist, most notably in the writings of Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch. In his *Discourse on Kingship*, Dio Chrysostom says that a flatterer corrupts the king "since he induces the fellow to take his own counsel and not trust to intelligent men."²¹ He contrasts the cultural attitudes of the Persian kings with the Roman emperors by suggesting the Persian disposition towards flattery is a condition for unhappiness and corruption, and contrasts it to the "delight in truth and frankness (*παρρησία*) rather than in flattery and guile" that is inherent in the ideal Roman emperor.²² As articulated by Dio Chrysostom, there existed a culture of ideal Roman rulership during Arrian's life that surrounded a king's benevolence specifically towards *parrhêsia* within his inner-circle.

17 Arr., *Anab.* 4.17; Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander, Volume I: Books 1-5*, trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 368 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946): 8.1.14.

18 Fields, *Frankness*, 31.

19 Arr. *Anab.* 4.8.

20 Fields, *Frankness*, 142.

21 Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 1-11, trans. J.W. Cohoon, Loeb Classical Library 257 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), 3.22.

22 Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.2-3.3.

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Not only was there a general philosophy towards a king's relationship with flattery and *parrhêsia*, there also existed a literary trope using Alexander's relationship with Diogonese of Sinope to understand the dynamic. Alexander's encounter with Diogonese of Sinope is often used as a parable to explain the ideal ruler's relationship with *parrhêsia*. In both Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch's accounts, they expound upon the moralising undertones of the episode; Dio Chrysostom explicitly links Alexander's behaviour to his love for *parrhêsia*,²³ while Plutarch says he admired "the haute and independence of mind of a man who could look down on him with such condescension."²⁴ Arrian's account of events is less overly moralising, but still falls into the same literary trope regarding Alexander's relationship with *parrhêsia*. In book seven of *Anabasis*, Arrian mentions a few stories regarding Alexander's love for condescending but wise speech. Though he does not make a point to foreground the moralising narrative that Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom do, Arrian works within the same philosophical framework that celebrates a king's temperance towards frank speech. One notable difference between Arrian's account is that he makes a point to say that "[Alexander's] conduct was always the exact opposite of what he then professed to admire."²⁵ Indeed, in the murder of Cleitus, Alexander gives in to the exact opposite conduct that Arrian admires him for.

Fields argues that Roman authors describing historical characters commonly used frank speech to frame the author or their characters as wise advisors in contrast to flatterers.²⁶ She calls this literary trope a "tyrant test" wherein the king's reaction to frank speech defines his rule as either a king or a tyrant.²⁷ While it is unclear if Arrian intentionally means to employ a tyrant test on Alexander in the scene, it is clear that he does hold a king to a higher ethical standard.²⁸ Alexander must tolerate Cleitus' speech because his tolerance is a measure of his kingship and character.

Though Cleitus' criticism of Alexander is morally correct, his speech is only permissible and persuasive if it stays within the social expectations of the scene, something Cleitus fatally fails to do. Cleitus fails to persuade Alexander for two reasons: first, he misunderstands his relationship to the king in the context of the feast; and second, Cleitus is infected by the wine's inappropriate influence. Arrian develops the feast scene as a space of uncontrollable passion and moral degradation. Though excessive drinking and feasting are features of the Macedonian court, Arrian had not included this aspect of Macedonian culture in his work until the digression scene.²⁹ Arrian also moralizes against this behaviour, noting that excessive drinking was a barbaric trait imported from the East.³⁰ As a result,

23 Dio Chrys. *Or.* 4.15.

24 Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 14.

25 Arr., *Anab.* 7.3.

26 Fields, *Frankness*, 58.

27 Fields, *Frankness*, 58.

28 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

29 Bosworth, *Commentary on Arrian*, 52.

30 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

the feast scene is framed as a place where Alexander prefers the court flatterers and the social conventions of the East over those of Macedonia, leading to a social structure within the scene in which barbarism is foregrounded as the acceptable social mode. Although Cleitus was correct to interject, it was not well-received in the context of the scene because prevailing social expectations were against him. By bringing serious speech against the influences of flattery and barbarism into a scene framed by flattery and barbarism, the actual illocution of his remarks is hostile rather than frank and advisory. Furthermore, the way in which Cleitus speaks takes on an insulting quality that Arrian attributes to Cleitus' drunkenness.³¹ Cleitus cannot successfully cast himself as morally above the rest of the characters in the scene because he too has lost control of his passions.

The Court Flatterers and Alexander's Character

Arrian uses direct and indirect speech to create an ambiguity between the core of Alexander's character and the indulgent influences he falls victim to. Throughout the text, indirect speech, such as "some of the company [...] declared with gross flattery that, in their opinion, Polydeuces and Castor were not to be compared with Alexander and his achievements"³² is a framing device where the speech applies characteristics onto Alexander, rather than Alexander taking agency and speaking out his desires as perlocutionary acts. This is crucial to the scene, because it turns the agency of the speech towards Alexander's company and not himself. In doing so, Alexander appears to have little power over the changing reality of his army.

Cleitus' impression of Alexander's corruption derives from the type of speech that Alexander allows in his court, not from Alexander's own words, thereby making Cleitus' accusations towards Alexander pragmatically infelicitous. In contrast, Alexander's direct speech distinguishes him from the Eastern rulers whom Cleitus believes he emulates. Alexander exclaims: "Have I nothing left of royalty but the name? Am I to be like Darius, dragged in chains by Bessus and his cronies?"³³ Alexander manipulates the illocutionary force of Cleitus' speech using his own. While Cleitus' speech is assertive in that it attempts to expose Alexander's poor character, Alexander manipulates the truth of the speech by supposing that he is the victim of treachery and disloyalty by being held back from responding appropriately. Though Alexander's actions are guided by arrogance, uncontrollable passion, and the influence of eastern luxury, his direct speech makes it briefly seem as though they are a matter of status. Thus, Alexander can take advantage of the ambiguous nature of his character to manipulate the meaning of Cleitus' speech and take it to its extreme by insisting that he can only prove that he has not been corrupted if he kills Cleitus.

Though Arrian lays blame on Alexander by demonstrating Cleitus'

31 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

32 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

33 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

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murder is symptomatic of Alexander's uncontrolled passions, Arrian diverts the blame away from Alexander by emphasizing the influence of the court flatterers. Throughout the scene, everyone is affected by flattery. The flatterers, who bring up Alexander's achievements in such a way as to bring Cleitus to offence, and who reinforce Alexander's immortal sense of self-worth, inhibit both characters from controlling their passions. Alexander is absolved of blame for the murder because he was driven to that point by the excesses in the scene, upon which "he showed himself on this occasion the slave of anger and drunkenness, two vices to neither of which a self-respecting man should ever yield."³⁴

Still, Alexander is quick to recognize his own lack of control and punishes himself by attempting suicide "because a man who murdered his friend when his wits were fuddled with wine was not fit to live."³⁵ In this moment of moral clarity, Alexander briefly acknowledges his mortality. Arrian contrasts Alexander's brief exercise in humility against later scenes on the question of *proskynesis* (προσκύνησις), implying that it is ultimately the influence of the court flatterers that draws Alexander to indulge in further morally corrupting behaviour. Bosworth notes that this advice led Alexander to request *proskynesis* in the following scene.³⁶ He argues that "Anaxarchus, not Alexander, is ultimately responsible for the next episode of immoderation."³⁷ Likewise, within the scene on the death of Cleitus, although Alexander's lack of control is at the centre of culpability, Arrian goes to great lengths to obscure this fact by framing the scene in moral corruption that even Cleitus cannot deny.

Conclusion

This paper uses frankness to better understand how Arrian rhetorically constructs the murder of Cleitus as a critical lens through which he can both defend and condemn Alexander's character. Arrian signifies the importance of the murder of Bessus to Alexander's character by breaking the linear progression of the text to discuss the murder of Cleitus. Within the scene, Cleitus speaks within the bounds of acceptable speech for someone of his status, exercising his *parrhêsia*. However, the boundaries of accepted speech in the scene are distorted due to the influence of the Eastern court flatterers, and as a result, Cleitus is punished for speaking out of turn. By using speech to spread blame among the Eastern court flatterers and Cleitus, Arrian paints Alexander as a victim of his own passions, worsened by the ill company he kept and their intoxicating effect. Even Alexander's own admission of guilt is lined with virtue, as Arrian redeems Alexander by stressing his humility in admitting his mistake.

The *Anabasis* is a masterfully crafted piece of propagandistic literature

34 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

35 Arr., *Anab.* 4.8.

36 Bosworth, *Commentary on Arrian*, 68.

37 Bosworth, *Commentary on Arrian*, 568.

that manipulates the timeline and impression of events in Alexander's life, while also masquerading as objective history. Arrian goes to great lengths to paint Alexander as the conqueror of the world, while also a victim of his social one—in doing so, he reconciles the images of Alexander the victim and Alexander the conqueror. As a result, the *Anabasis* reads like a cautionary tale about the capacity of flattery to corrupt a king's soul. However, this apologia also accomplishes something greater: it argues that none of Alexander's actions in the murder of Cleitus or in the killing of many other noblemen in his court were motivated by his personal moral corruption. Rather, it was the corrupting influence of those around him that led to his moral and physical demise.

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Unwedding, Unveiling, Undoing: Marriage to Death and Female Homoeroticism in Euripides' Medea

Cass Aalbers-Davey

Abstract

This paper examines the description of the death of the Corinthian princess in Euripides' *Medea* 1137-1221, investigating what it reveals about the dynamics between Medea, Jason, and the unnamed princess he has married. This paper builds on Dana Field's recent work on the rhetorical construction of *parrhêsia* in Roman literature during the Second Sophistic. Fields' work provides valuable insights into the rhetorical uses of *parrhêsia*, but nevertheless, the genre of history has been understudied through this lens. While the existing literature has established firmly the marital imagery of this passage, it has yet to consider Medea as fulfilling the role of the husband in the princess' second marriage. I argue that Medea's murder of the princess represents a metaphorical undoing of the young bride's marriage to Jason, allowing Medea to supplant him as the princess' guardian and assert her divine power. Implementing tragic and ironic reversals of the wedding process, such as the poisoning of the bride-like dress and crown, the magic which burns and devours the princess like a wedding feast, and her violent return to her father's *oîkos*, Medea crafts a deadly wedding for her. Medea's fluidity between roles and assigned gendered behaviours are richly evidenced in this passage. Her methods are indicative of the patriarchal structures of 5th century BCE Athenian society, where she must inhabit a masculine role to grasp at autonomy and power. All of these aspects reveal a complicated, inverted, erotic thread between Medea and the princess.

Introduction

Much has been said about the description of the Corinthian princess' death in Euripides' *Medea*. This paper will take a close reading of the messenger's account of Glauke's death in lines 1137–1221 and draw comparisons between analogous imagery within the classical Athenian wedding process. I argue that Glauke's death is recounted as an inverted marriage, happening in improper order with tragic and

¹ For clarity I will refer to the princess as Glauke, as she is called in other Greek sources, but she is never named in *Medea*.

ironic reversals, ending with the undoing of her marriage to Jason. The formulation of Glauke's death as wedding-like positions Medea in the role of Glauke's husband at several key points.

In my analysis of this passage I follow the outline presented in John H. Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos' *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* for the aspects of the wedding process. Some key elements for this paper include the *engýē* ("betrothal"), an agreement made between the prospective husband and the bride's *kýrios* ("guardian"), typically her father or a close male relative;² the *anakalyptēria*, the unveiling of the bride before her husband;³ the ritual bath, performed using *loutrophoroi*, specialized vessels;⁴ the sacrifice of animals then consumed for the feast;⁵ and the *epaulia*, gifts presented to the married couple after the wedding proceedings.⁶

Upon Glauke's marriage to Jason, he would have become her legal guardian under fifth-century BCE Athenian law.⁷ Medea gifting the poisoned dress and crown to Glauke positions her as a prospective husband to the girl, sending an offer of marriage to her *kýrios*. The gifts also serve to connect the end of the ritual aspects of Glauke and Jason's wedding to the beginning of Glauke's new un/wedding.⁸ Their literal function may be that of Medea's contribution to the *epaulia* for Jason and Glauke. Medea sending her own children into the royal household insinuates her presence within it, destabilizing Jason's new marriage with a reminder of his first. Jason's encouragement that Glauke accept the garments⁹ unwittingly binds her in a betrothal to both Medea and death. It is then that the second wedding begins, drawing Glauke forwards to a new marriage and backwards to undo her marriage to Jason.

When Medea's children enter with her gifts, Glauke recognizes them as Medea's and "(*proukalýpsat*) her eyes and [turns] her white cheek away,"¹⁰

2 John Howard Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993): 10; Hans Julius Wolff, "Marriage Law and Family Organization in Ancient Athens: A Study on the Interrelation of Public and Private Law in the Greek City," *Traditio*, no. 2 (1944): 46-7.

3 Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 25; Rush Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019): 103.

4 Oakley and Sinos, 15-6.

5 Oakley and Sinos, 11.

6 Oakley and Sinos, 38.

7 Melissa Mueller, "The Language of Reciprocity in Euripides' Medea," *The American Journal of Philology* 122, no. 4 (2001): 482; James Robson, *Sex and Sexuality in Classical Athens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013): 12.

8 To conveniently discuss the paradoxical nature of moments that are two opposing events at once, I use a slash: 'un/wedding' refers to Glauke's inverted marriage/death, being both a wedding and an undoing of a wedding.

9 Euripides, *Medea* 1150-5. All quotations are translated by David Kovacs unless otherwise indicated.

10 Eur., *Med.* 1147-8.

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a reversal of the *anakalyptēria*. Both words come from the root verb of *kalýptō*, to cover or conceal. When Glauke looks at the gifts, in the gap between lines 1155–56, she must ‘unveil’ her eyes, revealing her face and completing the *anakalyptēria* in her un/wedding. The gifts themselves, a dress and a crown, have particular associations with marriage; the crown is sometimes referred to with the same word, *stéphanos*,¹¹ as the garlands that would be worn on a wedding day.¹² Glauke accepting the gifts and dressing herself in them makes her appear bride-like as the wedding events begin to repeat and reverse. After putting on Medea’s gifts, Glauke moves around the room to admire herself, mimicking an Athenian wedding procession. Curiously, she “over-rejoices”¹³ in the dress and crown: there is a sense of overindulgence, even before the effects of the poison set in on Glauke. Nancy Rabinowitz suggests that this short episode may be emphasizing Glauke’s vanity,¹⁴ but I additionally suggest that it emphasizes the unnatural persuasive effect of the clothes upon their wearer and unsettles the scene as the account of her death begins. In any case, Glauke’s enjoyment of the gifts is excessive, foreshadowing the ensuing events.

As Glauke dies, Medea demonstrates control of the princess’ body akin to that of a husband over a bride. The beginning of Glauke’s poisoning is mistaken by an attendant as a “frenzy”¹⁵ from “Pan or one of the other gods.”¹⁶ Her “festal shout” at 1173 becomes a “wail” at 1177 after seeing the state of the princess. The noises echo and then invert the practice of the bridal group singing outside the bridal chamber.¹⁷ This moment of frenzy inverts the consummation of a wedding night: what appears for a moment to be divine *mania* is instead indicative of Glauke’s poisoning, and the inflictor of this state is not her husband Jason, but Medea. Glauke’s body has a dramatic effect analogous to sexual pleasure performed on it by the actions of another person.¹⁸ Medea, playing Glauke’s husband on the wedding night from a distance, demonstrates her possession of Glauke’s body not alone within a wedding chamber, but far from her as Glauke is in a populated room to be witnessed. By doing so, she flips the public and private spheres, conflating the procession and consummation of the un/wedding and

11 Eur., *Med.* 984, 1160, 1192.

12 Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 16; see Xenophon, *An Ephesian Tale* 1.9.5 for another example.

13 “ὕπερχαίρουσα,” Eur., *Med.* 1165, my translation.

14 See Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Unveiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993): 145.

15 “ὄργῆς,” Eur., *Med.* 1172.

16 Eur., *Med.* 1172. The mention of Pan insinuates an erotic aspect to Glauke’s frenzy.

17 Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 37.

18 Compare this to Sappho 31, a scene where the woman that Sappho loves inflicts agonizing, deathlike sensations upon her by (perhaps unintentionally) ignoring her. Both Medea and Sappho’s lover are physically distant from their victim/suitor and are still able to inflict pains on her that are both erotic and deathlike. For more on Sappho 31, erotic poetry, and *Medea*, see: Rick M. Newton, “Medea’s Passionate Poison,” *Syllecta Classica* 1 (1989).

bringing herself into the masculine sphere while excluding Jason.

After the first moment of frenzy, the gifts become hostile: Glauke's crown "[shoots] forth a terrible stream of consuming fire."¹⁹ This imagery is mutable and echoes several different aspects of the wedding process. It directly inverts the ritual bath before adornment,²⁰ transforming the water to all-devouring²¹ fire. It covers her whole body, melting her flesh and transforming it to liquid²² rather than, like water, dripping off of her body: her skin and blood become the bathwater. The visual is also similar to that of a marriage torch.²³ The fire that consumes Glauke is cooking her like the sacrificial meat consumed at the marriage feast, and as it does, Medea's dress begins to devour her.²⁴ Instead of consuming a wedding feast that sits contained within her body, the dress violently reaches inwards, through her flesh: her body is "torn by the unseen jaws of the poison."²⁵ Glauke becomes the feast, the bathwater, and the marital torch in her un/wedding, and Medea continues to show her possession over Glauke's body by violently transforming it. The melting of Glauke's skin as well as the blood dripping from the top of her head²⁶ also figures as another, gorier un/veiling: not of the veil from her face but of the skin from her body. This both reveals and obscures her totally, to the point that she is "barely recognizable to any but her father."²⁷ She is *hyper*-unveiled by Medea, her beauty destroyed²⁸ and transformed into "a dreadful sight to behold"²⁹ instead of a beautiful young bride. Medea removes Glauke from Jason's reach along with any pleasure he could derive from her by rendering her corpse unrecognizable to all but her father, which allows the second death in her revenge plot to take place. When Kreon tries to rise from his lament over Glauke, he is unable to pull away from her body without "rip[ping] his aged flesh from his bones."³⁰ Medea forcibly returns Glauke to the care of the *kýrios* she left behind through marriage, literally attaching her to her father. Glauke was never going to exit her father's household: instead, Jason joined her *oikos* when marrying her, an arrangement made out of necessity for him, and, ostensibly, Medea and their children.³¹ This places him in a feminized

19 Eur., *Med.* 1187.

20 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975): 62.

21 "παμφάγου," Eur., *Med.* 1187.

22 Eur., *Med.* 1201.

23 Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 104.

24 "ἔδαπτον," Eur., *Med.* 1189.

25 Eur., 1201–2.

26 Eur., 1189.

27 Eur., 1196.

28 See: Charles Segal, "Euripides' 'Medea': Vengeance, Rehearsal and Closure," *Pallas*, no. 45 (1996): 34 for more detail on the reversals of this moment.

29 Eur., 1202.

30 Eur., 1217.

31 Eur., 550 ff.

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position by making him dependent on the social power and resources of the family he marries into, like a bride. Medea undermines even this lesser authority over Glauke by undoing the exchange of guardianship.

Earlier in the play, the Chorus, foreseeing Glauke's demise, understands that she is to be wed to Death: "About her fair hair with her own hand she will place the finery of Death."³² Medea has moved her backwards through the marital rites so that her marriage to Jason is summarily rejected in a way that both undoes their marriage and marries Glauke again, to Medea for a brief time and then to Death, mimicking how Jason has been twice-wed. Girls and young women who died before being married were often buried with the ritual bath *loutrophoroi* and conceptualized as brides to Hades.³³ If Glauke's un/wedding restores her, in some way, to the state she inhabited pre-marriage, then she is a young virgin in the same breath that she is twice-married, and she ultimately ends the play under the guardianship of Death. Medea has passed Glauke through her hands to Kreon and to Death. She grants everyone access to Glauke but Jason, who is excluded from even watching the process of exchange. This display of power emphasizes the difference between Medea and Jason: she is more powerful than him and Glauke is at her mercy, not his.

Medea's borderline status between binary divisions (citizen/barbarian, god/mortal, mother/child-killer) is reflected in the gendered actions she performs. As is true of other tragic heroines, what she is able to do far exceeds the autonomy granted to almost all contemporary Athenian women.³⁴ However, she does not take on a completely masculine role: rather, she simultaneously performs masculine and feminine actions.³⁵ We can see this as she deliberates on her course of action for Jason and Glauke. Considering possible avenues of retribution, Medea asks: "Shall I set the bridal chamber on fire or thrust a sharp sword through their vitals, creeping into the house where the marriage bed is laid out?"³⁶ As Ed Sanders has noted, *Medea* has a strong concentration of references to (marital) beds, and by implication the sex that happens within them.³⁷ Medea's contemplation of slaying Jason and Glauke in their marriage bed invokes the idea of killing them in

32 Eur., 980–1.

33 Robson, *Sex and Sexuality in Classical Athens*, 29; Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 6. As one famous tragic example of a virginal bride to Death, see: *Antigone*, discussed in Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 59–71.

34 Segal, "Euripides' 'Medea'," 29–30; Margaret Williamson, "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*" in *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1990), 18. See Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 93–103 for analysis of the autonomy of tragic heroines as compared to women living in classical Athens.

35 See Helene Foley, "Medea's Divided Self," *Classical Antiquity* 8, no. 1 (1989) for a thorough exploration of Medea's masculinity and femininity.

36 Eur., 378–80.

37 Ed Sanders, "Sexual Jealousy and *Erôs* in Euripides' *Medea*" in *Erôs in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45–6.

the act of sex.³⁸ She considers a masculine mode of revenge, but ultimately uses a feminine method, poison, to kill Glauke.³⁹ She does not reject the thought because she is incapable of murder in close proximity to her victim: she is famously capable of murder with a blade, as shown later when she kills her children. Medea is able to use both feminine and masculine tactics, and strategically employs those which best serve her needs at any moment. She inhabits gendered roles when they are most rhetorically useful to her: she seeks Kreon's sympathy as a mother,⁴⁰ but demonstrates her superiority over Jason through her use of the role of the husband with Glauke. She is a fluid, mutable, difficult to categorize figure.⁴¹

Medea's slippery nature also holds true for the role she plays in Glauke's marriage/death. Rush Rehm positions Medea as *nymphéútria*,⁴² a woman close to the bride, perhaps her mother, who aids in her preparations for the ceremony.⁴³ This interpretation is further supported by Medea's orchestration of events and the cosmetic nature of the gifts. Melissa Mueller supposes Medea as Glauke's father,⁴⁴ evidenced with Medea's dowering of Glauke to Death through the gifts. Charles Segal and Rick M. Newton both consider Kreon as allegorically Glauke's husband, analyzing erotic imagery within the passage of his lament.⁴⁵ Certainly Medea fulfills all those roles: to Glauke, she is *kýrios*, *nymphéútria*, murderer, and husband. The lack of discussion on that final role is a slight oversight in *Medea* scholarship, but not an unimportant one. Isabelle Torrance notes that fire is linked to *erōs*, and that the gifts' effects represent "Medea's vengeful passion,"⁴⁶ but does not connect this to Medea's emotions about Glauke. This tiny gap is perhaps indicative of a historical lack of attention to the erotic interactions between women in Classical literature.⁴⁷

Medea uses her magical abilities to assert herself as the dominant, patriarchal figure in Glauke's marriage. She emasculates Jason by stealing his wife
38 Lysias' roughly contemporary speech *On the Murder of Eratosthenes* is a (likely fictitious) defense of a man convicted of precisely that: killing a man he caught having sex with his wife in their bed.
39 Eur., 381–5.

40 Eur., 340 ff.

41 Sarah Nooter, "Medea – Failure and the Queer Escape" in *Queer Euripides: Re-Readings in Greek Tragedy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022) investigates the queerness of this non-conformity.

42 Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 103.

43 Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 16.

44 Mueller, "The Language of Reciprocity," 499.

45 Segal, "Euripides' 'Medea'," 33–4; Newton, "Medea's Passionate Poison," 19.

46 Isabelle Torrance, "The Princess' Gruesome Death and *Medea* 1079," *Classical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2007): 289.

47 Of course, much interest has been taken in female homoerotics in more recent years: see Sandra Boehringer, *Female Homosexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York: Routledge, 2021) and Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) for cultural overviews, and Sarah Olsen and Mario Telò, *Queer Euripides: Re-Readings in Greek Tragedy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022) for Euripides, to name only a few.

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and performing the husband. She possesses Glauke's body and plays upon it to her liking. When the poison of the gifts begin to take effect, Medea allegorically transforms Glauke into inanimate objects relating to marriage: bathwater, a torch, a wedding feast. She takes Glauke back through the stages of the marriage process until Glauke ends up back in the *oikos* she came from, literally attached to her father. Medea's actions in this passage highlight her ability to occupy and move between social and gendered positions, creating a show of undeniable power upon the body of the princess.

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Effeminate Hephaistos: Gender and Power in the Birth and Return of Hephaistos

Jenna Guadagna

Abstract

In Book 18 of the *Iliad*, Hephaistos describes the circumstances of his birth and childhood; in Book 1 of Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, the author briefly mentions a temple mural depicting the procession of Dionysos and Hephaistos back to Olympos which reunites the smith-god with his kin. I argue that both stories impart a need for the "correct" performance of gender, or alternative performances that result in male supremacy, in order to secure a stable society of properly functioning individuals. This reflects circumstances in reality where access to power is undistinguished between genders. Power, defined as the actions that impact a character's autonomy, is the axis of action used to order society. In order to fill the gap in Karłowicz's (2021) de-gendered politics of the family, I utilize the narratological lens outlined by de Jong (2014) and the gender performance theory of Butler (1990), with a focus on bodily capacity as the mode of power. Pregnancy is the primary act of power utilized in the birth narrative. I identify two forms: procreative (Hom. Il. 18.136ff, Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.20.3), modeled after reality, and creative (Hom. Il., 3.125-128, Hom. Il. 18.400ff), predicated on the accumulation of dependent knowledge. In the return narrative, it is the masculine power of restriction (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.20.3). Hephaistos, as a physically disabled god from birth, does not have the same access to normatively gendered behaviour as his peers and neuters the expectation of male supremacy. This is partially alleviated by the Okeanids giving him creative pregnancy in his childhood, and fully solved with his reintroduction into a masculine social role by Dionysos. I conclude that the narratives of Hephaistos rely on internal structures of gender and power, confirming the reality that gender trouble must be reckoned with in order for the social order of reality to be substantiated.

Introduction

The Greek god of metalsmithing, Hephaistos, is one of the scant Olympic twelve to not be presented in a collection of individually-focused myths. Beyond his role in mythic wars, such as the Trojan War or the much earlier Gigantomachy, his primary story is that of his own birth. This fact does not make his story any less exemplary

of the cultural milieu which also produced the stories of his half-siblings. Hephaistos' story begins, like many others, with divine violence. Hera, irascible and jealous—either at Zeus generally,¹ or in regards to his birth of Athena through swallowing Metis—attempts her own form of asexual generation.² Her new son Hephaistos, despite his godly status, was born with disabled legs; Pausanias³ in particular has Hera casting Hephaistos from Olympos herself in anger at his glaring, less than divine imperfections. Following this, Hephaistos is reared by the Okeanids⁴ Thetis and Eurynome, learning the craft of blacksmithing in secret for nine years.⁵ The disabled god, now fitted with divine skills, creates a trap for his mother: a golden throne, which fetters the occupant with unbreakable chains.⁶ It is only with the intoxication of Dionysos and his drunken revelry that Hephaistos is goaded into returning to Olympos on his donkey, forgiving Hera and unlocking her from the throne.⁷ In this essay, I will interpret the birth and return of Hephaistos—as attested in Hesiod and Homeric literature, and Pausanias respectively—through a narratological lens, with an emphasis on theories of gender.

I will begin by describing how power manifests in Homeric texts through gendered activity. In order to interpret the complexities in Homeric gender roles, an understanding of the text's focalization and its impact on what the narrative presents as "right" and "wrong" is needed. Significant figures, such as the divine Metis and the demigod Helen, set standards for feminine behaviour and the associated characteristics of sapience and creation. Through procreative and metaphorical birth, a woman is provided access to power. Manhood, oppositionally, is understood through the actions of Zeus and Dionysos. Both divinities represent a way to impact the body of others, always physically. Each figure has an effect on the world around them through these facets, understood here as power. Conflict arises when figures utilize the power of the opposite gender; claims on all resources threaten to unbalance the systems in place. Hephaistos and Athena are two such cases, and their existence exemplifies why distinctions of gendered power need

1 Versions using this narrative have Hephaistos act as a pseudo-doula, helping Zeus give birth to Athena after he has become associated with smithery (Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 7.33 ff; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.20).

2 The *Theogony* mentions Athena's birth twice in the account of Zeus' partnerships and children, once in reference to Metis and once in relation to his marriage to Hera. Hesiod, *Theogony* 886ff, 924 ff; Homer, *Iliad* 18.136 ff.

3 Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.20.3.

4 It is not until the second century CE that Eurynome is regarded as an Okeanid (Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. J. G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library 121 and 122 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 1.8), and Thetis is more commonly described with the patronymic title of Nereid. However, both ultimately descend from Okeanos, and I make the decision here to group them under the Okeanid title.

5 Hom., *Il.* 18.400.

6 Paus., *Description of Greece* 1.20.3.

7 Paus., *Description of Greece* 1.20.3.

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to be made.

Then, I will dissect the established fabula of the myth of the birth of Hephaistos. Each major figure within the story mirrors another, exposing the role of gendered power embedded in the focalization of the narrative. Zeus and Hera propose the question at the outset, creating unease by flouting the expectations of their genders through birthing an illogical divinity. Hephaistos and his mirrored counterpart, Athena, are still points of contention. While Athena is able to address her own peculiarities in a way that satisfies the narrative's logic on her own, Hephaistos cannot. Thetis and Eurynome respond to that unease by providing a way for these events to be acceptable, reinforcing the feminine standard. Mirroring establishes the logic of the fabula: what is retained and how is it subverted in other figures? In this dissection, I will identify the tensions that they produce and are produced by socio-cultural binaries, and the ways in which gender affects where figures interact with those binaries. This process of tension and inversion is what lays the bedrock for the myth of Hephaistos.

Finally, I will discuss the presence of Dionysos in Hephaistos' return more closely in conjunction with other critical readings, such as political theory or comparison to coming-of-age narratives. His use is bizarre and does not align with the original version of Hephaistos' story in terms of structure, but retains many of the same concerns. Homeric texts do not speak on the smith's return to Olympos, but Pausanias' account of an Attic mural explicitly does. Because of the archaeological character of this instance, more commentary on the social relevance of the myth can be entertained as opposed to the strictly theoretical role of Homeric text. This strange interpolation enriches the gendered reading of Hephaistos, and thus allows for alternative readings.

The Logic of Reality, the Logic of Myth

Impregnation, as the primarily repeated motif across the narrative, is the locus of power and control for both genders. What is considered transgressive within the narratives betrays the biases of the focalizer, and materializes from archaic cultural anxieties and the ideology of the Homeric narrator surrounding gendered activities. First, consider impregnation in observed reality. In the process of pregnancy, women can become generative figures, creators who entertain a form of previously inaccessible power. After ejaculation, women become the primary caretaker of the unborn child. Anxieties around women's influence over the unborn become reflections of real fears in non-mythic contexts. The Hippocratic medical text *On Intercourse*, for example, characterizes the woman as the primary determinant of insemination, proclaiming that she can keep or expel male semen "at will", and has her own semen that will affect the outcome of the child.⁸ While this exact view of

⁸ Hippocrates, *On Intercourse* 6.

the female body was most likely not prevalent at the time of Hephaistos' myth's conception, it signals an enduring cultural observation that the female body was not simply a receptacle, but vital and active. In opposition to this view is the context of that vitality: it is male power—the phallus—that opens the realm of control to women, and the society around them that ratifies a woman's impact on the child. Birth cannot happen without male semen, even when it is gestating women in charge of production. Any child produced would need to repeatedly be within recognized parameters of legitimacy over the course of its life, such as in the case of Athens' legitimacy and inheritance laws. It is worth noting that those in charge of determining lines of succession were predominantly men and demes at large.⁹ Thus, pregnancy can be understood as a physical collaboration between the male and female that is entirely dependent on male *initiation* and female *cooperation*, metered by their society.

Pregnancy was a potential liability for the potency of a divided sphere of social influence, muddying the segregation through the co-creation of a child. However, it was circumvented through enforced physical processes and patriarchal sociopolitical sanctions. In myth, the accessibility of power to women is not always predicated on the procreative relationship between a woman and a man. Instead, a woman can turn to her social obligations, equally capable of creation as bodily pregnancy. Literal pregnancy is complemented by weaving clothes, decorative fiber arts, stories, and schemes—metaphorical pregnancies with equally physical products.¹⁰ Homeric texts often juxtapose scenes of feminine creation with male presence and war-mongering, paralleling the importance of each to the opposite sex's theater of control. Action becomes a core component of realizing an individual's gender through distinguishment.¹¹ There remains, however, a discomfort in these alternative 'pregnancies'. Each pregnancy—such as weaving, story-telling, or judgement—requires a level of foreknowledge and skill to inform creation, or *μητις*; combined with the lonesome nature of unassisted pregnancy, there runs the risk of a woman's power rivaling that of a man's through the fact that she has the opportunity to make all the important decisions.

Helen's weaving is a direct example of the emergence in narrative of anxieties around a birth that is metaphorical and physical, with an adjoining scene that circumscribes her individual potential by reCOORDINATING her efforts with that of men's. In Book 3, the Trojan captive weaves cloth, but not any cloth: she weaves the story of the Iliad, with the most pronounced aspects being the battle between

9 Cynthia Patterson, "Athenian Citizenship Law" in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 280-2.

10 Cristiano Franco, "Women in Homer" in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. by Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 56.

11 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversive of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 190-1.

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the Trojans and the Akhaians.¹² Weaving cloth becomes a point of access to power, providing narrative authority separate from men's war-mongering. Additionally, it is largely framed as women's work in Homeric texts, making the action distinctly feminine.¹³ The very next scene is the Teichoskopia, wherein she participates in the council of elders, who prompt her to make judgements based on past experiences with the heroes on the opponent's side.¹⁴ And on first glance, Antenor's approval of her insight¹⁵ gives Helen the opportunity to affect the narrative perception of the men around her as might be expected of a man, not a captive woman.¹⁶ Her active participation with the council takes up both physical and social male space—her role as a woman and a war prize does not generate a need for this awareness.¹⁷ Here, Helen's feminine act of creation is permitted as it satisfies what Butler identifies as the Hegelian "masculine identity-in-difference."¹⁸ The council of men ratify her *μῆτις* as far as it solidifies the bonds of privilege kept amongst men and the power of oversight they exercise, turning the transgressively feminine into a more acceptable expression.¹⁹ Creation is not strictly procreative in the Homeric world, and with that comes additional social limits. Reality dictates that a man must claim his children, and myth dictates that men must approve creation in all its forms. Power is comfortably divided.

The focalization of the Homeric narrative is preoccupied with who has what power as the axis for naturality, not simply the mechanical parts needed to conceive. Procreative birth must involve both sexes, each in their prescribed roles, to be acceptable. Successful metaphorical birth under the same circumstances allows an equal amount of power as expected of each participant, constituting alternative access to power. Hera's birth, though procreative, lacks all proper aspects which makes it a pertinent example of an invalid birth. She forms her child in isolation, a parallel to Helen's weaving, and Hephaistos' birth divorces her from the realm of Zeus' surveillance. She cedes no control to him or any man, instead producing an alternative bid for power through her own will, which attempts to rival her king's. Zeus' birth of Athena, on the other hand, lacks no aspect of the logical criteria. The act of swallowing Metis completes the mechanical and socio-structural requirements of conception, even if the result is birthed from the father. Metis per-

12 Hom., *Il.* 3.125-8.

13 See also Penelope's suitors fundamental ineptitude concerning weaving; it takes a slavegirl revealing the plot for them to understand something was awry (Hom., *Od.* 2.100-11).

14 Hom., *Il.* 3.145 ff.

15 Hom., 3.203 ff.

16 Hom., 3.204.

17 See Judith Fletcher, "Women's Space and Wingless Words in the Odyssey," *Phoenix* 62, no. 1/2 (2008): 77-91, for a reading of Penelope's speech and physical space in the Odyssey; while some might disparage the idea that strict gendered ideas might have existed, the Homeric world has constructed lines of space more clear than reality.

18 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 54-5.

19 Patterson, "Athenian Citizenship Law," (n. 9).

forms the duties of a subservient mother, appropriately capitulating to Zeus' control by way of force; feminine cooperation and the male catalyst. Initial anxieties in procreative pregnancy, namely the potential rejection of male oversight, are resolved: Metis is swallowed in order that Zeus' handle on the throne would not be threatened by a male heir, thus maintaining his masculine power.²⁰ But to claim knowledge—*μητις*—is indeed to claim a *feminine* power, concerned with creation and delimited by men. The focalization is quite uncomfortable with knowledge being feminine, and furthermore for it to be a threat to the social hierarchy; Zeus' consumption solves the issue by firmly placing the trait in his, and thus all men's, realms. The king's extreme claim on the resource of power, however, violates the core logical principle that problematizes pregnancy in the first place: power must be split. Neither Hera nor Zeus entirely benefit from their pregnancies, even if Zeus' was more successful. Divine *μητις* is ceded to Athena forevermore instead of staying with her father, continuing the tradition of knowledgeable women; Hera produces a son with no skills at all. This is the distortion of the focalization rearing its head: if there are alternative routes to power, who should have what kinds? Should men have all the control, such as Zeus who impregnates *and* gives birth, who violates the principle of division? Or should the women have their own say, such as Hera and her solitary generation, opposing natural law *and* society's?

Reading the Birth of Hephaistos

The couple that prompts the question are Zeus and Hera, and their mediators are the Okeanids. Zeus and Hera's competing births are each grabs for power, either consuming or flouting all components needed for a successful creation. Hera's potential power seems to be an issue by way of pure ability: the woman, rather than accessing alternate power through acceptable channels, replicates the individuality of metaphorical pregnancy with the mechanical physicality of procreative pregnancy. Hera, as the goddess of motherhood and marriage, no doubt has some sympathetic connections to divinities associated with childbirth within the narrative and is thus assumed to be similarly gendered.²¹ However, her inability to perform either version of pregnancy as prescribed marks her as improperly gendered. Zeus' pregnancy provides too harsh of an overcorrection, as he completely eliminates the mother in his consumption of her. If each sex is able to find a way to claim a child as completely their own, what is there to say they could not birth their own armies, their own lines of succession? Yet each of their progeny provides balance to the improper behavior of each parent.

²⁰ Hes., *Theog.* 886 ff.

²¹ Jennifer Larson, *Greek Nymphs: Myths, Cults, Lore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 113. Larson also flags special cultic relations between Hera Teleia and nymphs in Attica, ancillary to the discussion here but important to drawing lines between each party as associated with motherhood and each other.

Hephaistos' disability and Hera's rejection of him can both be attributed to Hera's separation from the roles treated as inherent to her sex, as his lack of inherent traits and his need to use feminine modes of power balance the fear that comes with a woman's birth of an unfathered son. Hephaistos' disability is the primary barrier to his actualization of male gender as he is physically prevented from performing the kind of somatic force that Zeus—the primary male figure in the myth—does. His access to male power over women is slim. Hera herself throws Hephaistos to mortal land; he has no control over the force used against his body. If we see him as a mediating figure, Hephaistos' weakness works in the power of the rest of his family. Other divinities are well known to be threats to the power of the Olympian Twelve, and the birth of a son could potentially place him in the position to challenge the rest of the family. Yet unlike the forthcoming Athena, Hephaistos has no traits given to him at birth beyond his disability. Additionally, Hephaistos has no father to claim him—no external masculinity to approve of him. Without it, he has even less of a chance at succession. The god is an example of an utter lack of power: he only bears the reality of his sex, but none of the boons gifted by nature nor society. Hera can find no power in her son, and her failure at producing an “equivalent” god to Zeus distinguishes the act as distinctly wrong.

The Okeanids²² act as an attempt to mediate the tension produced, properly utilizing non-procreative pregnancy to rebalance Hera's actions and the reality of Hephaistos' existence. Though Hephaistos is able to correct Hera's mistake, he becomes himself a problem. Instead of seeking to undermine the infant for authority and control, Thetis and Eurynome act as nurturing mother figures that enrich the infant god through the foreknowledge that is meant to incite generative power. By passing knowledge of smithing to the future blacksmith, they cede what would potentially be a conquering power to the closest man in their vicinity and allow him to perform a man's social activities. As in the case of the Helen, this transference of *μητις* is permissible as it gives custody of feminine knowledge to the dominant male social identity. The framework imposed by the focalization initiates the transfer and the female figures of the narrative are required to cooperate in order for their gender, and thus their access to any power, to be intact. The consensual movement of *μητις* from the Okeanids to Hephaistos contrasts with the violent accession of Zeus' consort, demonstrating that a hierarchy of knowledge is possible. Rather than giving their whole body, and thus their entire access to power, they surrender a portion of their own will to the young god. The narrative's discomfort with the femininity of *μητις* is again resolved, this time through actions more permissible through its capitulation to typical roles. This also effectively accounts for the overreach in Zeus' pregnancy, separating the realm of the impregnated from the impregnator. Their act of intervention and influence, ordinarily curbed by the most

²² It is worth noting that Metis, as an Okeanid, is herself associated with childbirth through her lineage as well as through her actionable role. She is generative both socially and naturally, perhaps even preternaturally, which enhances her role in the narrative as a positive figure of female power.

powerful man in the room, helps Hephaistos achieve a discernible divine status.

However, though Thetis and Eurynome mean to prepare Hephaistos for an appropriately gendered life, the nuances of their interactions with the child leave the scene's use as a solution quite shaky due to the fact that he gains a woman's traits. Hephaistos is a powerless and degendered infant upon arrival; despite his youth,²³ his disability prevents him from confirming the masculine trait of control over the Okeanids during his education. Divinity in youth often produces hyperskilled individuals. Additionally, if we are to consider the established parameters for gendered action in Homeric text, Hephaistos' cache of knowledge and the art he produces afterwards mimics the circumstances of a woman's alternative pregnancy. He becomes figuratively impregnated²⁴ with knowledge of smithing by Thetis and Eurynome instead of the natural inverse. Even if he mimics Zeus' role as a male generator, he has no choice or initiative power in the matter. While he is finally achieving the access that would have been otherwise afforded to him, he is doing it in a way marked as feminine, taking on *μητις* himself. One solution spawns another problem: should men, lacking male power, be able to turn to women's?

Athena proves that one sex performing the roles of another is acceptable, insofar as their abilities are highly limited, functioning as a mirror-story to Hephaistos' narrative.²⁵ Athena is peculiar in a way that is sometimes shrouded to modern audiences by her reverence as a goddess. Her divine sex and her primary role are at odds with each other: the goddess is a sworn virgin, a woman, but she is beholden to the masculine realm of war that composes her primary characteristic in epic myths.²⁶ She rejects motherhood as the primary inborn power of women and primary axis of male control, instead relying solely on weaving, which should preclude her from properly gendered existence. Like the Okeanids, her proficien-

23 Divinity in youth tends to produce hyperskilled in mythological narratives; Athena is the closest example, but Herakles (in his strangling of a snake as an infant) and later Artemis (*Callimachus Hymn 3*) both present their social station and gender through extreme competence in their most iconic, and thus intrinsic abilities.

24 Hephaistos' education, curiously, lasts for nine years. Hippocrates officially states that "pregnancy does not last longer than ten months" (Hippocrates, *Nature of the Child* 6), but it is hard to believe that people living amongst the pregnant would not casually notice how long such a process takes. One could argue that the number is less based in reality and more a product of cultural ideas surrounding numbers, such as numerology and other systems of superstition. However, those superstitions are not created in a vacuum, and birth is dealt with so heavily in this narrative that it would be a quizzical reason to use the number nine.

25 Irene J. F. de Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 25. "An embedded narrative that reflects the main narrative, as flashback/flash-forward or thematically, is also called a mirror-story."

26 Franco, "Women in Homer," 58-9. It may be appropriate to read Athena as *over-gendered* rather than *under-gendered* as well, but this idea is better explored in a strictly gender-theoretical environment.

cies could jeopardize the stability of her role as a goddess. This, however, is not without a mediating factor: Athena is *intelligent*. Her mother, being the representation of knowledge itself, trumps the *μητις* of other female divinities and mortals she finds as peers in the Homeric texts. Furthermore, her lack of children is a boon to the complicated question of divine succession, providing subtle assistance to her father's continued claim to power and submission to male authority.²⁷ What she lacks in procreative femininity she exemplifies in socialized femininity; her rejection of one form of power balances her overt skill in the other. Her presence in war remains somewhat of an issue for her, as it is a man's role in the eyes of the Homeric narrator, having power over the physical body. This is solved by her complete subservience²⁸ to her father's power, as the instruments of her war prowess and ability to act are gifted to her by him.²⁹ Athena shows how Zeus' extremity can work—the narrator presents the succession of male power as an eventuality, despite the apparent proposition of a middle ground. For that reason can Athena retain her proper gender through the performance of feminine social roles; she bears feminine intelligence, but the masculine powers she claims are subordinated by Zeus'. Athena is an anxiety circumscribed, the true product of male initiation and female cooperation.

Pausanias' Mural of Dionysos and Alternative Readings

The narrative does not wholly find relief, however, as the actions of Hera—who is focalized as failing in her gendered expectations—have yet to be reckoned with. Violence is the manifestation of that friction within the narrative. Zeus acted upon it when he swallowed Metis—her abilities were a liability; should the prophecy come to pass, she would not be living under the hierarchy of shared power. Hera performed it when she threw Hephaistos away—she resisted the power of her husband, and Hephaistos suffers for her misstep. However, Hera's violence is considerably more unrestrained than Zeus'. The king's actions have a purpose, a measurable end-goal that substantiates the action; the queen's is pure emotion with no reason beyond it. The narrative, thusly, ends with a final act of violence: Hephaistos wields his power over his mother because she is the final figure who cannot conform. His long-laboured skill is used to craft a magnificent golden throne, laced with hidden and unbreakable chains. They are physical and symbolic. Thus Hera is focalized by the narrator as having transgressed the logic supplied within the myth, and now must be trapped to it by someone who does. While he claims intelligence as his ac-

²⁷ The question of inheritance is more relevant to Zeus' story, though pertinent here as Athena's relationship to Zeus codifies her role as a goddess. See Hom., *Theog.* 886-924.

²⁸ You can argue that Athena does not show complete subservience in the Homeric texts, especially the *Odyssey* in which she is the primary divinity in which the story progresses through. However, it is pertinent to note that Athena explicitly beseeches the king-god for assistance and permission in Hom., *Od.* 5.15 ff.

²⁹ Hes., *Theog.* 929a ff.

cess to masculinity, his emotionally driven violence colors the action differently. This is an act of cunning, of intelligence through anger, just like his mother Hera; he mirrors and inverts the actions she performed against him at the beginning, yet is not able to resolve the core issue of his aimlessness. He has not yet reached an acceptable performance of gender, like the Okeanids or Athena, which means the narrative cannot yet end. Despite ostensibly getting his revenge, Hephaistos does not come back home to Olympos.³⁰ This violence is aimless and cannot be condoned—not only does it keep Hephaistos in a state of effeminate anger, but it extends the power struggle. A final figure must act as a mediator for the story to end.

Enter Dionysos, carrying wine and trailed by satyrs to bring Hephaistos home. The brevity of the story, being available primarily through visual mediums,³¹ lends itself to a variety of interpretive frameworks that seek to account for its individual details as well as how it might affect the larger story of Hephaistos. Most read it primarily through its narrative context. While this is not strictly misguided, it must be remarked that the physicality of the narrative can enrich inquiries into its messaging. We know, for example, that the mural is Athenian³² through Pausanias, and Athenian political or social ideals about Dionysos will not be universally enmeshed with the post-Achaic landscape of most³³ Homeric canon.

Karłowicz (2021) identifies Dionysos' role in the story as a reconciliatory deity being primarily a civic affair. Karłowicz enumerates similar points to what I have presented here: that there is an unbalance in order introduced when Hera casts out her son, and again when he refuses to let her go.³⁴ However, he draws most of his interpretations through a lens of divine politics; order is on the basis of royal and familial capitulation. Hephaistos does not bow to his queen and mother, problematic for a family-oriented Greek hierarchy.³⁵ Dionysos' return of Hephaistos, he concludes, is an exercise in wisdom, rationality, and family responsibility: "If, as is the case in the dispute between Hephaistos and Hera, the reasons presupposed by the parties lead to stasis, the reason must be suspended."³⁶

30 Paus., *Description of Greece*, 1.20.3.

31 The scene is one of the more popular ones appearing in Etruscan art after the increased import of Athenian goods influenced the art market in the Italic colonies. For more, see: Dimitris Paleothodoros, "Dionysiac Imagery in Archaic Etruria," *Etruscan Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): 187-202.

32 Paus., *Description of Greece*, 1.20.3.

33 The approximate dates of production for some of the Homeric Hymns are debated, and generally some hymns are thought to have interpolative elements from later writers. For a more complete discussion of dating techniques and scholarly response to proposed timelines, see: Andrew Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

34 Dariusz Karłowicz, "On the necessity of Dionysus: the return of Hephaistos as a tale of the god that alone can solve unresolvable conflicts and restore an inconsistent whole" in *Dionysus and Politics: Constructing Authority in the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 34.

35 Karłowicz, "On the necessity of Dionysus," 35.

36 Karłowicz, 39.

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Wine, the representation of Dionysos' powers, turns the smith god's head away from his reason which allows him to see the truth of their hierarchy. While the interpretation is convincing and presents accurately an aspect of the tension within Hephaistos and Hera's power struggle, there is much more to say about the complexities in a man bowing to a woman.

A similar but more gender-motivated view of the story is that of the coming-of-age narrative. At this point in his life, Hephaistos is not quite an Olympian; the blacksmith has not been integrated into the power structure of the divine ecosystem as Karłowicz asserts, but he has gained an education that provides him skills that differentiate him from the other gods. Beaumont identifies a similar state of androgyny in the life cycle of an Athenian man: boys are educated in youth, but do not reach the full scope of their political and social power until they physically show their age in growing a beard.³⁷ The pedagogy of boys by other men is cited as a thematic undercurrent in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*; although the claim is shaky when one attempts to assert reflections of specific realities,³⁸ it is another example of divine figures walking the line from childhood to an adulthood accompanied by particular traits and skills. Hephaistos' theoretical adolescence, however, remains distinctly incorrect. Instead of being educated by other men, Hephaistos is thrust into a deeper state of incongruence by being inculcated by female nymphs. His skills are distinctly feminine according to the story that he is in, and he has no notable contacts with other men, mortal or divine. Thus, Dionysos' presence and symbolic procession back to Olympos is not just a return to order, but a proper introduction to adult society that Hephaistos was not able to attain in his solitude. The comparison, of course, does not completely explain the workings of power as understood by the Homeric texts but only serves to supplement it. To come-of-age necessitates a transition of expectations and standing; it presents a scale of power, but does not explain how it works nor really its bounds. One could argue that the restraint and release of Hera is a show of power's outer edges, but such an action is more easily correlated to a sense of hierarchy as in Karłowicz. Additionally, while the Athenian culture of manufacture may influence some of the more nuanced details, the larger story of Hephaistos' fall does not account for this.³⁹

Fruitful are Vernant's⁴⁰ views of Dionysos, who emphasizes a sense of

37 Lesley A. Beaumont, "Shifting Gender: Age and Social Status as Modifiers of Childhood Gender in Ancient Athens" in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203-4.

38 Sarah I. Johnston, "Myth, Festival, and Poet: The 'Homeric Hymn to Hermes' and Its Performative Context," *Classical Philology* 97, no. 2 (2002), asserts potential candidates for similar ancient rituals as found in the hymn; critiqued in Athanassios Vergados, *The "Homeric Hymn to Hermes": Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013): 151.

39 A further discussion of the merits of comparing the mural to the Homeric literature follows shortly.

40 Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Dionysus in Thebes" in *The Universe, the Gods, and Men: Ancient Greek Myths* (New York: HarperCollins Press, 2001), 136.

otherness by way of location; as he says, he simply wanders into the narrative. The god is always wandering, and yet always being the center of attention. Dionysos is an interloper to Hephaistos' story in form and function: his only role in the story is to bring Hephaistos home. His status as an interloper is escalated through the medium of the myth, being attested by way of *ekphrasis*. His inability to stay in one place at one time extends into his relationship with gender. Dionysos' relationship with gender ambiguity is attested in several ways. Vernant draws attention to Dionysos double-birth,⁴¹ which is especially pertinent here as an example of his ability to move between both genders; this god, too, has experienced birth through Zeus. He is most heavily associated with the company of women and nymphs⁴² or the rabble-raising hypermasculine satyrs of the forest.⁴³ In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysos' ability to blur lines between gendered performances—such as in the treatment of Pentheus and the turning of the Theban women into creatures of the wilderness—reflects his associations in cultural reality. His “woman-shaped” form is also pertinent to this playing with gender: not only can he interact with both, but he *is* both.⁴⁴ The *Bacchae* is the exemplum preferred by Vernant, but Csapo traces the basis of such gender ambiguity to the religious rituals of Dionysos.⁴⁵ In this sense, Dionysos can better be understood on the gendered axis within the structure of gendered power present in the narrative. As one who can move between the company and presentations of men and women, he is the most able to bring Hephaistos home.

Dionysos performs his inversion of Hephaistos not through looking more or less feminine, as in the *Bacchae*, but through his actions. As previously mentioned, intellect and creation can be productively read as femininely gendered in Homeric texts and associated with the realities of womanhood. In opposition is the masculinity of physical violence and war—actions and concepts that work by affecting the body rather than the mind. Dionysos, in getting Hephaistos drunk, functionally performs both categories of power. Pausanias specifies that “[Hephaistos] refused to listen to any other of the gods save Dionysos—in him he reposed the fullest trust—and after *making him drunk* Dionysos brought him to heaven.”⁴⁶ Drunkenness affects both the mind and body of the imbiber; wine acts as the great equalizer that traverses gendered bodies, and the god who is wine

41 Vernant, “Dionysus in Thebes,” 142.

42 Larson, *Greek Nymphs*, 128-9, 143, 172-3; Cornelia Isler-Kerenyi, *Dionysos in Archaic Greece: An Understanding through Images* (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 107, 114. Isler-Kerenyi also makes a point to highlight followers of Dionysos “metamorphosizing” into satyrs and maenads in his presence, as well as the mixed gender, class, and age groups depicted in some of his early pottery.

43 Catalin Anghelina, “The Drunken World of Dionysos,” *Trends in Classics* 9, no. 1 (2017): 130-4. Anghelina treats the satyr as a facet of Dionysian cult in particular.

44 Euripides, *Bacchae* 352: “τὸν θηλύμορφον ζένον.”

45 Eric Csapo, “Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconography, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction,” *Phoenix* 5, no. 3/4 (1997): 262.

46 Paus., *Description of Greece*, 1.20.3. Emphasis mine.

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personified leads the way through. Unlike Hera, Dionysos' force is not enacted with emotional abandon; it is seemingly calculated on Dionysos' part to make certain that Hephaistos comes home.⁴⁷ Thus the wine god acts androgynously, though it would be wrong to discount Dionysos' recognized sex. As a man, his realm is in affecting the body; this justifies his power's effectiveness within the confines of the story's expectations. Should Dionysos actually be a woman, the return to correctly assigned power remains unachieved.

There are three primary rebuttals to asserting feminine intellect in Dionysos' actions. Firstly, Pausanias writes a scene unknown to the Homeric canon. The creation of the *ekphrasis* is uncertainly dated, and may be an adaptation of local tales which populated autonomously from ideas proposed by Homeric traditions. To apply the same focalization of our Homeric material onto an ostensibly unrelated episode would be to suppose a connection that may not have existed in reality. This cannot be disregarded in reading two stories together generally; each piece has its own history and context, which should be acknowledged even where they intersect. However, I would argue that the mural existing at all implies a relationship between the Homeric text and the Dionysos episode inherently. Hephaistos' absence from Olympos necessitates some story of return, and while there are a few permutations of the story as presented here, each presents a unified front of gendered incongruity on behalf of Hephaistos. Change the fine details, but the emphatic dissonance of each remains the same, as does the question of power and imbalance. The mural invites a gendered reading when taking into account the liminal quality of the god's roles, and to ignore them neuters interpretations of the mural.

Beyond the question of ability to interpret, getting Hephaistos drunk may not be considered as a use of intellect at all. As wine is one of the god's overarching primary associations, it makes sense that it would appear in an Athenian religious context such as the temple that housed the image of Dionysos and Hephaistos.⁴⁸ Additionally, Pausanias treats the *ekphrasis* of Hephaistos' return with few words, and his description does not contain any judgements of the figures within. However, Pausanias makes a point to highlight that Hephaistos only trusted Dionysos of all the gods. Such a detail imparts intentionality in action, implying that Dionysos knew this as well and used it to his advantage. Simply, he used intelligence. It would be unreasonable, and almost illogical, to have Dionysos and not Zeus bring the smith god home if this was not the case; even Hermes would be a pertinent choice considering his Homeric role as guide and messenger.⁴⁹

47 Though outside the Homeric scope of this paper, Alkaios' *Fragment* 349a suggests a potential expansion of this myth with Ares attempting to bring Hephaistos to Olympos "by force" (Alcaeus, *Fragments* 349a). Here, Dionysos' actions become even *more* divisively gendered and most obviously planned; masculine force cannot bring the blacksmith home, but Dionysos' wine can, and in fact that is the goal. 48 Paus., *Description of Greece*, 1.20.3.

49 For more on Hermes' role as a guide in Homeric literature, see: Jenny S. Clay, "Hide and Go Seek: Hermes in Homer" in *Tracking Hermes, Pursuing Mercury* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019),

One can argue that Dionysos is mimicking the manhood exemplified by Zeus, as a way to keep gendered order. The king of the gods indeed swallowed Metis, absorbing intellect into his masculinized sphere of power. If we agree that Dionysos is exercising intellect and not happenstance, then it is prudent to acknowledge the inversion between the consumption of Metis and the consumption of wine—impregnation by intellect versus impregnation by stupidity. The drunkenness of Dionysos is also articulated as madness in Attic literature, a loss of intelligence and inability to distinguish realities.⁵⁰ It is not just a use of intelligence, then, but a masculinized subtraction of it by way of bodily change—a removal of the feminized *μητις* from Hephaistos. But the wine, though an extension of Dionysos, is not exactly his physical touch the way handling someone's body is. Furthermore, impregnation is still impregnation—even if the primary masculine figure of the story, Zeus, was able to become pregnant, Hephaistos' consumption of Dionysos' core form does not make it any more acceptable. Dionysos is meant to be viewed as feminine under the logic of the text, just as Hephaistos is, in his force against Hera, integrated into the gendered logic of the myth.

Dionysos' gendered intervention is logical because of his ability to transform the gender performance of those around him in his cultural contexts as well as his literary contexts. Hephaistos, who had been showing femininely gendered behavior up until this point, is conciliated by the wine of Dionysos—his essence—and thus led back home to reconcile with his mother, abandoning the rage which had been holding him back. Hephaistos is able to access the social status associated with men of his rank, using the skills gained from women but lacking the negative traits associated with them. Dionysos, upon this journey, is transitory as well as transitional. He ambles through space and is able to be ambled through: Hephaistos' intoxication through the god is exemplary of that. The story ends with Hephaistos emerging into a properly masculinized role: the gendered tensions between him and his mother are solved when they move into their proper places. He completes his mirroring of Athena as a whole god, not half of one.

Gender suffuses the structure of Hephaistos' principle myth. It asks the question of power—who should hold what power? Three significant recurring motifs come into play: impregnation, birth, and violence against the opposite sex. Zeus and Hera exemplify two answers to the question, in tension with one another and the matters of reality they are removed from: male power with female support, or female power with no male support. These options are obviously gendered, with the narrator's presentation of Hera being highly unfavourable. Birth and creation involves men whether women have a say or not, and an absence of male power creates something incomplete; Hephaistos shows what incompleteness looks like, whereas Athena shows the opposite. They, too, are functional in-

67-78.

⁵⁰ Hom., *Il.* 6.129 ff; Eur., *Ba.* 30-40.

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versions, mirror-stories embedded in the fabula of Hephaistos' myth. The Okeanids and Dionysos act as mediating parties for the two main conflicting pairs, Zeus-Hera and Hera-Hephaistos respectively, using the expectations of their genders to more fully form the gender of those around them.

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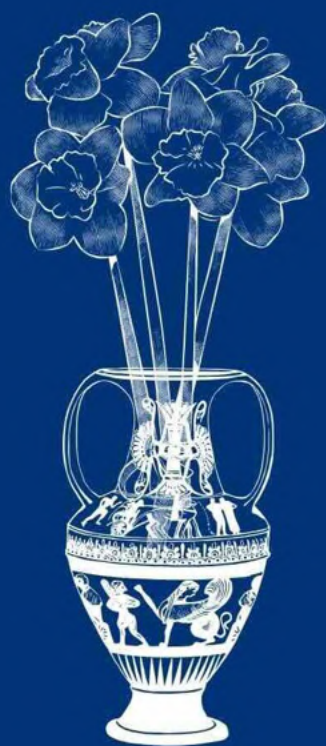


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