

“UT NON [FORMA] CYGNORUM, SIC ALBIS PROXIMA CYGNIS”:
POETOLOGY, EPIC DEFINITION, AND SWAN
IMAGERY IN OVID’S *METAMORPHOSES*

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VENULUS’ UNSUCCESSFUL APPEAL TO DIOMEDES IN *Aen.* 11.243–295, inviting him to join the Rutulian forces in the war against Aeneas, is among the few Vergilian episodes recast at length in Ovid’s *Aeneid* (*Met.* 14.457–511). The selection of the episode clearly relates to the dominant presence of the metamorphosis theme in the legend of Diomedes, who witnessed his comrades changing into birds. Ovid relates the transformation in detail (*Met.* 14.497–509), yet, curiously, does not state with precision the identity of the newly formed bird (lines 508–509):

*Si volucrum quae sit dubiarum forma requiris
Ut non cygnorum, sic albis proxima cygnis*

“If you wonder what might be the appearance of these dubious birds, although it is not the one of swans, it nevertheless resembles most closely that of white swans.”

Recent critics seem more concerned to justify Ovid’s decision against calling these birds swans¹ than to explain why the poet wishes to describe Diomedes’ birds as “similar to swans” when he need not have furnished any identification at all. It is the contention of the present paper that the birds of Diomedes serve as a metaphor for Ovid’s poetic style. Inspired by the associations of the swan both with traditional epic and lofty poetry in general, regardless of genre,² Ovid utilizes swan imagery to underscore the sublime artistry and epic aspirations of his complex *carmen perpetuum*, while also differentiating it from traditional epic archetypes.

None of the surviving sources relating the transformation of Diomedes’ companions identifies the newly formed birds as swans. The earliest known reference to the story occurs in the work of a fourth-century writer of Italian history named Lykos (cf. Antigonus *Mirabilia* 172), who explains that on the

¹ See, for example, Musgrove 1998: 189, arguing that Ovid decided against the swan in this episode because he had already narrated two different accounts of the swan’s origins: in *Met.* 2.367–380, Ovid narrates the transformation of Phaethon’s friend Cygnus, while in 12.72–145, he narrates another swan *aetion* in the transformation of Cynus, the son of Mars. Ovid uses the spelling “cynus” for the swan on another occasion, in Book 7; in my discussion throughout I am following Ovid’s orthography.

² “The swans are the singers of heroic epic, ‘birds of Maeonian [Homeric] song’ in Horace’s words,” as Putnam says (1970: 310). The swan is first associated with sublime, non-epic, poetry in Pindar, a literarily self-conscious passage discussed in Horace *Odes* 2.20; on swan imagery in Alexandrian poetry, esp. Callimachus, and also in Roman literature, see below, nn. 12–13.

island of Diomedea, off the coast of Apulia, a group of herons that fawned on Greek visitors were said to be the companions of Diomedes. The next known source of the legend, Lycophron (*Alex.* 592–609), does not specify which kind of birds the companions of Diomedes were, but offers a detailed account of the birds' lives on Diomedea, paying particular attention to their habit of fleeing the arrival of barbarians.³ Vergil, Ovid's prototype, is likewise vague (*aves*, *Aen.* 11.273), although certainly aware of a number of additional traditions about the adventures of post-Homeric Diomedes and his settlement in Italy.⁴

There is little doubt that Vergil's account of Diomedes (*Aen.* 11.243–295) is the principal source of inspiration for Ovid.⁵ The author of the *Metamorphoses* has self-consciously remained close to Vergil's text, following the same story line, and even maintaining an almost identical verse count. Ovid's account opens, as in the Vergilian model, with Venulus, the Rutulian ambassador, arriving at Diomedes' city to ask the Greek warrior to join the fight against Aeneas (*Met.* 14.457–458). Consistent with his appearance in the *Aeneid*, the Greek hero, himself an exile in the pursuit of a new life under a new identity as son-in-law of the Apulian king Daunus, refuses to join the Rutulian forces (*excusat*, *Met.* 14.462). The Ovidian hero's story, however, both replicates and distances itself from the recollections of his Vergilian counterpart. Diomedes experiences the same set of adventures in both poems,⁶ but each narrative centers on different episodes.⁷ This apparent and no doubt intentional contradiction also reflects the different issues that each text addresses. Vergil's character highlights his Homeric memories and delivers an ethico-moral dissertation about the character of Aeneas, in compliance with the *Aeneid*'s major theme of the portrayal of the Roman epic hero. The Ovidian hero, on the contrary, in accordance with the theme of change that dominates the *Metamorphoses*, opts to devote the greater part of his narrative to the transformation of his companions. And yet, the

³ For a complete list of ancient sources on the birds of Diomedes, see Forbes Irving 1990: 230–232; Bömer 1986: 150–151; Thompson 1936: 88–91.

⁴ See the complete collection of these sources, with bibliography, in *LIMC* 3.1, s.v. "Diomedes I" and *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* 1, s.v. "Diomede."

⁵ By describing the metamorphosis of his comrades before the eyes of Diomedes, Ovid indirectly admits that his primary source of inspiration was Vergil, who was indeed the first to alter tradition that the transformation took place after the death of Diomedes: see *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* 1, s.v. "Diomede," p. 81; on pre-Vergilian versions concerning the nature of the birds of Diomedes, see also Della Corte 1972: 19–21 and Gagé 1972: 763–764. The intertextual relationship receives additional support in the numerous verbal echoes between the Ovidian and the Vergilian texts (*Met.* 14.457 - *Aen.* 8.9; *Met.* 14.527 - *Aen.* 11.227; *Met.* 14.469 - *Aen.* 11.258; *Met.* 14.474–475 - *Aen.* 11.259; *Met.* 481 - *Aen.* 11.260).

⁶ This textual proximity contrasts with the radical restructuring of those other Vergilian units selected for adaptation in the "little *Aeneid*" (*Met.* 13.623–14.608). The Anius story, the Sicilian tales, the encounter between Achaemenides and Macareus, Aeneas and the Sibyl, and the transformation of Ardea are the other major episodes comprising Ovid's version of the *Aeneid*. The Diomedes unit aside, all are profoundly different from their ostensible Vergilian sources.

⁷ Hinds (1998: 116–119) offers an insightful comparative discussion of the two speeches.

two narratives are brought together by the fact that both are self-consciously metaliterary.

Within Vergil's epic, Diomedes is the only prominent Greek veteran of the Trojan campaign to appear. As the only hero who had fought with (and nearly killed) Aeneas on the battlefield (*Iliad* 5), he has unique, immediate experience of the Trojan hero's battle prowess, and is arguably the second "best of the Achaeans" after Achilles in the Homeric world. What is more, tradition credits Diomedes with a post-Homeric set of adventures strikingly similar to Aeneas' own. After the end of the Trojan war the Argive was forced out of his fatherland; experienced a long series of adventures at sea (including an affair with an African princess which ended tragically); and eventually settled in Italy (Apulia), where he married the daughter of a local king.⁸ The legitimate (Homeric) *alter* Achilles, then, and a (post-Homeric) doublet of Aeneas, with exclusive experience of man-to-man combat against the son of Venus, Diomedes is uniquely qualified to pass weighty judgment on Aeneas' overall conduct, and thus to establish the Trojan leader's claim to epic heroism and leadership.

Indeed, when Diomedes refuses outright to engage anew in battle against Aeneas and praises his former opponent, he raises issues that single out the unique synthesis of the Trojan leader's merit. According to the new criteria set out by the son of Tydeus for determining the preeminent hero of the age, martial excellence is inseparably tied to moral eminence. The combination of supreme *virtus* and *pietas*, absent from the world of Homeric heroic axiology, holds central place in the *Aeneid* because the two qualities are intertwined in the portrayal of the Roman leader. Aeneas, who exemplifies both, deservedly lays claim to the title of *pater* of a reinvented Troy, and is rightly chosen to survive the fall of the old epic world. The transition to the new epic era is captured in the appearance of Aeneas and Hector side by side at two points in Vergil's epic. In Book 2, the ghost of Priam's son, the Homeric "best of the Trojans," visits Aeneas' dreams and entrusts to him the survival of Troy's future (2.268–297). This transference of power is sanctified, in a symmetrically placed attestation (11.285–292), by Diomedes' objective assessment (*experto credite*, 11.283) of Aeneas' character, which is now compared directly to Hector's own: *ambo animis, ambo insignes praestantibus armis, / hic pietate prior* ("both renowned for courage, both eminent in arms; Aeneas ranked higher in piety," 11.291–292). The latter, the mightiest Trojan warrior, is judged inferior to Aeneas, the Roman leader, who is both a superb fighter and a living example of impeccable ethical responsibility.

The transformation of Diomedes' companions is irrelevant to the characterization of Aeneas, however. The miraculous event is listed at the end of a series of punishments that befell the Greek leaders who survived the Trojan war on their way home, as a result of their repeated violations of *pietas*. Significantly,

⁸ On the presentation of Diomedes in the *Aeneid* as successor of Achilles as much as Aeneas' forerunner and duplicate, see Papaioannou 2000: 193–217.

Diomedes' most outstanding achievement in his Homeric career, his victory over Aeneas and subsequent wounding of Venus (Aphrodite) as she rushes to save her son (*Il.* 5.297–330), is condemned as a dark and shameful act, the source not only of embarrassment but also of endless labor. By including in this series of punishments the transformation of his comrades, which functions as the loss of his last contact with his Homeric past, Diomedes canonizes the ethical code of heroic behavior presented in the *Aeneid* by contrasting it to the Homeric heroic model, epitomized in his conduct in the *Iliad* and now discredited.

The transformation miracle per se does not have a place in the Vergilian Diomedes' line of argument either: hence Vergil passes over the event summarily and does not specify the birds' identity. By contrast, a detailed metamorphosis finds itself at home in Ovid's *carmen perpetuum*. Ovid's concern to stress that the metamorphosed comrades look like but are not swans, might well obscure less obvious associations. But the frequent presence of this particular bird, carefully interspersed throughout the *Metamorphoses* as we shall presently observe, owes much to the popularity of the swan as a symbol of literary inspiration.

In the *Aeneid*, Diomedes' oratory praising Aeneas as the exemplar of the new epic hero captures the essence of Vergilian epic, an intellectual product gravely concerned with literary, and more specifically Homeric, succession while employing its narrative of the past to construct an ideology for the present. In refashioning Diomedes Ovid also seeks to enter the discussion of epic succession. Keen to challenge and rival Vergil, the poet of the *Metamorphoses* composes a mini-*Aeneid* where he recasts certain Aeneidic episodes that exemplify, in Hinds's view (1998: 116), Vergil's version of the *Iliad* "at its most self-consciously Homeric." Ovid includes Diomedes' speech among them for good reason: in the character of this Greek hero Vergil had found the opportunity to project his understanding of epic appropriation and definition. Likewise, Ovid adapts and translates it so as to cohere with his own articulation of a new, or rather alternative, epic project. The major issues of epic succession and re-interpretation in Vergil's *Aeneid*, succinctly captured in Diomedes' reconciliation of ethics and epic heroism, evolve into a broader and more complex genre anxiety in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a *carmen perpetuum* that lacks a single unifying theme and protagonist yet advertises itself as *carmen deductum*.⁹ Indeed, in addition to recording an actual, physical transformation, the Diomedes episode must have looked particularly attractive to Ovid for its potential to sustain a metapoetic subtext. As we shall see, Vergil's Diomedes reproduces many facets of Aeneas' character in the poem, including that of the substitute epic poet. Ovid, an extremely careful reader of

⁹ Aptly captured by Harrison (2002: 89): "Metamorphosis is the theme of the poem [*sc.* the *Metamorphoses*], both in terms of its formal content, and in terms of its generic variety. Genres appear and disappear and are transformed into each other through the long course of the poem, following its explicit programme (1.1–2): literary *forms* are transformed into new *bodies* of poetic work." Harrison's article offers an excellent brief overview of Ovid's life-long experimentation with genre. Once again, the inclusion of multiple genres in Ovid's epic has a precedent in the *Aeneid*; cf. Hardie 1986.

Vergil, masterfully adapts his work to promote the metaliterary aspect of his own Diomedes speech. The swan motif, adeptly placed at the very conclusion of the unit, is well chosen to embody both literary ambitions and anxieties. I shall first highlight the frequent and regular presence of the swan in the course of the *Metamorphoses*, and then analyze the literary dimensions of every single one of the attestations. Subsequently the focus will move on to Diomedes and his figurative role as an epic poet, first in the *Aeneid* and then in his later appearance in the *Metamorphoses*, where Ovid employs him to articulate the antagonistic spirit of his epic.

We may begin by considering the swan-like friends of Diomedes. Acmon, one of the hero's comrades, weary of the prolonged toil (14.475–482), taunts Venus (483–495) and she, in retaliation, transforms him and his companions into birds that closely resemble swans.¹⁰

*Dicta placent paucis, numeri maioris amici
Acmona conripimus; cui respondere volenti
vox pariter vocisque via est tenuata, comaeque
in plumas abeunt, plumis nova colla teguntur
pectoraque et tergum, maiores brachia pennas
accipiunt, cubitique leves sinuantur in alas;
magna pedis digitos pars occupat, oraque cornu
indurata rigent finemque in acumine ponunt.
Hunc Lycus, hunc Idas et cum Rhexenore Nycteus,
hunc miratur Abas, et dum mirantur, eandem
accipiunt faciem, numerusque ex agmine maior
subvolat et remos plausis circumvolat alis:
si volucrum quae sit dubiarum forma requiris,
ut non cygnorum, sic albis proxima cygnis.* (Met. 14.496–509)

Few approved of his words. We, the greatest number of his friends, upbraided Acmon. And when he was about to reply, his voice and throat together grew thin; his hair was changed to feathers, and feathers clothed a new-formed neck, chest, and back. His arms acquired large pinion-feathers and his elbows curved into nimble wings; his toes were replaced by webbed feet and his face grew stiff and horny, ending in a sharp-pointed beak. Lycus viewed him in wonder, as did Idas, Rhexenor, Nyctaeus, and Abas; and while they wondered, they took on the same form. The greater number flew up in a flock and circled round the rowers with flapping wings. If you ask about the shape of these indeterminate birds, while they are not swans, they were very like snowy swans.

The swans in *Metamorphoses* 14.508–509 conclude a series of seven other references to these birds (2.252–253; 2.369–374; 2.536–539; 5.385–387; 7.371–381;

¹⁰By depicting the transformation of Diomedes' comrades as a punishment inflicted upon them after verbally abusing Venus, Ovid moves away from the Vergilian narrative where their punishment is viewed as a result of Diomedes' wounding of Aphrodite on the Trojan battlefield (*Aen.* 11.271–277).

12.71–167; 14.429–430), including three different aetiologies of their origin. Carriers of literary associations as early as their attestation in the poetry of Hesiod,¹¹ the swans are linked directly with the persona of the poet in Callimachus.¹² The link was imported into Roman literature by Lucretius and was extensively employed by the Augustan poets,¹³ especially by Ovid, where the swan appears as a symbol of literary criticism on three other occasions in the poet's *corpus*.¹⁴

The attestations in the *Metamorphoses* likewise carry metapoetic overtones. The first one situates the birds by the river Cayster and the Maeonian banks:¹⁵ *et quae Maeonias celebrabant carmine ripas / flumineae volucres, medio caluere Caystro* ("and the swans which were accustomed to throng and sing by the Maeonian streams, were scorched in the midst of the Cayster," *Met.* 2.252–253). In this Ovid follows Homer (*Il.* 2.459–463), the earliest attestation of the Caystrian swan, and especially Lucretius (*DRN* 2.344–345).¹⁶ *Met.* 2.369–374 describes the transformation of Phaethon's friend Cygnus into a swan. Cygnus' lament over Phaethon's body in *Aen.* 10.185–192 is Ovid's primary model for a passage that brings together traditional epic and elegy, both erotic and mournful, while also emphasizing the key vocabulary and linguistic tropes of Callimachean poetics.¹⁷ The Homeric swans

¹¹ In the Hesiodic *Shield of Herakles*, a flock of swans decorates the rim of the shield, where they appear by the river Oceanus and utter a sound (314–317). As Donohue (1993: 20) observes, the particular term employed to describe their voice (ἥπυον, 316) occurs also in the poetry of Homer for the sound of the lyre (*Od.* 17.271). The association of the swan with poetry is established in the minor *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (21), where the swans accompany Apollo and sing in honor of the god, who in turn responds with his lyre. Notably, the poet of the *Hymn* employs the same word (λιγυρός), a term later to become a technical term for lyric poetry, for both swan song and Apollo's music.

¹² The identification is explicit in Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo*; cf. Donohue 1993: 27–28 on the identification of the literary swan with the Apolline poet in the Callimachean corpus.

¹³ As Hinds (1987: 47) observes, "TLL and OLD between them offer eleven non-Ovidian examples of swans (*cycnus* or *olor*) envisaged specifically as singing birds from poetry up to the end of the Augustan period. In no fewer than nine of these, there are clear evocations of 'poets and other literary men'." Donohue (1993: 18–34) traces the literary associations behind the swan motif in Greek and Roman poetry from Homer to Ovid. On metapoetic swans especially in Augustan poetry, see also Thompson 1936: 178–87; Nisbet and Hubbard 1978: 333–334, *ad* *Hor. Carm.* 2.20; Ahl 1982: 373–377.

¹⁴ In all these instances the poet/speaker is compared to a swan. At *Her.* 7.1–2, the swan (*olor*) is associated with Dido, the poetic subject and author of the epistle. At *Fast.* 2.108–110, the lyre player Arion is compared to a "cygnus," while in *Tr.* 5.1.11–12, Ovid likens his own poetic self to the swan. Cf. Hinds 1987: 149, n. 65.

¹⁵ For a detailed treatment of swans in *Metamorphoses* 2, see Keith 1992: 137–146, with a discussion (137–140) of the literary associations of the first Ovidian swan episode, including its debt to the Homeric text. Keith (137–138, n. 5) follows Hinds (1987: 44–48). Neither scholar, however, connects the "swan-like" companions of Diomedes with the list of Ovid's swan manifestations.

¹⁶ Cf. Bornmann 1967: 44–50; Cameron 1995: 355, n. 67.

¹⁷ Keith (1992: 140–144) explores the literary associations of *tenuata* and *querellis* in the transformation of Ligurian Cygnus in *Metamorphoses* 2. The adjective *tenuis* is a widely used Latin translation of the Greek λεπτός, an important literary term in Hellenistic literature. It would be worth drawing

of the river Cayster, and with them the allegiance to and acknowledgment of the literary model, return in *Met.* 5.385–387 with the swans of Enna.¹⁸

The transformation of Cynus the son of Hyrie into a swan (*Met.* 7.371–381) closely echoes that of Phaethon's Cygnus. The main character of the story, the spoiled *puer* Cynus, jumps from a high rock into a lake in selfish revenge when his lover Phyllus, indignant, refuses to surrender the prize of the last in a series of hard labors. The fall is cut short by Cynus' change into a swan. In despair, the boy's mother, Hyrie, consumes herself in tears and eventually turns into a lake bearing her name.¹⁹ Hyrie's pathetic transubstantiation into water²⁰ largely anticipates the next manifestation of the literary swan in the figure of Canens in Book 14, who similarly weeps until she dissolves into thin air. The parallels this episode shares with that of Phaethon's friend and Canens' metamorphosis invite the reader to view Ovid's swans as successive stages along the same narrative line.

Before he narrates the fate of Canens, Ovid (12.46–145) tells the story of Cygnus, son of Neptune, a Trojan warrior who confronted Achilles and was eventually transformed into a swan. This marvel (12.141–145) concludes the single combat between the two warriors. Book 12 records Ovid's adaptation of the *Iliad*, his most direct confrontation with traditional epic. The single combat between Achilles and Cygnus summarily replicates—and parodies—the Iliadic battle scenes that have been left out.²¹ What is more, Nestor's subsequent narrative of Caeneus, the transgendered, immortal warrior and central character of the mock-epic Centauromachy, revives the Cygnus episode and ridicules Achilles by assimilating him to Caeneus' opponents, the Centaurs. Concealed behind Nestor's narrative persona, Ovid claims control over epic tradition, and in a way redefines epic poetry and the essence of heroism.²²

attention to the suggestive similarity between Liguria and the Greek adjective λιγύς or λιγυρός ("subtle," "tender"), likewise a keyword of Alexandrian poetics; cf. Ahl 1982: 389. Admittedly, Liguria and λιγυρός do not seem to be related etymologically, yet the former term might have reminded Ovid's readers of the verb *ligur(r)io*, *-ire* ("lick, sponge"), which according to Donatus derives from the Greek word λιγυρός (cf. Maltby 1991: 341). The same linguistic pun is echoed in the description of the dying Canens later in *Metamorphoses* 14, which was also inspired by Vergil's description of the death of Phaethon's lover.

¹⁸Hinds 1987: 44–48; Keith 1992: 138–140.

¹⁹Ovid's emphasis on Cynus' homoerotic relationship clearly assumes that the reader has already traced the connection of Phaethon's Cygnus in Book 2 to its Vergilian prototype (*Aen.* 10.186–193) and views the Ovidian and Vergilian passages as complementary.

²⁰Water, present in all seven swan passages in the *Metamorphoses*, is an important symbol of poetic initiation as early as Hesiod (*Theog.* 39, 83–84, 97) and becomes a *locus communis* of poetic inspiration in Hellenistic poetry, especially in Callimachus; see Cameron 1995: 363–366; also Wimmel 1960: 322–337; Crowther 1980: 1–11; Knox 1986: 107–119.

²¹See, for example, Bömer 1982: 55–56, with earlier bibliography; Ellsworth 1980.

²²On the various metaliterary levels of the Centauromachy, and its central role in understanding Ovid's version of the *Iliad*, see Papaioannou 2002; Keith 1999: 231–238; O'Bryhim 1989; Bömer 1982: 60–62; Zumwalt 1977.

The Canens episode, and especially its conclusion describing the transubstantiation of the nymph (*Met.* 14.416–434), develops the most prominent literary claims.²³ Ovid compares the nymph to a dying swan: *verba sono tenui maerens fundebat, ut olim / carmina iam moriens canit exequialia cygnus* (“she poured out her mournful words attuned to grief, just as sometimes in dying, a swan sings a last funeral song,” 14.429–430). The comparison is modeled after the transformation of Phaethon’s lover in *Aen.* 10.185–193. Both Cygnus and Canens mourn passionately the untimely and tragic loss of their beloveds (*crimen, Amor, vestrum, Aen.* 10.189; *luctu . . . Phaethontis amati*, 191; *maestum . . . solatur amorem*, 193; cf. *luctu, Met.* 14.426; *cum lacrimis ipso modulata dolore*, 428; *maerens*, 429; *luctibus*, 431). Cygnus’ mourning is likened to a song (*canit . . . Musa solatur amorem, Aen.* 10.191), while Canens’ lament sounds similar to the song of the dying swan (*carmina . . . canit, Met.* 14.430) and, qualified as *tenuis* (*sono tenui*, 14.429), is thus glossed as erudite poetry.²⁴ All in all, the sequence of literary swans through the *Metamorphoses* forges a chain that strengthens the narrative continuity of the poem and underlines its forward momentum.²⁵ The swan-like friends of Diomedes fittingly form its concluding link, as they are likewise engaged in the authorial discourse on poetics, mediating Ovid’s claim to be Vergil’s epic rival and successor.

When Vergil’s Diomedes expresses his admiration for Aeneas and, with him, the virtues of the (Roman) epic hero reinvented in the Vergilian text, Diomedes personifies the voice of Homeric epic singing the praises of Vergilian epic. A closer look at Diomedes’ speech in the *Aeneid* is rewarding. The hero’s personal version of the Trojan war and its aftermath, obviously partial albeit projected as objective (*experto credite*, 283), has precedents in Aeneas’ own interpretation of the murals in the temple of Juno in *Aeneid* 1 and in his account of his life story

²³ On the programmatic function of the Canens episode in determining the unifying themes in the remainder of the poem, see Myers 1994: 112–113. She also discusses (109–113) the association of Canens, whose very name derives from *cano*, “to sing,” with both Orpheus and the Camenae, and the poetological implications; see also Bömer 1986: 143–144, *ad* 14.433–434; Michalopoulos 2001: 48–49. On Canens and Circe as two opposing aspects of singing (innocent song of the Muses vs. magic incantations), see Spahlinger 1996: 161–174.

²⁴ See, for example, Keith 1992: 141–142, with ample parallels and bibliography.

²⁵ The theoretical background of narrative progression supported by the recurrence of specific themes along the course of the *Metamorphoses* lies at the center of Wheeler’s argument (2000). Wheeler posits that Ovid’s narrative plan relies on “two generative principles: repetition and narrative continuity. That is, Ovid continues his poem and defers closure by repeating narrative patterns and linking episodes in continuous narrative sequences” (5). In the course of his study Wheeler detects recurrent themes and considers how several passages seemingly unrelated and situated at a distance from one another cohere to impart structure. Wheeler does not discuss the presence of symmetrical patterns in the recurrence of episodes and motifs, although his thesis owes much to Brooks Otis’s classic treatment of the *Metamorphoses* (Otis 1970: esp. 45–90) as a continuous narrative of unity whose shifting thematics are tied together by structural symmetry. Schmidt 1991 and Ludwig 1965 are two significant studies concerning the fundamental role of repetition of form and content in the *Metamorphoses*’ dynamics of continuation.

during and after the fall of Troy in Books 2 and 3. In fact, the selection of the pictorial narratives that decorate the temple is Dido's, yet we see them in the order chosen by Aeneas and we observe the details that Aeneas picks out (or wishes us to pick out). In this way, we receive an alternative account of the Trojan saga, an epic-within-an-epic, since the *praemia laudi* (1.461) on the murals actually describe (and in a way paraphrase) *klea andron*. Commenting on 1.457 (*bellaque iam fama totum vulgata per orbem*, "wars already spread in fame through the whole world"), Barchiesi stresses the poetological nuances heralded in this opening line of the ekphrasis. He notes that these "wars," in reality the Trojan saga, have lost originality and hence appeal since they have become familiar through continuous oral performances and the inclusion of individual episodes in other epics. Vergil's (and Aeneas') task is to step outside the overly familiar epic Cycle, and write his own, new, epic.²⁶ The same play on words, urging differentiation from an epic tradition, may be read in Dido's asking Aeneas at the end of *Aeneid* 1 to narrate his own adventures, to define his own epic space. Dido's invitation follows a series of questions about the Trojan war that rehearse the familiar epics. Aeneas' personal, original account in Books 2 and 3 of the fall of Troy and his subsequent adventures, is the new epic Dido craves. Diomedes' personal memories of the Trojan war and its aftermath in Book 11 recast in condensed form the same metaliterary ambitions. The new interpretation of the hero's attack on Venus and an equally unusual, or rather unexpected, analysis of the *nostoi* combine to produce an original, individual narrative of familiar epic material, a new epic.

Ovid's Diomedes is likewise keen to make a statement concerning poetics as he comes to grips with his Vergilian counterpart. As Hardie has pointed out, the alleged impartiality of Diomedes' speech in the *Aeneid* could weigh heavily upon the decision-making process of the Latins with respect to the continuation of warfare against Aeneas. Thus, king Latinus urges Venulus to report Diomedes' reply as accurately as possible: *responsa reposcit* [sc. *Latinus*] / *ordine cuncta suo* ("Latinus asks for his [Diomedes'] responses, each in its order," 11.240–241). The envoy, who realizes the weight of the eye-witness factor in Diomedes' testimony, hastens to comply, first by stressing that the embassy actually saw and touched the Greek hero (*vidimus . . . contigimus*) who had himself seen and touched Aeneas, and secondly by reporting Diomedes' words in direct discourse.²⁷ These issues of directness, objectivity, and accuracy largely determine the inclusion of Diomedes' speech in the *Aeneid* and naturally attract the focus of Ovid's attack. Whereas Vergil had Venulus report Diomedes' words, Ovid stages the narrative moment at an earlier time, when Diomedes delivered his "original" speech. Since the hero in the *Metamorphoses* emphasizes different events and substitutes the transformation of his comrades for ethics as his core theme, the audience is bound to question

²⁶ Barchiesi 1994: 118.

²⁷ Hardie (1998: 254–256) discusses Diomedes' reply within the context of the rhetorical distortion that underlies the council of the Latins in *Aeneid* 11, where objectivity and partiality are hard to separate and epic *fama* and *invidia* intersect.

the credibility of Venulus' report in the *Aeneid*. Ovid thus exposes the rhetorical distortion in the speech of Vergil's Diomedes, along with its literary-critical potential.

The poetic anxiety and competitiveness in the Diomedes narrative appropriately culminate in the implementation of the swan imagery at its conclusion. As we have seen, Vergil's Diomedes relies on traditional epic themes, the Trojan war and the *nostoi*, in a narrative neither unbiased nor objective. Indeed, for Hardie, the hero becomes an internal narrator of epic events, much like the Homeric Phoenix or Odysseus in Phaeacia, and a score of secondary narrators in the very text of the *Aeneid* whose presence, among others, challenges the authority of the primary narrator.²⁸ Hardie further observes that these internal epic narrators actually reflect "the poet's work within his text" and "might be thought to be the product of the late stages of a tradition that has become overly self-conscious, a development that will reach its logical conclusion in the plethora of figures of the poet that inhabit the pages of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*."²⁹ Thus Vergil's Diomedes is identified with Vergil, while his Ovidian counterpart acts out Ovid's narrative, and the central narrative theme represents the generic affiliations of the respective works.³⁰

The metamorphosis narrative which dominates the Ovidian version of the Diomedes story (14.483–509), raises again the issues of genre the poem addresses throughout. The emphasis on change, as the details of the transformation supercede more straightforwardly epic material, figures the shift in the narrative focus and poetics of the Ovidian episode as a whole. The detailed account of the transformation, however, employs language that draws the element of poetics back in, as it echoes the metamorphosis of Phaethon's Cygnus in Book 2, and alludes to a similar play with multiple genres.

Indeed, Cygnus and Diomedes' comrade Acmon follow a parallel course in their respective transformations. Initially, both perceive their voices becoming progressively more attenuated: *Met.* 14.498, *vox . . . vocisque via est tenuata* ("his voice and throat . . . grew thin"), is repeated verbatim from *Met.* 2.373, *vox est tenuata*. These passages are the only two occasions in the entire Ovidian poem where the terms *vox* and *tenuata* appear in association with each other. Then the metamorphosis affects the two heroes' hair, areas around the neck and torso, all of which are gradually covered with feathers: in Cygnus' case, *canaeque capillos dissimulant plumae* ("white feathers cover his hair," 2.373–374), while Acmon sees his hair undergoing an identical change: *comae in plumas abeunt* ("his hair was changed to feathers," 14.498–499). Again the presence of *coma/capilli* and *pluma/penna* in the same narrative unit is not attested in the *Metamorphoses* outside these two episodes. Next, the detailed covering of Acmon's neck, chest, and back by feathers, *plumis nova colla teguntur / pectoraque et tergum, maiores brachia*

²⁸ Hardie 1998: 257–259.

²⁹ Hardie 1998: 259–260.

³⁰ Hardie 1998: 260, drawing on Martin 1989.

pennas / accipiunt ("and feathers clothed a new-formed neck, chest, and back; his arms acquired large pinion-feathers," 14.499–501) is summarily reflected in the similar change affecting Cygnus' body: *penna latus velat* ("feathers covered his side," 2.376). Finally, both Cygnus and Acmon see their fingers changing into webbed feet (*magna pedis digitos pars occupat*, "his toes were replaced by webbed feet," 14.502; cf. *digitos ligat iunctura*, "a membrane links the toes together," 2.375) and their faces assume the shape of a beak (*oraeque cornu indurata rigent finemque in acumine ponunt*, "and his face grew stiff and horny, ending in a sharp-pointed beak," 14.502–503; cf. *tenet os sine acumine rostrum*, "his face held a non-pointed beak," 2.376).³¹

And yet, the birds of Diomedes are clearly not swans, since their beaks are pointed, contrary to that of the swan. Not fortuitously, in this last set of parallels Ovid introduces the only notable difference between Cygnus and the birds of Diomedes. What is more, this assertion of difference is paired with vocabulary that carries literary connotations which underscore that these new birds partake of the poetological associations tied to the swans. Significantly, the word *acumen* is not employed elsewhere in Ovid's text to describe a bird's beak; it does however often connote shrewdness, keenness of mind, and subtlety of speech.³² Likewise, the term *os* has been previously employed in Augustan literature, in the very text of the *Aeneid*, to signify not merely "speech" but "speech differentiation": *ora sono discordia signant* ("mark our speech different in tone," *Aen.* 2.423). Thus, when Ovid/Diomedes remarks at the conclusion that his friends assumed avian shapes similar to but not identical with the form of the swan, he espouses the literary complexity and multiple genre associations that the swan symbolizes, all the while respecting the tradition of the vague identity of these birds. The deep-rooted correlation of the swan to poetic inspiration, and by extension to one's models, moreover, becomes for Ovid a foil for the definition of his own literary independence; Diomedes' quasi-swans symbolize Ovid's stake in the epic world, similar to and yet separate from the one occupied by Vergil.

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³¹ It is worth noting that the Cygnus episode in *Metamorphoses* 2 also plays with genre, since its elegiac tones are well developed already in its epic archetype, the Cygnus account in *Aen.* 10.185–193, a metapoetic text which likewise alludes to the elegiac genre: see Keith 1992: 144–145.

³² *L-S* s.v. II.A and B.

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