

## TRAGEDY IN OVID

Ovid is today best known for his grand epic, *Metamorphoses*, and elegiac works like the *Ars amatoria* and *Heroides*. Yet he also wrote a *Medea*, now unfortunately lost. This play kindled in him a lifelong interest in the genre of tragedy, which informed his later poetry and enabled him to continue his career as a tragedian – if only on the page instead of the stage. This book surveys tragic characters, motifs, and modalities in the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*. In writing love letters, Ovid's heroines and heroes display their suffering in an epistolary theater. In telling transformation stories, Ovid offers an exploded view of the traditional theater, although his characters never stray too far from their dramatic origins. Both works constitute an *intratextual* network of tragic stories that anticipate the theatrical excesses of Seneca and reflect the all-encompassing spirit of Roman *imperium*.

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Theater, Metatheater, and the Transformation of a  
Genre  
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*Theater, Metatheater, and the  
Transformation of a Genre*

DAN CURLEY

*Skidmore College*



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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xi
1 <i>Mutatas dicere formas</i> . The transformation of tragedy	I
1 Theater and metatheater	2
2 Sources and genres	7
3 Tension and synergy	11
4 Decoding tragedy	14
2 <i>Nunc habeam per te Romana Tragoedia nomen</i> . Ovid’s <i>Medea</i> and Roman tragedy	19
1 Repetition and innovation	21
2 Careerism and gentrification	30
3 The <i>Medea</i> of Ovid	37
4 Textualization and transformation	49
3 <i>Lacrimas finge videre meas</i> . Epistolary theater	59
1 Writing within margins	62
2 The pathos of love	68
3 Myth	75
4 Irony	79
5 <i>Heroides</i> “22” and the theater of epic	84
4 <i>Locus exstat et ex re nomen habet</i> . Space, time, and spectacle	95
1 Places in view	96
2 Hecabe: off-center stage	101
3 Hercules: tragedy displaced	115
4 <i>Medea</i> : the limits of tragedy	121
5 <i>Tollens ad sidera palmas exclamat</i> . Staging rhetoric	134
1 Talking to oneself	136
2 <i>Medea</i> : a heroine’s debut	141

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
3	Hecabe: a mother's lament	153
4	Hercules: a heroic body of work	161
6	<i>Medeae Medea forem</i> . Tragic intratextuality	177
1	Intratextual footnotes	179
2	Iphigenia and Polyxena: (re)playing the victim	185
3	Medea and Deianira: pernicious text(ile)s	200
4	Deianira(s) and Hercules: expanding the intratext	206
7	<i>Carmen et error</i> . Tragedy's end	217
1	Ovid as a tragic poet	218
2	Staging <i>imperium</i> : Vergil, Ovid, and Seneca	221
3	Exodos	233
	<i>Bibliography</i>	236
	<i>Index of passages discussed</i>	251
	<i>General index</i>	263

## Preface

This book, a study of tragic theatricality in Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*, has its origins in my doctoral dissertation (University of Washington, 1999). Although the intervening period of rereading, rethinking, and revising has been long, the result is the book I wanted to write. Whether the end is justified is naturally for the reader to decide.

Ovidian studies have changed during this time, and for the better. When I began work on this topic in the mid-1990s, the reclamation of Ovid as a major Augustan poet was already well under way. This effort continued into the new millennium with major companion volumes from Cambridge, Brill, and Blackwell, the long-awaited Oxford Classical Texts edition of the *Metamorphoses* (Tarrant 2004), and that poem's new, six-volume commentary overseen by Alessandro Barchiesi (2005–). Yet for all the shoring up of Ovid's reputation, there remains room for a comprehensive treatment of his engagement with the genre of tragedy. The same scholarly industry that heralds or affirms an author as a classic also signals that it is time to move on. In the case of Ovid, it would be a shame to heed that call without a fuller appreciation of his aspirations to be a tragic poet, in addition to being a consummate poet of elegy and epic.

The seven chapters of *Tragedy in Ovid* cover different aspects of the genre, whether actual plays or poetry indebted to tragedy. Chapter 1 establishes the critical bearings for reading “the tragic.” Chapter 2 focuses on the lost *Medea*, Ovid's first attempt to be a tragedian, in light of Roman dramaturgical tradition and practice. Chapter 3 posits the *Heroides* as the poet's next best alternative to writing tragedy and identifies key aspects of the genre on display both there and in the *Metamorphoses*, the main subject of the next three chapters. Chapter 4 discusses manipulation of space and time in the epic with an eye toward the tragic stage; Chapter 5, the epic's tragic monologues; Chapter 6, its comprehensive network of tragic heroes and heroines, which also incorporates the *Heroides*. Chapter 7 offers some conclusions on Ovid as a tragic poet of the imperial age, particularly

his intermediary stance between Vergil and Seneca. Each chapter may be read on its own, but the book overall is cumulative, much like the poet's approach to tragedy over the course of his career.

A few words on references, editions, quotations, and translations. All references to commentaries, unless otherwise noted, are *ad locum* (or *loca*). That is, they cite an editor's comments on the passage or passages in question without numerical indicators. If, however, the comments appear elsewhere – e.g., in notes on a different passage or prefacing a new section of the text – their location is usually given in parentheses: thus “Anderson 1972 (after *Met.* 7.349)” references remarks found after his note on line 349 of *Met.* 7. The only instances in which I cite a commentary by page number are when referring to the editor's introduction or to an appendix.

In this study I regularly cite the following editions. Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, Tarrant 2004; *Heroides*, Showerman and Goold 1977; *Amores*, McKeown 1987; *Tristia*, Luck 1967. Greek tragedies: *Agamemnon*, Denniston–Page 1957; *Hecabe*, Collard 1991; *Hippolytus*, W. S. Barrett 1964; *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Murray 1913; *Medea*, Page 1938; *Trachiniae*, Davies 1991. Roman tragedies: Sen. *Medea*, Costa 1973; *Thyestes*, Tarrant 1985; fragments of the Roman tragedians, including Ovid, Klotz 1953 (*SRF*, vol. 1). Quotations from the text of these editions are so ubiquitous that I do not mention the editors by name, as I do when quoting other texts and authors. Naturally, I have made use of other editions, and textual departures from those listed above are noted as necessary.

In quotations I employ a system of underlining, developed by Clauss 1993, which facilitates the comparison of two or more allusive passages. Single underlining in one passage denotes a word or words that appear verbatim in a second passage, the citation of which follows. Double underlining denotes a word or words appearing verbatim in a third passage, which is cited after the second passage. Dashed underlining denotes a word or words that differ, however significantly or slightly, from passage to passage.

All Greek and Latin is translated or closely paraphrased; the renderings, which strive to balance the literal and the figurative, are usually mine. Subsequent quotations of a previously quoted Greek or Latin passage are typically given without translation. In such cases I direct the reader to the first, translated quotation.

I have many debts of gratitude to acknowledge. I begin by thanking above all Stephen Hinds, the director of the original dissertation and astute reader of subsequent revisions, whose support and mentoring over

*Preface*

ix

the years have been indispensable and unwavering. I also thank Catherine Connors and Michael Halleran, whose comments on the original dissertation guided its revision, and Alison Keith and Denis Feeney for their insights as the book developed.

Thanks to Michael Sharp, Senior Editor at Cambridge University Press, and to Gillian Dadd, Assistant Editor. Thanks also to my anonymous readers, particularly “A,” whose criticism was both constructive and useful at every juncture. I am grateful to Rob Wilkinson and Annie Jackson at Out of House Publishing Solutions (on behalf of Cambridge University Press) for editorial guidance and assistance during the production phase. To say that any errors or omissions are ultimately my own responsibility is a timeless *topos*, but no less true or necessary.

I want to thank my partners in Classics at Skidmore College – Michael Arnush, Ruby Grande, Leslie Mechem, Jackie Murray, David Porter, and Jessica Westerhold – for their advice, assistance, and encouragement. I am also grateful to the Office of the Dean of the Faculty for awarding two sabbatical leaves (2004–2005, fall 2012) to work on the book and for supporting travel to conferences and ancient theatrical sites. Profuse thanks to the Interlibrary Loan Department at Lucy Scribner Library for meeting my requests time and again; teacher-scholars at small colleges know that my gratitude here is fully warranted. Thank you to Amari Boyd, my research assistant, for help in organizing secondary sources and proofing the final typescript.

It is a pleasure to thank the Loeb Classical Library Foundation for its generous financial support, which allowed me to devote a full year of leave to this project. Thank you to Special Collections, University of Vermont, especially Jeffrey Marshall, Director of Research Collections, and Sharon Thayer, Collections Specialist, for supplying the cover image of Medea (by Abraham Aubry, after Johann Wilhelm Baur). In addition, Mr. Marshall hospitably granted me access to several illustrated volumes of the *Metamorphoses*, which helped to drive home for me the visuality of Ovid’s poetry. I am very grateful to Giulia Bartrum, Curator of German Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, for assistance in confirming the dates of two different Baur–Aubry editions.

I have had opportunities to present on Ovid and tragedy in professional venues since completing the dissertation. I learned much from audiences and co-presenters at the University of Nottingham (2000), Skidmore (2000), the Langford Latin Seminar (2001), the American Philological Association (2001), the Classical Association of the Atlantic States (spring 2001), the Pacific Rim Roman Literature Seminar (2001 and 2004), the



Classical Association of the Empire State (2009), and the University of Vermont (2010).

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge my Skidmore seminars on the *Metamorphoses*, in which I shared some of my ideas with groups of interested and talented undergraduates. Let me single out two students by name, Andy Cabell (fall 2005) and Claire Saxe (fall 2010), whose own projects on Ovid buoyed my faith in this project.

Over the years friends and acquaintances have shaped my perspectives in ways great and small, although hopefully not too small for them to remember: Antonios Augoustakis, Michael Clapper, Anne Duncan, Kendra Eshleman, David Fitzpatrick, John Franklin, Laurel Fulkerson, Jenny March, Lily Panoussi, Alan Sommerstein, and Andrew Zissos. Thank you one and all.

Finally, although the book has been transformed many times over, one thing remains constant and true: my devotion to my wife, Krista Anders, and to our daughter, Kaitlin, who has grown up alongside the project. Without their love, patience, and support it would never have been completed. It is to them I dedicate the book now, *pignus amoris non mutandi*.

## *Abbreviations*

- CAF* Kock, T. (ed.) (1880–8) *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, 3 vols. Leipzig.
- EGF* Davies, M. (ed.) (1988) *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. Göttingen.
- LIMC* (1981–) *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. Zurich.
- LSJ* Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones, and R. McKenzie (eds.) (1996) *A Greek–English Lexicon*. Oxford.
- NTDAR* Richardson, L. (1992) *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*. Baltimore, Md.
- OCD*<sup>2</sup> Hammond, N. G. L. and H. H. Scullard (eds.) (1970) *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 2nd edn. Oxford.
- OED* Simpson, J. A. and E. S. C. Weiner (eds.) (1989) *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford.
- OLD* Glare, P. G. W. (ed.) (1982) *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford.
- SRF* Klotz, A. (ed.) (1953) *Scaenicorum Romanorum Fragmenta*. 2 vols. Vol. I. *Tragicorum Fragmenta*. Munich.
- TGF*<sup>2</sup> Nauck, A. (ed.) (1964) *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. 2nd edn. Hildesheim.
- TrGF* *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. Göttingen.  
 Snell, B. (ed.) (1971) Vol. I. *Poetae Minores*.  
 Kannicht, R. and B. Snell (eds.) (1981) Vol. II. *Adespota*.  
 Radt, S. (ed.) (1985) Vol. III. *Aeschylus*.  
 Radt, S. (ed.) (1999) Vol. IV. *Sophocles*. 2nd edn.  
 Kannicht, R. (ed.) (2004) Vols. V.1 and V.2. *Euripides*.