

CHAPTER 7

"Songs the Greater Image"

The kinds of interpretative decisions Bergmann and Elsner imagine being made by the viewer confronted with the painted images in the homes of the Roman elite emerge with even greater impact from the grand urban monuments of the emperor, those which were experienced by the viewer not as guest, client, slave, or master in the household but as citizen or subject of empire. In chapter 2, I argued that the political functions of complexes like the temple of Apollo on the Palatine resided not so much in the intricacies of the claims they communicated about the role of their ultimate producer, Augustus, but in the scope they gave for each viewer to work out his own position in the empire and relation to the center. But there sculptural programs were treated as similar to any other form of representation; no special attention was paid to the effect of their particular medium. Analysis of the Pygmalion story, though, has revealed the special efficacy of artistic images, sculpture in particular because of its coexistence in the same spatial realm as the viewer, as a means for constructing these relationships. The tension in ways of seeing raised by such an image between the artistic appraisal of the connoisseur and a recognition of what is depicted as real parallels the alternatives of distance and identification conjured up by sacrifice and so sparks a chain of contrasting implications for the viewer's relation to the artistic subject and its maker, and, in the right contexts, the gods.

This "imperial" aspect of representation is essential in Augustan culture and implies much more than the conqueror's ability to refigure the image of the conquered explored by modern colonialist studies. We have already seen how much of the experience of art inevitably connoted conquest simply because this was the ideal mechanism for making such works present at Rome in the first place. But an important corollary to this is the role that representations played in manifesting Roman power to viewers throughout the empire. For among the many other artistic experiments for portraying Rome's world domination, the Roman was trained to see the provinces of the empire as sculptural representations of women. Mourning allegorical figures, taking the visual form of a female captive either to be punished for rebellion or raised up through the generosity of the conqueror, featured on coins and items of houseware, as well

as triumphal monuments, like the Forum of Augustus. Conversely, members of a community like Aphrodisias learned to imagine Roman power through a similar set of allegorical statues, including the representation of the female goddess Roma herself.¹

This chapter analyzes how Ovid places his text in dialogue with the public display of images by the emperor. I first focus on the story of Niobe, a figure who played a significant role in the iconography of both major temples of the particularly Augustan god Apollo, as a freestanding group in the temple of Apollo in Circo and on one of the doors to the sanctuary of the temple of Apollo on the Palatine.² My analysis of Ovid's Niobe narrative attempts to fuse two lines of reading: one that deals only with art images as sources for Ovidian narrative without considering Ovid's own elaborate treatments of the problems of representation and another that uses artistic images primarily as ways to understand the poetics of Ovid's text without thinking of their effect as “real” real presences on the reception of Ovid's work. The second figure I discuss, Perseus, requires different treatment, for Perseus as a character, by contrast to Niobe, plays a relatively small role in Augustan iconography. Fragments of a terracotta plaque found near the temple of Apollo show the fight with Medusa, and the Gorgon's head appeared on the upper part of the shield of the cult statue of Mars Ultor.³ Rather than drawing on a clear and prominent visual appropriation of Perseus, much of the effect of Ovid's politicization of the tale—in the broadest sense—comes from its unexpectedness. Perseus, the most fantastical and distant of the Greek heroes, and one with no genealogical or etiological connections to Rome or Italy, seems by his nature the one least likely to be seen as an Augustan prototype, and to view him from this vantage point forms another of the uncanny mirrorings of the familiar in the strange that punctuate that episode. Thus, the Perseus narrative offers a less specifically focused but ultimately even

¹ For details, see the groundbreaking discussion in Kuttner 1995.69–123.

² Evidence for the Niobids in the temple of Apollo in Circo comes from Pliny *HN* 36.28. On the decoration of the temple of Apollo in Circo, see esp. La Rocca 1985 and 1988. Viscogliosi's (1988.139) hypothesis on the arrangement of art works within the temple suggests that the Niobids would have been treated essentially as museum pieces, while Gros 1976.165 imagines them more closely integrated into the overall program. There is no hard-and-fast evidence that the statues were not in fact first displayed in the mid-republican predecessor of the Sosian temple (so also Schmitzer 1990.244), but whenever they were brought to Rome, Pliny's identification of them shows their connection with the restored structure. On the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, where the Niobids were not only present on the doors (Prop. 2.31.14) but adorning the handles of tripods dedicated by Augustus (for illustration, see Zanker 1988.87), see above all Zanker 1983 and now Galinsky 1996.213–24.

³ Schmitzer 1990.239, who sees this as evidence of Perseus as a transparently Augustan figure.

more suggestive analysis of the power of images, as well as a final opportunity to study how Ovid's fiction measures itself against the real.

I. RECONCILING NIOBE

The Niobe narrative is ideal for exploring the relationship between texts and images not only because of her artistic “reality” in the city of Rome but also because the nature of her metamorphosis into a rock seems to create a link between narrative and monument. Although Ovid's stone Niobe is wafted to the slopes of Mount Sipylus, not the Palatine, the stone form taken on by the heroine provides an important visual “inter-text” for her familiar image that invites comparison to actual monuments as well as opening up speculation on the priority of visual and literary representations. Reading Niobe, as it turns out, will require Ovid's audience to consider anew the nature of metamorphosis itself and how the alternatives it poses reemerge as challenges in responding to representational works of art: for the question of whether to see Niobe as what she has become takes on a special urgency, and one inevitably connected to the reader's actual experience of works of art, because what Niobe becomes through metamorphosis can seem indistinguishable from a statue. At the same time, the extratextual role of stone Niobes in defining and justifying Roman *imperium* makes it possible to relate these issues directly to the investigation of the political positioning of Ovid's text begun in chapter 2.

To set the stage for this investigation, it is important to notice the “imperializing” context within which Niobe appears in Ovid's narrative. The tales that begin Ovid's sixth book are striking for two contrasting kinds of sameness. First, the fates of Niobe, Arachne, Marsyas, and the Lycian farmers all strongly point to the same moral about the importance of humans' not infringing on the prerogatives of divinity. Denis Feeney in discussing the punishment of Arachne notes the ancient belief that because they were woven without *ars* but simply by the creative power of *natura*, spider webs were all the same.⁴ And this repetitiveness seems to carry over into Ovid's narrative as well; for not only does the text, or at least one of its authorial voices, reproduce the same lesson, but it shows the stories themselves acting to impose conformity on their audiences. By making the transitions between these narratives hinge on the responses of internal speakers and audiences who are, or in Niobe's case should be, reminded by each story of further *exempla*, Ovid dramatizes what one might call the imperializing power of narratives to impose order by

⁴ Feeney 1991.193–94, citing Sen., *Ep.* 121.23.

reminding listeners of their place. The metaphorical use of place to signify social position⁵ emerges explicitly at the book's beginning: Arachne challenges Minerva, although distinguished neither for rank (*loco*, 6.7) nor for ancestry.

Already, though, it is hard to distinguish this vertical aspect of place from a horizontal one; Arachne is, specifically, from the small town of Hypaepae, whose "low" name (Greek for "under the mountain") matches her status and prepares for the contrast with Niobe.⁶ As Anderson notes, Ovid gives a virtuoso display of local knowledge with a flurry of geographic references to sites in Lydia, the particular region of Asia Minor where Hypaepae was located.⁷ This concern with locality is the second of the remarkable features in the narrative complex in book 6. All of its major stories have a connection to one of the adjoining regions of Western Asia Minor: Niobe's tragedy unfolds in Thebes, but she was born in and returns to Phrygia. Lycia takes a turn in the tale of the peasants turned to frogs for refusing to allow Latona to drink, and Marsyas returns us to Phrygia, where he, like Niobe, finally becomes a feature of the landscape.

This geographic contiguity is sometimes treated simply as accidental to the thematic identity that makes this one of the most clearly unified segments of Ovid's narrative.⁸ But its presence sets up two alternative horizons for understanding the relationship between narratives, that of Ovid's audience made aware of the universal significance of the issues involved, and that of the audiences within the stories, who see these issues filtered through a network of local myth. The contrast in scale receives strong reinforcement in the difference between the imperial world depicted on the tapestry of Minerva, with its clear center on the world city of Athens and its "framing" *exempla* set at the margins of the composition, each of which also registers one of the cardinal points of the compass, and the local specificity of Ovidian narrative. This tension between the universal and the local forms a second reflection of the impact of empire within the text. As Simon Price has shown, the manipulation of local myth within a larger Hellenizing frame gave individual cities a crucial language for negotiating their own position in the larger empires of both the Hellenistic and Roman periods.⁹ Price draws attention to a fascinating set of theater reliefs in the city of Hierapolis, from precisely our region in southwest Asia Minor, that illustrate this phenomenon.¹⁰

⁵ OLD s.v. *locus* §17.

⁶ Rosati 2009.249.

⁷ Anderson 1972.152.

⁸ E.g., Anderson 1972.172 on the transition to the Niobe story.

⁹ See Price 2005.

¹⁰ Price 2005.118.

The reliefs portray the deeds of two important "local" gods, Apollo and Artemis, whose birth was located in Ephesus as well as at Delos, and include the presentations of local stories, the punishments of Niobe and of Marsyas. These images use depictions of myth both to relate local cults to those of nearby communities (here, Price suggests, the Apollo of Hierapolis appears as the iconic equal of the prestigious Artemis of Ephesus) and to constitute a kind of cosmic map of the ties that bind the local to the universal. For the next level of the frieze was focused on the figure of the emperor Caracalla, who had at his left a personification of the city of Hierapolis.

Because the sculptures date from two centuries after the *Metamorphoses* there is no question of their exerting any influence on Ovid's text (nor is influence in the other direction probable). However, the process that they illustrate, as Price argues, was an ancient one, and probably there was no period or place where the realignment of local myth with imperial iconography was more pressingly felt than in the Greek cities of Asia during the reign of Augustus. Thus, despite the anachronism, the reliefs provide a valuable perspective on the organization of Ovid's narrative precisely because they remind us that the local point of view his speakers represent was a historical phenomenon as well as a narrative device. And that seeing Apollo and Diana as the avatars of Roman power, the particular divinities of Rome's empire, must be balanced against points of view that would have to make the adjustment from seeing them as local figures.

Obviously the fraction of Ovid's audience who would have first thought of Apollo as, for example, the founder of Hierapolis was a pretty small one. But a much larger contingent of his first readers would have been aware of the existence of such a point of view, whether through travel or, more importantly, through the writings of Hellenistic authors and poets who loved to catalog precisely this kind of local myth. And here the imperializing transformation that Ovid's structure imposes on this material takes on a more recognizable literary aspect. Arachne's father Idmon, comes from Colophon, and Colophon was also the home of Ovid's best-known predecessor as a poet of *Metamorphoses*, Nicander. We know little of Nicander's writing, but it is argued by Forbes-Irving, and would plausibly reflect general Hellenistic tendencies, that his poem was much more concerned with relating metamorphoses to local cult practice throughout the Greek world.¹¹ We cannot say for sure whether there were specifically Nicandrian antecedents for the stories that Ovid collects at the beginning of book 6. He certainly told the story of the Lycian peasants (Antoninus 35), while adding the detail that, before returning

¹¹ Forbes-Irving 1990.24–32.

to punish the *coloni*, Leto was led by wolves to the river Xanthos, which is now sacred to Apollo. He also records a variant of the Arachne story, which interestingly replaced the Lydian setting with an Athenian one, and occurred not in his *Metamorphoses* but in his work on snakebites (*Theriacae* 11). This detail is perfectly compatible with his having told a different version in the other poem as well. But if it is not possible or necessary for my argument to establish Nicander as a consistent intertext throughout the narrative complex, it is easy to see him as a representative of a kind of locally based etiology that the epic dimensions and grand moral theme of Ovid's poem supplants. And in fact another distinguishing feature of many of all these stories is their fairly transparent engagement with the imagery of Hellenistic aesthetics, an engagement that allows Ovid's text to be read simultaneously as aligned to the perspectives of these Greek authors and as transcending them.¹² The rewriting of Greek etiology into Roman epic thus becomes part of the process that transforms local stories into reminders not to offend against the gods of imperial cult.

But what I have described as a conflict between imperial and local frames of reference here could also be conceptualized as a tension between the points of view of two localities. For in their sculptural form, two of the figures in Ovid's stories were also conspicuously present in the visual landscape of Ovid's Rome, the twin Niobes we have been discussing, and the statue of Marsyas, which stood next to the Comitium.¹³ The divine triad of Latona, Apollo, and Diana, who play such an important role in all these stories, was of course on permanent display in the temple of Palatine Apollo, in the form of actual Greek cult statues transferred to Rome. In other words, by engaging a global vision of myth that places Rome at the center with the potentially disparate points of view imposed by geographic distance, Ovid's work once again replicated issues played out in the physical realities of the city.

Ovid's Niobe in particular raises themes that encourage the reader to connect it with the visual imagery of empire on display in contemporary Rome. In the context of temples erected to Apollo in the twenties BCE, the figure of Niobe was colored by her associations with the defeated Cleopatra and, as Ulrich Schmitzer has described, the particular features that helped characterize that Egyptian queen as other have also been put

to work in Ovid's text.¹⁴ Niobe's striking first appearance in the narrative, as she interrupts the festival of Latona to state her claim to divinity, highlights her foreignness and her associations with the institutions and garb of kingship and makes the perennial Roman connection between such institutions and the transgressive power of a woman. Thus, Niobe appears in Phrygian robes, flashing eyes described as *superbos* (6.169). Like Cleopatra, Ovid's Niobe stresses her divine descent, coupled perhaps with a suggestion of Ptolemaic incest: "Jupiter is my grandfather, and I exalt in having the same god as my father-in-law" (*Iuppiter alter avus; socero quoque gloriior illo*, 6.176). Reference to Atlas brings a hint of the other African queen, Dido, and the *immensae opes* (6.181) on display in her home have reminded critics of the *barbarica ope*, of Cleopatra's fleet at Actium as depicted on the shield of Aeneas.¹⁵ So her exaltation of the authority she wields harks back to the common link between *regnum* and the gender-reversing enslavement of subject peoples: she claims that "the Phrygians fear me"—as of course they would a tyrant—and the palace of Cadmus (*regia*) is *sub domina*, under the sway of a mistress (6.177–78).¹⁶ But the most striking and significant link between the two figures, one not developed by Schmitzer, is that Cleopatra too seems to have connected claims to divinity with her role as a mother. The imagery of fertility appeared on the queen's coinage, including one where she is depicted suckling her son, and helped link her especially to the Egyptian mother goddess Isis.¹⁷ Of course, the very names of Cleopatra's children by Mark Antony, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, call to mind the offspring of Latona.

But if one effect of this pattern is to activate all the terms of Cleopatra's barbarism as a means of giving the defeat of Niobe an ideological charge in the present, Ovid's Niobe seems equally to resist such an obvious characterization as foreign other. To start with geography, as a native of Sipylus in Asia Minor, Niobe is well qualified, in Greek Thebes, to play the domineering Eastern Queen. However, as the description of her gown as Phrygian reminds us, Sipylus is not so far from the homeland of Aeneas, often to be insulted as a Phrygian.¹⁸ Indeed, her account of her own genealogy points to a further link with Rome's founder. She boasts of being the granddaughter of Atlas: *maximus Atlas est avus, aetherium qui*

¹⁴ Schmitzer 1990.244–49.

¹⁵ Schmitzer 1990.246, citing *Aen.* 8.685.

¹⁶ The power of female dynasts becomes in Livy's account a defining feature of Rome's *regnum* in its last phase; Feldherr 1997. For Thebes in general as a mirror of Rome, see Hardie 1990.

¹⁷ See Wyke 1992.102–3 for examples.

¹⁸ E.g., at *Aen.* 12.99.

¹² The opposition between classical (Minervan) and Hellenistic (Arachnean) aesthetics is widely recognized as a feature of the Arachne story (Leach 1974). For Niobe, see this chapter; for Marsyas, see chapter 2; and for the "muddy waters" created by the Lycian peasants, see Clauss 1989 and Myers 1994.83–90.

¹³ On the political significance of this Marsyas, and especially on Marsyas as a numismatic emblem indicating the status of a "free city" within the empire, see Veyne 1961.

fert cervicibus axem (6.174–75). So too when the eastern stranger Aeneas claims kinship with the Arcadian king Evander, he does so through Electra, the mother of Dardanus, another daughter of Atlas: *Electram maximus Atlas edidit, aetherios umero qui sustinet orbis* (8.136–37). Not only are there links of kinship between the two figures, but the lines clearly resemble one another, with the words *maximus Atlas* and *aetherium(os)* occupying the same metrical positions. But recalling Aeneas's own genealogy reminds us of an even closer tie: Niobe is the daughter of Dione, the Homeric mother of Venus, making her Aeneas's cousin.¹⁹

When we move from Rome's Trojan progenitor to its contemporary *princeps*, another set of analogies with Niobe emerges. The most striking of these results from Ovid's amplification of Niobe's mythical crime, which is no longer simply comparison to the goddess Latona but the aim of supplanting her rival and claiming godhead for herself.²⁰ If this ambition of Niobe exceeds mythical examples of hubris, it connects her to the problems of self-definition faced by Rome's *princeps* at this stage in his career. Indeed, the poem's final lines treat Augustus's divinization as the inevitable conclusion of his curriculum vitae, and in both cases the right to become a god rests at least partly on kinship. Niobe was daughter and daughter-in-law of Jupiter; Augustus, son of the god Julius. And as Niobe's claims to divinity are very much her own construction, Ovid points out the conundrum that Julius Caesar is deified precisely so that Augustus will be able to be the offspring of a god.²¹ Niobe's glance at her opulent palace might recall how Augustus's own palace, conspicuously linked to the temple of Apollo, where of course Niobe herself was on display, establishes a special connection between the emperor and the gods. And even the reference to Niobe's beauty, the *digna dea facies* (6.182), suggests the iconographical sleight of hand by which the sickly Octavian propagated through statuary a face and posture that were indeed unchanging and worthy of a divinity.²²

¹⁹ Bömer 1976.60 notes the connection, though there are of course other genealogies of the mother of Aphrodite. In Niobe's case, as Schmitzer 1990.245 points out, Dione as her mother first appears in Ovid. Schmitzer uses the connection with Venus as another point of similarity with Cleopatra, who according to Plut. *Ant.* 26 met Antony dressed as Aphrodite and associated herself with Isis, recognized as an Egyptian Aphrodite. The most suggestive of the iconic links that Schmitzer establishes between Cleopatra and Venus was Caesar's placement of her in the temple of Venus Genetrix, encouraging perhaps the same conflation between her self-presentation and the genealogy of the imperial family that Ovid suggests here.

²⁰ Voit 1957.146–47; Forbes-Irving 1990.296: "Instead of the irresponsible chatterer of the epigrams we find here a god-defier on a grand scale." Yet Ovid's inflation of Niobe's crime goes perhaps even further than has been suggested. A Pentheus may challenge the divinity of Dionysus, but he does not demand, as Niobe does, to become a god himself.

²¹ *Met.* 15.760–61, see Hardie 1997.190–92 and above, chapter 2.

²² Zanker 1990.98–100.

The final, and most suggestive, point of contact between Niobe and Augustus, however involves the climax of her claim to divine status, her offspring. Before I treated the link between fertility and divinity as an essentially Cleopatran element in Ovid's Niobe, but it too is much more than that. For Augustus as well would prominently deploy the imagery of growth and fertility, as well as the propagation of offspring,²³ to depict the promise of his reign, but would also lose countless heirs and adoptive sons. Specifically his adopted sons Gaius and Lucius had both died in independent accidents in the decade before Ovid's poem. In his *Res Gestae*, Augustus's description of his own personal loss, *filios meos, quos iuvenes mihi eripuit Fortuna* (my sons, whom Fortune snatched away from me in their youth, RG 14), is given in language similar to what Niobe will use to predict the impossibility of hers: *maior sum, quam cui possit Fortuna nocere, multaque ut eripiat, multo mihi plura relinquet* (I am too great for Fortune to harm; though she should snatch away many things, she will leave me many more, 6.195).²⁴ Here, in distinction to what we might initially construe as the "anti-Augustan" effects of disclosing potential similarities between the *princeps* and a figure associated with a vilified rival, the resemblance stresses the ultimate humanity of both rulers, placing them on the same side in the battle to freeze the processes of change that open the door to Fortuna's depredations.

My point in drawing these connections is not to suggest that Ovid has fashioned his Niobe into a cryptic indictment of Augustan policy. Any reader of this speech who made the comparison between emperor and queen could easily find that it threw into relief precisely what Augustus does not do. He did not explicitly claim divinity, as a Hellenistic ruler might have done. On the contrary, his distinctive odor of sanctity came precisely from the scrupulous piety with which he acknowledges the gods, and these particular Latonan gods, as his superiors.²⁵ So too the reference to the royal palace reminds us that Augustus's *domus* explicitly did not claim distinction on the basis of wealth. And the elaborate costume and flowing hair of Niobe's own appearance in this scene would stand quite apart from the decorous clothing and restrained nodus hairstyle of an Augustan princess.²⁶ Finally, Augustus's language regarding the deaths of Gaius and Lucius shows an acceptance of the hazards of fortune that Niobe denies. But even if the symbolic language of Niobe's

²³ See most conveniently Zanker 1990.172–79.

²⁴ On the possibility of Ovidian allusions to the *Res Gestae*, see chapter 2, note 32.

²⁵ See Galinsky 1996.219 on the function of Niobe as *exemplum* in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, who cites as the moral of the episode the dictum of Horace (C. 3.6.5) that "by holding yourself lesser than the gods, you rule, Roman."

²⁶ On the role of representations of women in the propaganda wars of the Second Triumvirate, see Kleiner 1992.

self-divinization is quickly diagnosed as precisely that which Augustus has rejected, her aim of using deification as a way of guaranteeing permanence in the face of change creates a more complex bond with the aging ruler. More important is the effect of having Niobe's claim presented in direct speech, indeed in a scene where the queen herself sets up a complex pageant relying on spectacle and rhetoric. Keeping Niobe in the role of negative exemplar to Augustus thus comes to depend on maintaining the priority of one representation over another—on keeping Niobe contextualized within the moralizing tendency of this part of the poem and the larger architectural context of Augustan Rome that records her as the deserving victim of divine punishment. The alternative is to perceive in Niobe's representational capacity a kinship between queen and *princeps* that levels the ideological playing field between them.

Niobe's role as an artist in her own right leads to the second part of my argument, which will point out how the different claims advanced about the status of Niobe rely on different modes of representation, and how, for the reader, interpreting her story means choosing between alternative models for construing Ovid's text. Because these representational alternatives are already delineated in the preceding encounter between Minerva and Arachne, I review quickly how their rival tapestries advance different political agendas by opening up different perspectives on the way artistic images convey reality. As Denis Feeney has pointed out, Minerva complements her diminution of humans to the role of cautionary *exempla* highlighting the permanence of the gods with a reliance on artistic realism to manifest the power of those gods in art.²⁷ *Sua quemque deorum inscribit facies; Iovis est regalis imago* (his own appearance marks each god, Jupiter's is the appearance of a king, 6.73–74). The divine images are doubly authentic—they are based on reality, in the sense that they really look like what they represent, and conjointly they convey the authority of the gods, whose power is operative in the real world. In answer to Minerva's moralizing use of metamorphosis and realism to reestablish the hegemony of gods over man, Arachne presents a catalog of the animal forms the gods have used to deceive the victims of their lust. Here, rather than being final, metamorphosis appears as a fleeting mechanism of deception, proof not only of the crimes of the gods but of the unreliability of appearances. Correspondingly, her art relies on a different aspect of realism, aimed not at guaranteeing images as true and reliable representations but at a verisimilitude that assimilates the viewer to the victim of divine deception: Jupiter here is not a king but a bull, and “you would think it was a real bull,” *verum taurum ... putares* (6.104), just as Europa did.

²⁷ Feeney 1991.190–92.

Equally notable is that both artists' narratives are defective in contrasting ways. Minerva depicts a timeless hierarchy but totally omits the flow of human time, so that the victims of metamorphosis are never depicted as human beings but only as immortal signs of immortality. By contrast, Arachne uses the power of art to make an obviously transient moment seem to last forever—Jupiter, of course, will not appear as a bull forever, and the human countenances that art preserves unchanging will age and vanish.

Within the Niobe story a parallel to these two modes of representation emerges in the form of two rival utterances, and as in the Arachne episode both images seem to compete as programmatic guides to Ovid's own text, so here it becomes possible to ally the narrative voice with either of these speakers, but with radically different results.²⁸ The warning to worship Latona comes from the speech, directly reported, of Manto, the daughter of Teiresias, described as prophetic (*vaticinata*, 6.159), invoking the very term that Ovid will use to define his own poetic role in the poem's final line (*vatum*, 15.879). As a good *vatis*, Manto presents her speech as providing direct access to the language and will of a real-life divinity: “Latona orders this with my voice” (*ore meo Latona iubet*, 6.162). If we compare the voice of this *vatis* with that of the Ovidian narrator, we find a pretty close match: we already know that the aim of the story will be to reinforce the moral of the Arachne narrative, and so again to emphasize the hierarchical patterns that subordinate men to gods, and that this hierarchy is presented as an extratextual reality (cf. 6.150–51). And Ovid's narrative too will offer direct depictions of the gods, cutting immediately from Niobe's boast to the scene of Latona begging her children for aid (6.204ff.).

²⁸ Further provocation to read the Niobe scene through the contrasting lenses offered by the tapestry images of the Arachne episode comes from the thematic anticipations of her story in each of the four cautionary tales that frame Minerva's picture. Thus, Rhodope and Haemus in the first of these scenes undergo a kind of petrification (they are changed to mountains) as a result of calling themselves by the names of the Olympian gods (6.87–89). In the second episode, the Pygmy queen defeated by Iuno in an unspecified competition is gratuitously identified as a mother (6.90). The next figure, Antigone, another rival of Iuno, shares with Niobe a royal heritage in Asia Minor (6.95–96). The final scene of Cinyras embracing the temple steps that were his daughters provides an exact mirror image of Niobe as a male parent, mourning children turned to stone, “seems to weep” (6.100).

Niobe's appearance, like that of her Vergilian analogue, Dido, seems to be as a figure stepping out of an artistic representation (with the temple of the Cinyras story perhaps tightening the connection). But here there is an added twist in the sudden shift from representation to reality because this tapestry figure herself appropriates an embroidered Phrygian cloth as an element of her own adornment, anticipating the reversals of perspective discussed later. For the importance of Dido's epiphany elsewhere in Ovid, see Hardie 2002c.183–86.

The second possible paradigm for the Ovidian narrator comes, of course, from Niobe's own speech, which in several features is not too far from recognizably Ovidian procedures. Interestingly, the lesson of Arachne is recounted by the poet as "to use lesser words," language that seems to link Niobe's offense precisely to her role as a verbal artist.²⁹ Ovid's descriptions of his own literary development as the evolution from small to large, in, for example, *Fasti* 2.3–4 and *Tristia* 2.63–5, where the *Metamorphoses* itself becomes his *maius opus*, invite comparison between Niobe's *verba* and the poetic text that contains them. Beyond the generalized opposition between the grand and the slight, a distinction that Ovid's poem conspicuously blurs, Alan Cameron has suggested that throughout Latin literature the "greatness" of a work relates directly to its panegyric function.³⁰ Such a connotation here further strengthens the connections both between Niobe's crime and her poetic performance and between that performance and the text that surrounds it. For Niobe's arrogance manifests itself in a perversion of a specific literary form, the hymn. Niobe deploys the traditional rhetoric of praise, as we have seen, to exalt herself while recasting the traditional hymnic narrative of the birth of Apollo to put blame on the goddess Latona.³¹ Interestingly, this assertion of human superiority over the gods, which leads up to her poignant final neglect of the power of time to undo the signs of her triumph, itself depends on a truncation of the narrative that recalls the storytelling of Arachne. For just as the weaver never brings her tales to the end, so Niobe here omits the miraculous fixing of the island to the seabed that affirms Latona's divinity.³² Her manipulation of the hymnic genre also provides an obvious point of comparison between Niobe and the hymnic narrator who has spent the better part of the last book recount-

²⁹ *verbisque minoribus uti* (6.151). For a similar poetological dimension to the succeeding narrative of the Lycian peasants, see Clauss 1989.

³⁰ Cameron 1995.466–71, though in the case of the *Tristia* passage designations of size and scale do seem to me operative in the use of *maius*.

³¹ As described by Anderson 1972.177, see also Barchiesi 1999.124 and Fuhrer 1999.364, who catalogs precisely the hymnic elements in Niobe's self-praise.

³² This also provides an important link to the Pierides, the human singers who challenge the muses to a contest of hymns in book 5, for they too end their song with the gods hiding (*latuit*, 5.331 ~ Latona?) concealed in the form of animals, rather than going on to narrate the defeat of Typhoeus. Other important thematic connections between Niobe and the Pierides are the latter's reliance on number over quality, at least as the Muses report (5.305) them, and the eastern, specifically Egyptian, emphasis of their praise of Typhoeus (for details, see Anderson 1996.531–32), which anticipates Niobe's eastern origins and perhaps her contemporary associations with Cleopatra. The "Egyptianizing" of the failed hymns in these books looks forward to the poem's final ostentatious reconfiguration of Alexandrian elements in the portrayal of Venus to serve Roman ends; see the important discussion of Barchiesi 1999.119.

ing a refashioned hymn to Demeter. Again, there are obvious differences between the two treatments, signaled not least by Niobe's omission of the prime Ovidian element of metamorphosis and Ovid's careful decision to place hymnic "big words" directly in the mouth of the muse of epic poetry.

But however much we may correct this impulse to hear Niobe's voice in Ovid's, just as we reject the notion of Niobe as Augustus, the exercise of making the equation disclose a resemblance between the two speakers that the reading of the story as an *exemplum* would like us to keep apart. The mortal and unimperial Ovid, even as he seems to anchor his narrative to reflections of those greater than himself, still appropriates the language and figures of external authorities and in doing so suggests that these authorizing images are perhaps no more than artistic constructs on the part of mortals. What we gain from the equation between Niobe and the poet, and again by extension Augustus, is a new perspective on those images that makes it possible to understand them less as representations of an external reality than as projections of human ambitions struggling to be accepted as real. Viewed like this, the very gods whose inclusion in Ovid's narrative differentiates it from Niobe's story and whose depictions in Apollo's temple perform a similar authorizing function have no authentic power outside of the representation. To make matters more confusing, they look a lot like Niobe herself. Niobe's own Arachnid view of images, where it is the human face that endures and takes precedence over the divine, becomes an essential corollary of Minerva's depiction of the gods. Making gods look like men inevitably makes men look more like gods. And so the first directly described image of Latona is of an angry woman seeking to obtain vengeance over a rival through her children (6.204–13). The view from the top down, where art accurately depicts real gods in human form as a warning to mortals, and from the bottom up where human beings immortalize their own countenances, creating gods in their own image, and where the face of the human artist is always visible, come to settle into one. And this is no mere metaphor, for Ovid's narrative here shows an extreme interest in verticality, as it moves back and forth between mountain and plain.³³

The approximation of Niobe to the divine thus paradoxically becomes most visible just at the moment when the narrative would seem to have exposed her inferiority to Latona, when she is on the verge of being converted literally to a statue. And again this semantic doubling goes together with an emphasis within the text on problems of viewing and perspective. A brief glance at the death of the penultimate two daughters, whose

³³ Cf. *summoque in vertice Cynthi*, 6.204 ~ *planus erat*, 6.218.

removal finally reduces her, as she emphatically points out,³⁴ below the Latonan tally of two, helps make this clear:

*latet haec, illam trepidare videres;
sexque datis leto diversaue vulnera passis
ultima restabat.*

(6.296–98)

One hides, you might have seen the other tremble; with six given over to death and having suffered various wounds, the last was remaining.

The hiding daughter assumes precisely the characteristic pose of the exiled Latona and indeed seems to offer an etymological gloss for her name.³⁵ But Latona in a very different guise is lurking in the next line as well; the "death" to whom the daughters have been handed over is none other than Leto, the Greek name for the same goddess. This shift in perspective, by which the victim indeed comes to resemble the divine, while the divinity is reduced simply to the destructive force that alone keeps mortals from obtaining their due, occurs together with another little narratological reminder of Arachne's tapestry. You would see that daughter tremble, as on the tapestry you would believe that Jupiter's bull was a real bull. The introduction of the internal spectator once more accompanies a shift in perspective by potentially placing the reader in the story. As there seeing the bull as real meant adopting the point of view of the victim Europa, so here, I suggest, the "you" that you become is Niobe. The sympathetic perspective thus also coincides with the moment when the text itself seems most capable of producing the illusion of reality, the result of which is not only to be able to see Niobe's daughter with maximum vividness but to see as Niobe.

This fleeting reminder of the problems of illusionism is particularly suggestive here because it so closely prepares for the moment when Niobe herself becomes a work of art—the eternal stone figure that ends the narrative and, by extension, the actual sculptural figure on display in Rome. Before turning finally to consider how Ovid's narrative affects the reading of this real monument, and vice versa, it is important to recall just how problematic Niobe's metamorphosis had always been as a conclusion to her story. Why exactly does Niobe turn to stone? Do the gods transform her as the culmination of her punishment? Does the

transformation happen spontaneously, or is it even granted to her by the gods as a token of compassion?³⁶ Ovid's own ambiguous description can accommodate many different possibilities. She grew stiff from evils, *deriguit malis* (6.303). The evils she committed, or the evils she suffered? One reading makes the stone commemorate Niobe's own transgression, fixing her into a perpetual reminder of the power of the gods to exact vengeance. The other, though, highlights the commemoration of her grief and her humanity. And if what is remembered is Niobe rather than her exemplary punishment, metamorphosis gives her the immortality she seeks at the beginning of her story.

The sign of Niobe becomes invested with these two different significations, coexisting in one image, and these differences enshrine not only the difference in points of view articulated in the tapestries that prepare for the scene but also different views of the "difference" that the figure of Niobe was meant to record in Augustan culture. In this connection too, it is important to remember that the tale of Niobe's historical analogue Cleopatra becomes especially difficult to deal with precisely at its ending, where the barbarian queen's brave suicide makes her at once sympathetic and heroic, and thus puts her beyond the reach of commemoration by Augustus, even as the fact of her death saved her from being displayed in a triumph.³⁷

Although the development of the tale of Niobe prepares the reader to take this double view of the resulting image, Ovid's account of that image itself makes it a figure for perpetuating the ambiguities of the metamorphosis. The most striking thing about the stone Niobe is her contradictory nature as artistic artifact. She is at once totally inanimate and miraculously defies inanimacy. In comparison to ancient conceptions of the properties and ideals of statues, the stone is both too dead and too much alive. Ovid is at pains to present the final form of Niobe as the antithesis of her first appearance as a moving figure interrupting the rites of Latona with her boasting.³⁸ Her hair does not move, her face loses its color, and—the paradigmatic silence of statues—her tongue cleaves to her palate (6.303–9). A final element in the same pattern of inversion comes perhaps at the end of the catalog, where even the organs inside her have become stone: for this image controverts two Greek ways of figuring female fertility, as a soft wax tablet and as a fertile field. In this way, the stoniness of her internal organs points up the statue's lack of the very

³⁴ Cf. the stress on *unam* in lines 6.299–300.

³⁵ Fulgentius *Virg. Cont.* 104,13: *Latinus ... a latitando ... unde et Latona dicta est Luna quod nunc superna celet nunc inferiora nunc uniformis latitet.*

³⁶ See Voit 1957.149 and Frécaut 1980.135–37, who also provides a résumé of other views.

³⁷ Wyke 1992.127, citing Pelling 1988.318–19.

³⁸ See also Forbes-Irving 1990.147.

creative capacity most essential to the immortal identity Niobe tries to establish for herself.³⁹

Such inversions can indeed contribute to a reading of Niobe's petrification as the inevitable punishment for her hubris. But at the same time, they disconnect the stone precisely from the figure whom, if this is actually a statue, it ought to represent. A central paradox of statuary so frequently exploited in, for example, the ecphrastic writers in the *Greek Anthology*, is precisely that a statue's capacity to represent seems to give it properties it does not possess. So here Ovid's insistence that the statue does not move or speak and that "there is nothing alive in the image" (*nihil est in imagine vivum*, 6.305) reflects the hard facts of the statue as artifact,⁴⁰ but it also negates the very qualities that make it miraculous as art. However Ovid has a different kind of miracle in store. The immobile stone undertakes a remarkable journey as a blast of wind carries it from Thebes back to Mount Sipylus. So too Niobe, who had become so absent in the stone's figuration, persists not as an image but as a living presence. The stone, which remains grammatically feminine (cf. the participles in 6.310–12), continues to weep. Ovid thus emphasizes the complex semantic possibilities available to the viewer of the real statue of Niobe by disarticulating two contrasting ways of seeing. On the one hand, there is no illusionism at all: the viewer sees simply the dead rock that has replaced the living Niobe. On the other, there is an illusionism so complete that the role of art itself vanishes. Niobe weeps not because the rock seems to weep but as a continuing presence miraculously pouring forth real tears.

Niobe becomes an interesting figure for pointing out this possible gulf between reality and representation not just because of her iconographic importance as a statue in Augustan Rome but because throughout antiquity writers raise the question of what exactly you saw when you looked at Niobe. This uncertainty can take the simplest form in the mere question of whether a woman was figured in the actual rock on Sipylus. Thus, for example Pausanias, whose thoughts turn to the actual stone Niobe as a result of seeing a statue of her very like the one on display in Rome, a tripod embossed with Apollo and Artemis killing the Niobids, recalls how different points of view really did affect one's perception of the stone: "I myself saw this Niobe, having climbed the mountain at Sipylus. Close up she is a rocky crag, offering no appearance of any woman at all, much less a weeping one. But if you go farther off you seem to see a woman weeping with lowered head" (Paus. 1.21.3). The theoretical

problem involved in matching Niobe with the stone appears in skeptical writers attempting to rationalize the metamorphosis story itself; thus, the comic poet Philemon has a character say: "I never believed Niobe was stone, nor now will I be persuaded that the stone was a human being; but rather, no longer able to speak on account of her evils, she is said to be a stone on account of her silence."⁴¹ But more interesting still are the actual responses to stone images of Niobe recorded in the *Greek Anthology* that relate precisely to our problem of recognizing the living figure of Niobe in a stone image. The play between Niobe and the statue, between presence and absence, can be inflected in numerous ways. Thus, for example, an anonymous poet has a Praxitelean Niobe address the hearer as follows:

Ἐκ ζωῆς με θεοὶ τεύξαν λίθον, ἐκ δὲ λίθοιο
ζωὴν Πραξιτέλης ἔμπαλιν εἰργάσατο.
(AP 16.129)

From a living woman, the gods made me stone; from stone, Praxiteles has made me a living woman again.

The idea that the artist in some sense challenges the gods as Niobe had done precisely in bringing the stone to life further suggests how the sympathetic recognition of Niobe in the statue can undo the image's exemplary significance. Notice too how the verbal artist, the anonymous epigrammatist, adds the finishing touch to her resurrection by restoring Niobe's power to speak. A poet much later than Ovid, Julianus of Egypt, takes precisely the opposite tack and relates the lifelessness of an actual image to the divine transformation that preceded the artist's work.

Δυστήνου Νιόβης ὀράας παναληθέα μορφήν
ὥς ἔτι μυρομένης πότμον ἔων τεκέων.
εἰ δ' ἄρα καὶ ψυχὴν οὐκ ἔλλαχε, μὴ τότε τέχνη
μέμφο· θηλυτέρην εἶκασε λαϊνέην.
(AP 16.130)

You see the true shape of the wretched Niobe, as if still mourning the fate of her children, but if she has not received a soul, don't blame this on the artist, for he portrayed a stone woman.

In this case the deadness of the statue, recording merely the shape of Niobe, is itself the perfect commemoration. But the simple equation be-

³⁹ For writing and plowing as metaphors for female fertility, see Dubois 1988.65–85 and Steiner 1994.111–12. See also, on the contrast between the stone Niobe and the queen at the beginning of her story, Forbes-Irving 1990.147.

⁴⁰ On silence and immobility as the defining characteristics of statues in Greek thought, see Steiner 2001.136–151; on the contrasting illusion of animation, see Steiner 2001.44–50.

⁴¹ ἐγὼ λίθον μὲν τὴν Νιόβην, μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς,
οὐδέ ποτ' ἐπίσθην, οὐδὲ νῦν πεισθήσομαι
ὥς τοῦτ' ἐγένετ' ἄνθρωπος· ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν κακῶν
οὐδὲν λαλῆσαι δυναμένη πρὸς οὐδένα,
προσηγορεύθη διὰ τὸ μὴ φωνεῖν λίθος.
(fr. 101)

tween bringing Niobe to life and undoing the gods’ work, which I extended to adopting a perspective alien to the exemplary reading of the image, is complicated in yet another poem, by the Hellenistic Theodoridas, that most resembles Ovid’s representation in its intricacy.

Στᾶθι πέλας, δάκρυσον ἰδὼν, ξένε, μυρία πένθη
 τᾶς ἀθυρογλώσσου Τανταλίδος Νιόβας,
 ἃς ἐπὶ γᾶς ἔστρωσε δυωδεκάπαιδα λοχείαν
 ἄρτι, τὰ μὲν Φοίβου τόξα, τὰ δ’ Ἀρτέμιδος.
 ἃ δὲ λίθω καὶ σαρκὶ μεμιγμένον εἶδος ἔχουσα
 πετροῦται· στενάχει δ’ ὑψιπαγῆς Σίπυλος.
 θνατοῖς ἐν γλώσσα δολία νόσος, ἃς ἀχάλινος
 ἀφροσύνα τίκτει πολλάκι δυστυχίαν.
 (AP 16.132)

Stand near, stranger, and weep beholding the thousand sorrows of the daughter of Tantalos, who had no door on her tongue, whose force of twelve offspring the arrows of Apollo and Artemis laid low. She, now having an appearance made up of stone mixed with flesh, has been changed to a rock. And lofty Sipylus groans. The tongue is a devious plague to mortals, whose unbridled madness has often given birth to unhappiness.

Theodoridas too highlights a division between flesh and stone that keeps Niobe from quite coalescing into a single image. But here, far from the sympathetic aspects of the statue alienating the viewer from the image’s moral force, the more one sympathizes with Niobe—and notice how “you” are instructed to weep like the rock is weeping—the more vividly one experiences the sorrow that comes from disobeying the gods.⁴²

This examination of other literary explorations of Niobe makes it clear that the connection between Ovid’s poem and the visual imagery of Niobe is more than simple imitation;⁴³ rather we can see the poet engaging both with the contemporary didactic deployment of images of Niobe and with the tradition of meditating on the ecphrastic ambiguities of a statue of a stone maiden to accentuate thematic issues important within his own narrative. These issues include the question of whether the punished Niobe can also be seen as a figure for pity, whose ambitions to rival the divinity have their root in the essential condition of mortality and resemble those of the very prince whose monuments use her punishment

to legitimize his own reign, and of the very poet who tells her story. And as the exploration of the image highlights the ambiguities of the narrative, so Ovid’s narrative charges the actual statues of Niobe with a new significance.

This reciprocal transformation of image and text points to two larger ways in which the fluctuation between picture and story becomes significant for understanding the function and nature of Ovid’s narrative. The first involves the central phenomenon of Ovid’s poem, metamorphosis. Both story and image reflect metamorphosis in different ways that controvert the seemingly obvious dichotomy between static image and evolving narrative.⁴⁴ In the case of stories, the fact that they move through time and so point out how characters undergo changes of condition makes them the ideal medium for representing metamorphosis. Indeed, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the change of condition represented is an essential criterion for analyzing plot (*Poet.* 13). Niobe, of course, thinks that her life will have no narrative—that she will always be what she is, and correspondingly she herself does not tell stories all the way to the end. But once we know the stories, then the images have their own distinctive way of reproducing metamorphosis that verbal narrative lacks. That is precisely because images affect the viewer synchronically, juxtaposing new and old in the same instant. Once we have learned to see Niobe in the Niobe statue, or rather to accommodate different perspectives that subject the image to different readings, then it acquires the ability to present opposite states not one after the other but in shocking simultaneity. Niobe emerges as both victim and violator at once. As Ovid invests the image with such complex significance by telling the story behind it, at the same time his narrative acquires the ability to depict this contrast with the immediacy and the intensity of a visual image. One example of how he gives his text this iconic property comes from another of the episode’s most studied lines, appearing halfway through Niobe’s punishment after her seven sons have been killed: *Heu quantum haec Niobe Niobe distabat ab illa* (alas how much this Niobe differs from the former Niobe, 6.273). A wonderful pun since the second Niobe has “declined” from the nominative to the ablative, but also a key question for the entire narrative, capable of many answers from “not different at all since she still offends the goddess” to “halfway on the road to total desolation.”⁴⁵ But the im-

⁴⁴ On the problems of representing metamorphosis in verbal and visual art, see Sharrock 1996.

⁴⁵ Tissol 1997.57–58 describes this “sinking downward” as a kind of linguistic proto-metamorphosis anticipating the effect of the final transformation before it has become visible to an outside observer. My own interpretation focuses more on the ambiguous likeness and difference between Niobe at the middle of her story and both her “before” and “after” states. In another important recent discussion of the line, Hardie 2002c.251 concentrates

⁴² For the treatment of the problem of the stone Niobe in Athenian drama, see Steiner 2001.147–48.

⁴³ That Ovid composed 6.298–99 to recapture precisely the pose of the Niobe now in the Uffizi (and sometimes argued to be a copy of the one on display in the temple of Apollo in Circo) was suggested by Bömer 1976.51 and Gros 1976.165, n. 85.

portant fact for my purposes is that the line invests the word Niobe with the capacity to signify both states. Niobe, however we construe it grammatically or interpret the story it tells, has not changed at all; the same term signifies Niobe at both the beginning and ending as the statue itself records its likeness and difference to the arrogant dynast.

Finally, let us return from statues and narratives in the abstract to our starting point, the interaction between one particular narrative, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and one particular set of statues, the images of Niobe infixed in contemporary temples of Apollo. Here too we will find not a simple question of models and reinterpretations, of an anti-imperial Niobe narrative planted like defacing graffiti on the monument of Caesar. Rather, just as within the text image and narrative mutually redefine one another, so within the real world into which Ovid's actual poem was introduced, the poet has made sure that the relative priority of these two representations of Niobe remains unclear in a manner that in itself plays on the episode's ostensible theme of the violations of the social order. Read according to Ovid's narrative sequence, the visual image comes last: this is a woman turned to stone. But in the real world the statues had been on display in Rome for at least thirty years when the poem was composed. The balance between our awareness of these two realities, the one created by Ovid's illusions and the one over which Augustus presides, make us look at what Ovid is doing in different ways. If we assume that the story is really an action for an image and motivated by the ending

on the distance the repetition introduces between the signifier Niobe, which undergoes no change at all, and its referent, Niobe herself, who will be radically transformed.

The possibility Hardie suggests here that the written "Niobe"—and, I would add, the sculptural Niobe—does not so much summon up the original Niobe as replace her emerges in another way from Ovid's portrayal of the metamorphosis. Ovid's account of Niobe's petrification has been central to the relation between metaphor and metamorphosis, and to arguments that seek to blur the boundary between the two by making of the metamorphic process a realization or literalization of a literary trope (Hardie 2002c.226–36, Pianezzola 1979, esp. 82–83, on Niobe). But at the same time, I suggest, the elision of the boundary here can act to remind the reader precisely of its importance. Pianezzola 1979.82 argues that when Ovid says in 6.303 that Niobe *deriguit malis*, "grew stiff with evils," this is not so much a narrative of her transformation but a preparatory use of a common metaphor for the effect of powerful emotion. If read in this way, the expression establishes an important continuity between the transformed image (and Ovid's text) and the actual experiences of Niobe as a human character. However, if we read *deriguit* as commencing the process of metamorphosis, and the reader will wait in vain for a clearer statement of her transformation as an event in the narrative, then it leaves open the possibility of imagining her transformation as something imposed from without that breaks the links between Niobe as subject and as image. Ovid's use of Niobe in this programmatic way for exploring the nature of representation of metamorphosis may result from the antiquity in literary historical terms of her exemplary function. As the story that Achilles tells to Priam in *Il.* 24.602–17, Niobe may be said to stand at the very beginning of literary representations of metamorphosis, or at least of their moralizing function.

point—it is there to reinforce a moral—then the poet himself emerges as a prophet comparable to Manto, whose words reveal the higher truth established by superiors. At the same time though, the poet seems to be describing the authentic Niobe, present in the audience's reality of Augustan Rome only as a representation, a statue. His Niobe is what Augustus is commemorating. The statues have now been animated by being reinserted into a narrative that highlights the instability of their significance. In this way Ovid's story seems to ensure that neither the *princeps's* images nor his text can stand alone: both are linked forever in a continuous process of petrification and coming to life, as the artist perpetually places his art at the service of Augustus's empire and, Niobe-like, asserts his own.

II. PERSEUS: THE SHADOW

Ovid's Perseus narrative frequently disappoints its readers. The famous shower of gold by which the hero was conceived receives but half a line. The killing of the Gorgon is already over by the time our narrative begins, and the account Perseus himself later gives of it—twelve lines of indirect discourse—offers but a scant résumé. Such unexpected emphases can perhaps be explained as a reflex, almost a parody, of the conventions of Hellenistic narrative, a Hecale-like interest in novelty, intricacy, and setting the most frequently treated subjects in unexpected frames. But Ovid's priorities here also have two important thematic consequences that make the Perseus episode an ideal conclusion to this section's analysis of the representation of artistic images within the poem and to my larger arguments about how the poem stages the reception of its own fictions. First, by the time we meet Perseus he has already gained possession of the Gorgon's head. Thus, his distinctive power comes from his ability to effect metamorphoses, specifically to turn a series of opponents into stone statues. Second, Perseus's improbable history, like Ovid's fictions, frequently inspires disbelief and incredulity. And this disbelief actually becomes the force that drives the narrative, for it is precisely his audience's skepticism that calls forth his fatal image making, a power so miraculous that it cannot but be disbelieved in turn.⁴⁶

My argument begins from the foregoing analysis of how the coexistence of Ovid's poem and the stone Niobes of the Roman cityscape destabilizes the meaning of both and specifically frustrates any final assertions about the statues' significance, their relationship to reality, and the moral they teach. A similar evasion of interpretative closure inevitably becomes

⁴⁶ On the theme of fictionality in the episode, see now the reading of Klein 2009, which appeared literally as this book was going to press.

a central point of the Perseus story, where each act of silencing dissenting voices inspires further skepticism. At first, Perseus's images would seem to be exempt precisely from any doubts about their relationship to reality. As Philip Hardie observes, their commemorative function appears absolute because they leave no gaps either between the identity of the victim and the image that recalls his defeat or between the act of victory and its commemoration.⁴⁷ Killing Phineus becomes identical with turning him into a statue of himself. But it is precisely the paradox at work in an unbelievable power to create authentic representations that allows it to raise such complex issues about the "power of images" in Augustan Rome, where monuments and celebrations served as the essential means of representing events and of imposing a view of history, by revealing how it depends on drawing a line between fiction and reality.

I begin by describing in more detail how Perseus is presented as a particularly Augustan figure in the poem. And the first similarity to stress between the emperor and the hero is that neither one is himself an artist. Unlike Pygmalion, Perseus has no ambitions as a craftsman per se—the last thing he would want is for his own images to come back to life. As his winged form takes him to the upper limit of human potential, so his divine parentage places him at the opposite end of the social scale from a mere craftsman like Daedalus, whom again he physically resembles. His sculptures are the by-product of his assertion of that status, a motive that dominates almost his every action and utterance in the poem. The images he leaves in his wake, then, memorialize not just the embedded presence of the victim but also the power of the victor.

In an earlier treatment of the civic and political role of visual display at Rome, I suggested that for a Roman emperor displaying the visual memorials of any victory was a kind of synecdochic extension of the victory itself; in the case of a triumph, such display becomes the literal completion of the journey that returns the victor to the very spot where he took the auspices in assuming his command.⁴⁸ As the commander will often have achieved victory by inspiring his troops with visual images, real or imagined, the visual commemorations of it replicate and extend his power and make him very much the author of the resulting monuments. The triumph too reminds us how plundered works of art—whatever their subject matter—acquire a specific value in Rome precisely as evidence of victory, *spolia*. One Augustan construction of the response to such booty, Cato's condemnation of the statues Marcellus brought as plunder from Syracuse in Livy's *History*, configures their reception as a

⁴⁷ See Hardie 2002c.179.

⁴⁸ Feldherr 1998.19–24.

struggle between the Roman narrative of conquest they commemorate and their own aesthetic desirability. Their craftsmanship makes them desirable and so instigates a cycle of avarice that will in the long run be as destructive to Rome as Rome was to any of its foreign rivals; thus, Cato describes the statues (*signa*) themselves as hostile (*infesta*).⁴⁹ This double link between art and victory, an association between the depiction and the event and the translation of other representational works of art into markers of Roman conquest, gives special point to the "functionality" of Perseus's *spolia* and to the connection between action and artistry noted by Hardie. Perseus might well be Cato's ideal artist, for not only is the very existence of his *signa* inseparable from victory but there is no craftsmanship at all to delight and seduce the eye.

What is more, like Augustus, another son of a god whose divine descent was always suspect, Perseus uses his extraordinary power only for the most pious ends: his last acts in the narrative settle old scores by paying off Proetus, the rival of his grandfather, and Polydectes, the king of the island where he and his mother had taken refuge, who had disbelieved in his divine descent. The very terms by which Augustus justified his participation in civil war as filial piety reemerge in the depiction of Perseus, who in the act of defeating Proetus is called "the redeemer and avenger of his dishonored parent," (*inmeriti vindex ultorque parentis*, 5.237).⁵⁰ And if these events were already a generation old by the time Ovid wrote, their commemoration was a highly topical issue, for the Forum of Augustus, with its central temple of Mars the Avenger was dedicated as recently as 2 BCE. So, as we have seen, Ovid describes his Perseus recalling, not performing, his most famous accomplishment. His narrative focuses around the visual effects of a *spolium*, for it is by this term, recalling precisely the kinds of objects that would be put on display by a victorious Roman general and which the temple of Mars Ultor was built to receive, that the statue-making head of the Gorgon is first described (*viperei referens spolum memorabile monstri*, 4.615). As a *spolium*, the Gorgon's head might equally recall another of Augustus's signal foreign victories, his defeat of Cleopatra, a similarly dangerous African female with unruly hair.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Livy 34.4.3.

⁵⁰ Other Augustan epithets of Perseus are noted by Schmitzer 1990.238–39: *genus deum* (4.609–10), *fortissimus* (4.769, 5.221), *victor* (5.237).

The interesting reading of the Perseus episode put forward by Neschke 1982 shows Ovid systematically remaking a Greek hero who relied above all on divine power to transcend human limits into an *exemplum* of the very Roman qualities of *virtus* and *iustitia*.

⁵¹ Connections between Augustus's victory in the civil wars and Perseus's exploits were also made explicit on terracotta panels from the temple of Apollo on the Palatine. See Kellum 1985, cited by Schmitzer 1990.239.

These Augustan parallels gain prominence from the peculiar way that Ovid shapes the Perseus story and, in turn, give special significance to its emphasis on the use of visual images. In no other surviving version of the Perseus story does the motif of family revenge play such a large part as in Ovid's.⁵² The expectation for vengeance is set in motion at the first mention of Acrisius in the narrative as someone who would learn by bitter experience the danger of doubting the divine paternity of both Perseus and Dionysus. Acrisius's role as a Pentheus-like doubter already creates the expectation that he will be punished (4.609–11), and given Perseus's important insistence on his paternity in the first narrated episode of his career, the encounter with Atlas (4.640), we may well expect that the grandson himself will be an agent of vengeance.⁵³ If Acrisius, contrary to these expectations, never appears again in the narrative, the twinned motifs of revenge and Perseus's need to prove that he is who he claims to be,⁵⁴ both set in motion by this introduction, will govern a number of its episodes. Atlas cannot explicitly deny Perseus's divinity, for his hostility is motivated by an oracle predicting that a son of Jupiter will steal the golden apples,⁵⁵ but he does call Perseus a liar for claiming to have killed the Gorgon. The fight with Phineus arises from a dispute over another reward (*praemium*, 5.25), and here the challenger, who has unwittingly interrupted Perseus's story of the Gorgons, does explicitly deny the miraculous shower of gold by which Perseus was engendered (5.11). When the narrative comes full circle by returning Perseus to the scenes of his birth and first years, he faces down both a family enemy and a doubter: the specific crimes of Acrisius reemerge in his final two opponents Proetus and Polydectes, the king of Seriphus. Acrisius drove the god Dionysus from the walls of Argos despite his kinship; Proetus has similarly driven out his own brother Acrisius (5.5.238–39). Elsewhere, Polydectes' enmity toward Perseus was rooted in his own courtship of Danae; here though the primary offense becomes his disbelief in the story of the Gorgon (5.244–45), the same crime as Atlas. The description of Acrisius made us look forward to the avenging power of truth; *prasentia veri*, the "real presence" of what he doubted would "soon" make Acrisius

⁵² Given both the many forms the Perseus story could take and the absence of any extended narrative other than those of the mythographers, this argument from silence by no means rules out earlier parallels.

⁵³ As of course he is, though unwittingly, in other surviving versions of the story, where Perseus accidentally kills his grandfather. See, e.g., Apoll. 2.4.4.

⁵⁴ The theme of disbelief in this episode is also treated by Wheeler 1999.183–84.

⁵⁵ Here, too, note the specifically Roman military terms in which this conquest is imagined, picking up on the account of Medusa's head: *spoliabitur* (4.644), *hunc praedae titulum* (4.645).

regret his crimes (4.612). And it is precisely proofs of truth, *pignora veri*, that Perseus offers Polydectes in the form of the transformative power of the Gorgon's head, at the conclusion of his story (5.247).⁵⁶

But is it a conclusion? The last three of Perseus's exploits end suddenly, especially the account of the fight in Cepheus's palace, to which not a word is added after the description of the stone Phineus. Yet the impression that these perfect monuments engender finality because they leave nothing left to be said is itself undercut by the apparently infinite repeatability of the act. There is always another wrongdoer out there to turn to stone, and the narrative abandons Perseus not because he has overcome all his trials and settled down to live happily ever after, but because our internal audience, Minerva, has wandered off (5.250–52). Not only does this lack of an ending belie the irrefutable proofs of virtue that Perseus claims to provide; a distance also opens up between monument and meaning. Again, the image of Phineus makes this especially clear. Far from the fearsome, unjust, and incestuous barbarian rival the narrative depicts, the statue shows a humbled suppliant: "But nonetheless, the timid face and supplicating gaze, the lowered hands and obedient expression endured" (5.234–35). So too, as Anderson acutely points out, the possession of so powerful an advantage as the Gorgon's head casts doubt on the very heroism Perseus so desperately wants to prove.⁵⁷ Perseus's monuments, like those of Augustus, are always available to be read as fictions, and the disbelief they engender paradoxically provides the impetus to turn new dissenters into stone.

The doubly ironic use of the Gorgon's head, a miraculous *spolia*-producing *spolium*, as an incontrovertible and final proof of truth reveals how deeply Augustus's problems of representation are intertwined with Ovid's own. (The language in which Perseus's magical exploit is denied

⁵⁶ It is a very neat narrative trick on Ovid's part to set up the story with the expectation of punishment for a figure who never appears again, and to have his place taken (in the case of Proetus quite literally) by the punishment, as though long expected, of two figures who have never appeared in the narrative before. And by making this substitution Ovid is also (transparently?) sanitizing the life story of this Augustus figure whose actual murder of his grandfather is dropped from the narrative. Instead of assuming the crime of killing his grandfather, Perseus now gets to be his avenger (while simultaneously paying off the very crimes which the grandfather committed). As we shall see later in this section, the chain of substitutions, by which new victims take the place of old, is an important motif throughout the episode.

⁵⁷ For both points, see Anderson 1996.519, who uses the phrase "happily ever after." Barkan 1986.55 by contrast sees the final image of Phineus as a perfect embodiment of the latent cowardice of the character. However, the importance of the end of the *Aeneid* as an intertext further focuses attention on the moral and religious consequences of killing suppliants.

recalls the terms in which Ovid would disparage his own fictions. The story is a “lie,” *mentiris*, 4.650, and “made-up,” *fictam*, 5.246.) In making this point, I am not positing a generation of “Philippi-deniers” doubting the veracity of the emperor’s claims to have avenged his father. Rather, the “problem of representation” is the same as that described in chapter 2: imperial representations themselves offer a context for voices other than the emperor’s to emerge. Whether these voices dissent from or appropriate the authority of their creator, they challenge the *princeps*’s ability to manifest his power through images, to demand assent and promote civic unity as effectively as he did through the actual victories those images commemorate. And of the historicity of this phenomenon, we have a supreme example in the works of Ovid himself—not just the intervention of “fictions” in reconfiguring reality, which is the burden of my argument here—but in the *Ars Amatoria* where triumphs and monuments are refashioned both to signify and to accomplish the victory of love.

But the interaction of commemorative images and fiction is, of course, more complicated than a simple struggle for credibility and authority. It also clarifies how the real monuments of the emperor are pushed in the direction of fictionality. The power of the Gorgon’s head is directly proportional to its unbelievability. So the more the emperor’s images exalt and magnify his achievements, the harder they are to believe and, correspondingly, the more they require a form of representation that goes beyond producing a verisimilar image of what actually happened. Augustus may never have claimed to slay any Gorgons, but Perseus’s dilemma applies to him in two related ways: first, part of the power of imperial display came from its capacity to bring directly before its audience’s gaze peoples and creatures from the farthest edges of the earth, again the more exotic—the closer to the miraculous they become—the greater their prestige. And, second, spatial distance in this context offers a metaphor for the borders of the verisimilar. While Augustan art famously avoids the kind of baroque mythological excesses of the late republic, it nevertheless uses the language of myth, Apollo’s presence at Actium, for example, to gloss imperial accomplishments as something beyond what can be described in merely historical terms. And here a couple of details about Perseus’s adventures take on a particular significance: for him too the unreal is physically far away. Those episodes like his programmatic first encounter with Atlas, when he turns a mythical giant into a real mountain, that bring him farthest from apprehensible reality take place on the literal edges of the earth, and Ovid structures his narrative as the trip from there to here: we first meet Perseus making his way back from the slaying of the Gorgon, and the participle used there (*referens*, 4.615) links the physical carrying back of the trophy with “narrating” it.

The problem of how to domesticate the marvelous also features in one of the strangest of Perseus’s deeds, and indeed one of the strangest metamorphoses in the entire poem, the creation of coral. After dispatching the sea monster, Perseus stoops to wash his hands, and “lest the hard sand harm the snaky head,” he makes a soft bed for it by heaping up seaweed. But, of course, the seaweed absorbs the potency of the Gorgon and hardens into coral. The sea nymphs repeat this miracle (*factum mirabile*, 4.747) and cast the seeds of the transformed seaweed back into the water. So far a fairly generic etiological metamorphosis: some mythological event in the past offers an explanation for a feature of the natural world. But the distinctive point about coral is that the feature its miraculous origins explain is precisely the capacity for metamorphosis. Coral really does turn hard when it moves from the ocean into the air. These few lines then describe an iteration of metamorphosis itself that takes it from a single miraculous event performed in the past by a son of Jupiter, via the mediation of sea nymphs, to an empirical “hard fact” of natural science. It describes how the miraculous enters everyday experience: the plant turns to stone as it is lifted from one realm to the other, from sea to air.⁵⁸

To demonstrate how Ovid’s larger treatment of Perseus shows the instability of these translations from the marvelous to the real, we can examine the battle with the sea monster itself, turning first to show how, in Ovid’s telling, this mythical victory at the edge of the earth takes on the recognizable form of a contemporary event, a naval spectacle. But if Ovid’s text here gestures toward becoming real, it simultaneously exposes how much the glorification of Augustus relies on reconverting the visible to the miraculous. Among the most remarkable moments in this extraordinary combat is the ending, when the shores ring with applause and the sound goes up to the homes of the gods (4.735–36). For though we had been aware of the presence of Andromeda and her parents, we suddenly realize that an entire crowd has been watching this event from the shore. Within the narrative, this conversion to spectacle further enhances Perseus’s glory, for unlike the killing of the Gorgon, which is apprehended only through a verbal report and is often disbelieved, this event is broadcast to an audience that measures the vertical dimensions of the cosmos at the very moment it occurs. But the presence of spectators within the narrative has the potential to change dramatically the terms

⁵⁸ The role of the sea nymphs here may make us think of the mutual miracle that begins Catullus 64, as the nymphs wonder at the ship, themselves emerging from sea to air. For a different reading of the passage, stressing how even the natural phenomenon of coral defies belief, see Klein 2009.197–98.

within which a contemporary audience reads the scene by assimilating it precisely to the kind of spectacle they might have seen at a *naumachia* or in an elaborate *venatio*. In this latter case, the coincidence between image and event experienced within the narrative begins to pull apart, for such spectacles were not, or not only, memorable in themselves; they also connoted or represented something else. Thus, the great *naumachia* put on by Augustus in which a Greek fleet faced off against the Persians, as it represents this distant historical reality, pretty transparently figures the battle of Actium as well, at which Augustus himself led the West to triumph over the East.⁵⁹

The symbolic representations of victory in the games, though, could not match the kind of fantasy that was possible in other forms of depiction, above all literary description. Thus, the most famous poetic account of the battle of Actium, which struggles in turn to be made a real presence through its vivid ecphrastic context, diametrically reverses the properties of Ovid's description here (*Aen.* 8.671–713). There a historical event is converted to a mythic one: the geopolitical connotations of the battle, the triumph of West over East, and civilization over disorder, are realized through allegory. The bestial East emerges in a series of impossible hybrid divinities whose opponent, depicted in the form of a man, was the Olympian Apollo. In Ovid's text an event that can be nothing but make believe comes to occupy the apprehensible form of a spectacle and, by doing so, perhaps offers itself as a gloss on the real battle won by the emperor. If this connection is made, and there are other incentives to read the scene this way, not least its initial resemblance to the *Aeneid*'s boat race that with its bestialized combatants and moment of epiphany itself prefigures the Actian scene, then we might imagine that precisely as Perseus becomes more believable, he does so at the expense of the emperor, whose claims for his accomplishments are revealed in fully fantastical form. Or, for a believing audience, the miraculous victory of Perseus over the unreal, so to speak, realizes precisely the triumph of Augustus—making us see history in this miraculous guise.

This implicit comparison to spectacle concludes an episode that has already given special attention to the relation between being and seeming and the correlation between literary impressions, real perceptions, and public display. For the entire first half of the contest is visualized through

⁵⁹ One clue to connect this scene in the *Metamorphoses* with this event in particular comes from the way Ovid in the *Ars* describes that very spectacle: *Quid, modo cum belli navalis imagine Caesar / Persidas induxit Cecropiasque rates?* (*AA* 1.171–72). The two sides represent respectively the "sons of Perseus" and the descendants of a king who was half serpent, and the whole is "an image of naval warfare." The occasion for this *naumachia* was again the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor, in 2 BCE. On the ideological significance of *naumachiae* in general, see Coleman 1993.

an elaborate and dense network of similes that define the protagonists and the space within which they fight:

*Ecce, velut navis praefixo concita rostro
sulcat aquas iuvenum sudantibus acta lacertis,
sic fera dimotis impulsu pectoris undis;
tantum aberat scopulis, quantum Balearica torto
funda potest plumbo medii transmittere caeli,
cum subito iuvenis pedibus tellure repulsa
arduus in nubes abiit. ut in aequore summo
umbra viri visa est, visa fera saevit in umbra,
utque Iovis praepes, vacuo cum vidit in arvo
praebentem Phoebos liventia terga draconem,
occupat aversum, neu saeva retorqueat ora,
squamigeris avidos figit cervicibus ungues,
sic celeri missus praeceps per inane volatu
terga ferae pressit dextroque frementis in armo
Inachides ferrum curvo tenus abdidit hamo.
vulnere laesa gravi modo se sublimis in auras
attollit, modo subdit aquis, modo more ferocis
versat apri, quem turba canum circumsona terret.*
(4.706–23)

Look, as a speeding ship with a sharp beak plows the waters driven by the sweating arms of young men, so does the beast, the waves parted by the force of its breast. When it was as far from the rocks as a Balearic sling can traverse the heavens with its torqued lead bolt, suddenly the youth pushing off from the earth with his feet, leapt straight up into the clouds. When [as] the reflection/shadow of the [a] man appeared on the surface of the sea, the beast raged against the reflection. And as the bird of Jupiter, when it sees in a lonely field a serpent offering its blue back to the sun, seizes it from behind, lest it twist back its savage mouth, and plants his quick talons in his scaly neck, so Perseus driven headlong through the void in his swift flight attacked the beast's back and as it raged sunk his sword for the length of its hooked blade in its right shoulder. Damaged by this serious wound, the beast now raised itself into the air and now sunk back into the water and now turned about like a fierce boar whom the bellowing pack of hounds terrifies.

Appropriately for the coming evocation of a *naumachia*, the approaching monster is like a battleship; he is as far off as the range of a Balearic sling, and Perseus, in flying up on his winged sandals, is like the eagle of Jupiter pouncing on a serpent sunning itself. Finally the wounded crea-

ture thrashes like a fierce boar surrounded by dogs. While similes always play on the tension between likeness and difference of tenor and vehicle, the relationships between description and event in this passage simultaneously veer toward an anachronism that seems to haul the battle into the present day (especially the designation of the sling bolt as Balearic), and a closeness of reference that makes it unclear where simile ceases to be mere description. In a coralline metamorphosis, image becomes reality, and reality merges back into image. The first word of the description, *ecce*, already introduces this tension. For by compelling his audience to behold, the narrator at once pulls them back into the mythical world of Perseus and makes that world accessible to them in the form of spectacle. But what one is compelled to behold is not immediately that remarkable. It looks like a ship, not a monster. And if the final gesture toward spectacle summons up the viewing context of a *naumachia*, glossing a battle that aspired to being described as myth, then it is appropriate that the text's representation of the monster should contain an added twist. Because the image of the ship in the simile looks in turn like a monster, it possesses a *rostrum* attached to the front,⁶⁰ it leaves an incongruous “furrow” in the sea, and it is propelled by sweaty human arms. An extreme reading of this shifting image, then, would not so much offer a way of apprehending the strange through the familiar but expose the beast as a sham deception—just a ship with a fake snout stuck on (*praefixo*).⁶¹

If the first simile has the effect of defamiliarizing the real by opening the distance between tenor and vehicle, the second major simile, the eagle and the serpent, creates an impression of sameness that seems to make Ovid's representational figure an ideal medium for describing a distant reality. And the descriptive validity of this particular image is important because of the role it too played in contemporary depictions of empire. For Horace had used virtually the same simile in one of his most explicitly panegyric odes to describe Augustus's stepson Drusus's defeat of an Alpine tribe (C. 4.4.1–12). Drusus's resemblance to the eagle, though, is as nothing to Perseus's, who not only belongs to Jupiter directly through the fact of paternity but also actually has wings. The scales of the serpent aptly recall the scales on the monster's own back, and even the curved talons of the eagle mirror the hooked sword of Perseus.⁶² Here again we seem to anticipate the metamorphosis of coral as the natural simply takes

over from the miraculous. In terms of its effects on the reading of imperial representations, perhaps this hyper-naturalization mimics a tendency in contemporary readings of Horace to see the serpent and the eagle less as amplification than as bestialization.

The potential confusion of image and reality raised by these curious similes figures in the action of the episode as well. After Perseus has sprung into the air, his reflection appears on the surface of the water, and the deceived monster makes a lunge at this reflection (*ut in aequore summo umbra viri visa est, visa fera saevit in umbra*).⁶³ But is the reflection in fact merely a simile? Although the flow of the sentence ultimately reveals that *ut* much more probably marks a temporal clause, the tantalizing false impression of a simile never quite recedes, pulling the beast itself—which is, after all, imaginary—into the illusionistic world, trapping it “within the seen image” by making it “like the reflection of a man seen on the surface of the water.” And one strong temptation to do so—despite the fact that it is also easily explicable as a common Ovidian epanalepsis⁶⁴—comes from the verbal “mirroring” of the very words for reflection, *umbra* ... *visa*, chiastically arranged in line 713.⁶⁵ The twin realms of sea and sky seem to offer transforming reflections of one another, with no clear sense of where the original lies. Aptly, it is on the sea's surface, the point where coral too miraculously takes on its everyday hardness, that we become unable to separate reflection from reality. And indeed elements of the sea threaten to drag Perseus down, as the frothing monster sprays him with water and gore. At this point though, the play of images abruptly ceases, and we seem to move on to the solid ground of pure narrative. Appropriately this escape onto the literal rock, which at once coincides with the abandonment of his own miraculous ability to fly and makes possible his defeat of the miraculous beast, happens when

⁶³ A detail of Ovid's account noted by Vernant 1991.136, n. 46, in his discussion of the importance of reflection in the Medusa myth. I continue to prefer the ablative forms of *visa* and *umbra* over the accusative variants, though the latter have now been adopted in Tarrant's OCT. There is no doubt that the accusative is more appropriate if *saevit in* means simply attack, and the corruption into the ablative would be all too easy to explain. On the other hand, the simplification of the grammar comes at the expense of the kind of verbal game that we have seen Ovid play in describing Procne as “totally absorbed in the image of pain,” *poenaeque in imagine tota est*. If the accusative is to be retained, the effect I describe here still operates through the ambiguity of the *ut* as temporal or comparative.

⁶⁴ Cf., e.g., 1.590–91.

⁶⁵ Though appropriately this is a purely visual effect—specifically a reflection, not an echo—because the quantity of the *a*'s is different in the two phrases and the ending of the first *visa* is prodelided with *est*.

For an excellent analysis of the effect of these lines, though one that concedes a little more control to Perseus than I would, see Barkan 1986.54. He reads Perseus's conscious manipulation of shadow and light to trick the monster as another example of how the hero wins his victory because of his mastery of metamorphosis.

⁶⁰ While it is metaphorically applied to the prow of a ship, *rostrum* originally designates the snout of an animal; see *OLD s.v.* § 1. For other monstrous ships in epic, see Hardie 1987.

⁶¹ On the assimilation of ship and beast here, see now Barchiesi 2007.340.

⁶² Indeed, though there is no semantic or etymological connection, the word for talon, *unguis*, itself looks like the adjective for curved, *uncus*, that had previously modified Perseus sword (and appeared in the same metrical position, 4.666).

Perseus himself has come to "doubt" his own wings (*credere*, 4.731). Yet, equally appropriately, this rock is not quite all there; it only partly and temporarily emerges from the surrounding sea.⁶⁶

Having gotten our hero back to dry land, let me summarize the argument to this point. The connection I suggest between Perseus's production of images and Augustus's leads to a focus on two aspects of imperial self-representation. First, Perseus's own ability to produce images at the moment he obtains victory offers an ideal that makes clear by contrast the "space," both temporal and interpretative, that inevitably opens up between event and representation. Another problem with the credibility of images illuminated by the episode comes from a desire to magnify human and historical accomplishments by pushing them toward the miraculous and divine. Here twin dangers arise: the fantastic can come to seem banal—a sea monster emerging as a ship with a fake snout; or the real can seem incredible. Having concentrated first on the production of images and then, through a scene full of contrasting spectatorial perspectives, on their reception, I intend to continue that trajectory by analyzing how Ovid links the ambiguity of images to problems of recognition and identification similar to those that emerge in his own fiction. While the reading to this point has fit in with my emphasis on how the poet places his text in dialogue with other forms of imperial discourse, from here on I will be examining how the analogies between text and image give his poem access to the socializing powers of art.

The first step in this movement from spectacle back to fiction is a further examination of the figure of Medusa. She is at once the unbelievable creature, only present through reported narration, who provokes disbelief and the source of the power that provides proof in the form of images that seem to allow no room for incredulity. Yet the intervention of Medusa and the role of sculptural figures in the episode give a new and deeper significance to the issue of disbelief than emerged from the discussion in the first chapter, one that relates it to political realities at least as directly as the confrontation with Augustus's credibility does. For not assenting to fictions involves much more than an unwillingness to credit the authority on which they depend; it relies above all on a sense of difference between the viewing subject and the object seen. And here, although Ovid seemingly places the figure of Medusa in the narratological background of his account, he makes the broader mythical connotations of this figure in Greek culture central to his Perseus story.

⁶⁶ Thanks to the transformative power of similes, Perseus's combat with the sea monster bears an extremely close relationship to a later episode in the poem where a son of Jupiter competes for a bride with a watery creature also given to shape changing, the combat between Achelous and Hercules at the beginning of book 9.

J. P. Vernant's sweeping analyses of the significance of the Gorgon unite the two crucial themes that emerge from Ovid's account of the hero's disparate adventures: the production and uncertain status of images and their transformative, disruptive ability to absorb viewers into a chain of partial reflections with the power to alienate them from themselves. The face of the Gorgon itself, according to Vernant, provides an unaccountable mixture of different categories, at once human, divine, and bestial; beautiful and repulsive; face and genital.⁶⁷ For all its strangeness, gazing at this image becomes a process of recognition and of possession simultaneously, as the viewer not only sees himself as Medusa but sees as Medusa, thanks to the Gorgon's distinctive frontal orientation, its capacity to become the face in the mirror. Vernant thus glosses the experience of looking on the Gorgon by comparison with the mirror in the shrine of the goddess Despoina at Lycosura in Arcadia; when you looked in the mirror, you saw the images of the gods with great clarity, but your own image became blurred. The gaze of the Gorgon fascinates because by recognizing it as a reflection, you see yourself become an image; ultimately for Vernant it is a view of one's own mortality. And each person who has gazed at the face of the Gorgon becomes a new wondrous image, able to freeze and transform new viewers in turn, sentencing them to death as well, as it will turn out in Ovid's treatment of Medusa's commutative powers. For the purposes of my own argument here, the figure of Medusa suggests a further link between the potentially deforming processes of spectacle described in chapter 4 and the role of visual representations within Ovid's poem. One larger structural function of the Perseus episode within the work is to establish just such a connection, for his adventures link Ovid's Theban cycle, with its emphasis on the social and personal effects of reflection and recognition, to the focus on representation, verbal and visual, that extends from the song of the Muses in book 5 through the tapestry contest and the image of Niobe in book 6.

We might also note a further appearance of Medusa at the juncture between the Perseus story and the following panel of episodes delimiting the powers of art that establishes a special connection between the Gorgon and specifically literary representation of the sort Ovid practices. For Ovid makes the Medusa the grandmother of poetry. As Minerva arrives on Mount Helicon, the home of the Muses, the reason she gives for her visit is a desire to see the new fountain, the Hippocrene, so often figured as the source of poetic inspiration, "which the hard hoof of the Medusan flier has broken open" (*dura Medusaei quem praepetis ungula rupit*, 5.257). The next line is equally important: "I wanted to see the

⁶⁷ See esp. Vernant 1991.137.

marvelous deed" (*volui mirabile factum / cernere*, 5.258–59). Again Medusa, as "hardener" presides over the transition from the verbal to the visual (*fama* ~ *cernere*) and from the marvelous (*mirabile*) to the actual (*factum*).⁶⁸

Having dealt with the motif of reflection in the Perseus episode largely in terms of the problem of representational accuracy, of whether images actually reflect what they represent, now I will show how, within the story, reflection acts to break down the distance between viewer and viewed. The most obvious example of this transformative power comes in what at first seems a jarring, ironic fashion, drawing attention, like so many similar touches in the poem, away from the mythical content to the authorial voice behind it.⁶⁹ As Perseus first catches sight of Andromeda, he "would have thought" that she was a marble statue (if she had not moved), and as a result of this misapprehension "he stands in wonder [*stupet*] and, captured by the image of her beauty, almost forgets to beat his wings" (4.676–77). Andromeda is not only herself a "statue" but threatens to freeze Perseus in his turn, with fatal consequences for the flying hero. A key word in this account of reciprocal petrification is "almost." This is not the actual story of Perseus's winged encounter with a statue-making female but, thanks to Ovid's language, seems close to it. He has substituted the erotic register of love poetry for the epic exploit anticipated, and Perseus wills the same transformation in his first address to her: "O worthy not of these [real] chains, but of the [figurative] chains by which desirous lovers are joined together" (another incidence, following the Atlas story, of Perseus's converting literal to figurative, and vice versa—and a pretty tactless comment under the circumstances).⁷⁰

The next place where the theme emerges comes in the account of the battle in Cepheus's palace, though before the actual statue making begins. Here the figurative language of love used in the Andromeda passage begins to assume dimensions that are at once more real and more tragic and so prepare for the final reappearance of the treatment of visual reflection in the account of actual images. The first of Perseus's victims is the Indian boy Athis, whose death, like that of Vergil's Euryalus, is seen by his lover Lycabas (*vidit*, 5.60). Lycabas in turn challenges Perseus, shoots an arrow at him that sticks in the folds of his garment, and is cut down by the hero's hooked sword, "already made conspicuous [*spectatam*, 5.69] by the slaughter of Medusa." "Now dying he looked around for Athis with eyes already swimming in darkness." The fatal sight of the beloved, which makes the viewer Lycabas as dead as what he gazes upon, is enmeshed

in a number of the episode's thematic preoccupations. Again, the figure of the Medusa herself is seen but, appropriately, indirectly. We expect perhaps that Perseus will use the fatal head already at this stage in the combat, but again this expectation is deferred. Instead, he uses the sword that "was seen" in that episode, making his victim in that sense like the Gorgon herself. The emergence of the Gorgon's head, as we saw, was linked to the establishment of "hard evidence" so to speak, of Perseus's miraculous feat. We are not quite at that final stage of the "miracle," but already the interest in truth and fiction emerges; for Lycabas the viewer here is "no concealer of true love" (*veri non dissimulator amoris*, 5.61), with the word *veri* thrown into emphasis by hyperbaton and by its position at the caesura of the line. And the most important Gorgonic element in the passage, the figure whose gaze is as fatal for Lycabas as Perseus's hooked sword, is presented in ways that suggest that it has already become a work of art. For Athis's beauty receives no less than eight lines of description. It begins as though it were an ecphrasis, with the verb *erat*, and the account of his birth beneath the waves of the glassy stream of his nymph mother relates him to the world of images and reflections (as well, again, to fictions, for that is where she is believed—*creditur*, 5.49—to have born him). As the word *cultus* (5.49) doubly suggests, the adornment that magnifies his beauty involves the application of art to his final form—doubly, for statues too could receive the kind of anointing and decoration described in the context of religious cult.⁷¹

Finally comes the most direct example of the contagion of viewing in the episode, which now involves not someone "like" a statue but the real thing. Alone of the companions of Perseus, one Aconteus catches sight of the Gorgon's head and is turned to stone (5.200–202). His enemy, Astyages, believes that he is still alive and hacks at the stone with his sword, before he himself in his amazement turns to a statue that still seems to be alive. What is most striking about the description of Astyages here is that, while presumably he turned to stone because he saw the Gorgon's head, the efficacy of that magic token is never mentioned. Rather Astyages seems to absorb the stony nature (*naturam*, 5.205) directly from the image that he sees. And as Hardie has pointed out, the deception he experiences replicates a basic aspect of the deception practiced by all realist images—he thinks the statue is alive.⁷² To reintroduce the terms of

⁷¹ The *monilia* (5.52) anticipate those with which Pygmalion will dress his statue.

⁷² Hardie 2002c.180 in fact argues that Astyages' misperception, characteristic of the naive viewer, forms the opposite of "the knowing credulity" experienced by the "normal" viewer of images, who is "amazed that what he knows to be marble seems to be flesh." I suggest that as in the Pygmalion story, Ovid's narrative does not allow the reader to rest comfortably in this position of knowing superiority but makes it possible even for experienced viewers to wonder at the metamorphosis wrought by the text in bringing representations

⁶⁸ For a masterful discussion of these lines, see Hinds 1987a.3–24.

⁶⁹ Acutely analyzed in these terms by Anderson 1996.484.

⁷⁰ On the humor of the scene, see Solodow 1988.103–4.

my own argument, his mistake is to see a likeness to himself in something whose representation makes it fundamentally different, and the likeness that he imagines comes to be realized but with destructive consequences for himself rather than his opponent. So too Phineus, at the moment before he also becomes stone, will recognize his own (*agnoscitque suos*, 5.212) among shapes that are actually different (*diversa*, 5.211). The dangers of reflection Vernant describes as operative in the Medusa's head are at work here as well even without her direct intervention.

Before I discuss the significance of the clearly tracked shift from erotic to martial associations of viewing, it is important to stress that, as in the Pygmalion episode, encounters with images here take place against a sacrificial backdrop that reproduces the reflexivity between viewer and viewed we have seen emphasized in the problems of recognition created by stone figures. In between the killing of the monster and the beginning of the tragic wedding banquet, Perseus erects three altars to the gods who aided him. He sacrifices a cow to Minerva, a calf to Mercury, and a bull to Jupiter (4.755–56). A representational likeness between god and victim was absolutely orthodox in Roman religion—so much so, perhaps, that it ought to go without saying here. The exchange, through resemblance, between top and bottom, sets the stage for an interest in sacrificial substitution throughout the battle narrative. Almost the first action in the fight sees Phineus ducking behind an altar to take refuge from Perseus's spear. Paetalus, struck in the neck with a club, dies "like a sacrificed bull" (5.122). Most horrible of all, Emathion, "a worshiper of fairness and fearful of the gods" (5.100), who, being too old to fight, rails against the weapons of the impious brawlers, is cut down as he too grabs an altar. His head falls into the flame itself with the tongue still cursing its killer (5.105–6).

The combat in book 5 offers a concentrated pastiche of all that is most gruesome in epic violence, and in that regard a fairly high incidence of sacrificial pollution is to be expected; it complements the motif of the corrupted feast as a classic topos of impious warfare. However, if we are willing to lend a little more weight to the sacrificial aspects of the combat, regarding them from the perspective of the sociological dynamics of sacrifice rather than primarily as a set of literary conventions, such imagery both accentuates the distinctive nature of this combat and links it to the interest in representation that we have been following. Not only is the battle between Phineus and Perseus a classic Girardian example of mimetic rivalry, the struggle between two figures for a single good, which in this case goes together with occupying the same role in society, as hus-

band of Andromeda and presumably Cepheus's heir; it also itself constitutes the imitative repetition of another conflict whose resolution should have been decisive.⁷³ For Perseus has already won Andromeda from one bloodthirsty, boundary-crossing suitor, and, as Cepheus points out, his defeat of that monster simultaneously checkmated Phineus's claims through his own failure to redeem her (5.16–25). The recursion of violence in the episode, especially when translated from the reasonably clear-cut victory of the celestial superhuman over the aqueous subhuman,⁷⁴ to a domestic combat that breaks apart essential human rituals signals what Girard⁷⁵ terms a sacrificial crisis, a moment when, because of the absence of differentiation, a society plummets into a chaos of meaningless and unstoppable killing. Sacrificial practice works to stop this cycle through a universally recognized act of substitution, where the animal victim stands in for one of the combatants, making it possible for the entire society to unite in the symbolic killing of a figure agreed to be the unique cause of violence in a guise that, because no longer human, invites no further retribution. In Girard's reading then, both the beginning and end of internal violence in a society depend on complex acts of recognition, on getting the right balance between seeing sameness and difference between perpetrator and victim. Too much sameness makes the victim a potential surrogate for the viewer and draws him or her toward a revenge that provokes further revenge and, in so doing, goes on erasing the boundaries between legitimacy and illegitimacy.

Scenes where the viewer gazing at a statue becomes what he sees, like Astyages' reaction to Aconteus, or Phineus's recognition of his companions at the moment of his own petrification (5.212), thus link the magical aspects of the Medusa's gaze to a very real and powerful force for social unification or dissolution. This reflective capacity of violence, where death uncannily doubles back on its own perpetrator or draws in new combatants through substitution or identification with a victim, recurs throughout the episode. When Phineus first dodges behind the altar, a substitute dies in his place, Rhoeteus, inadvertently struck down by Perseus's blow (5.38–40). Motifs of resemblance and substitution also color

⁷³ On "mimetic desire," see Girard 1977.143–68, esp. 145. For the sacrifice as a mimesis of an earlier act of violence that aims to a cycle of infinitely repeatable revenge, see Girard 1977, esp. 12–13, 26.

⁷⁴ I say "reasonably," because Ovid's narrative does not obscure a certain monstrous aspect to Perseus, whose tempting of the threshold of the sky (4.700) reflects the sea beast's lust for a human bride. And that beast, too, is an agent of Ammon (4.671), a figure who both is and is not the same as Perseus's Olympian father. All this shortly after Cadmus has just fulfilled the prophecy of book 3 by becoming a serpent (4.563–603).

⁷⁵ On sacrificial crisis, see Girard 1977. 39–67. For the productive application of this model to the situations of Roman epic, especially the *Aeneid*, see Bandera 1981.

to life at the same time as Astyages replicates the innocent who sees only the represented, not the representation.

the death of Lycabas, who makes what from the *Iliad* on was a classic error in picking up the weapon of the dead Athis and so shares his fate. That Aconteus should be the “one” (*unus*, 5.200) among Perseus’s men to view the Medusa recalls the *Aeneid*’s emphasis on the one victim, like Palinurus, who gives his life for the many. And, in one of the strangest encounters anywhere in ancient epic, another substitute who would not have been drawn into the battle, Idas, is hit by Phineus’s javelin instead of Perseus’s (5.89–96). What begins as an echo of the death of Rhoeteus takes on a further reflexive twist as Idas, with an appropriately Gorgonic stare, threatens to settle the score by hurling the same weapon back at Phineus. This attempt to establish difference through substitution, where Phineus by feeling the force of Idas’s blow in comparison to his own would “learn what an enemy [he] had made” (5.93–94), collapses in futility as Idas himself experiences the fate that he had predicted for his opponent, dying of his own wound in the very act of casting Phineus’s weapon back at its owner. A specific link between such mimetic violence and the reflexive power of images comes in the account of Echemmon’s demise (5.169–73). Echemmon, like Perseus and Phineus, misses his intended victim and strikes something else instead, not a human combatant but a column, a gesture that in turn looks forward to Astyages’s attack on the stone Aconteus. A shard of the sword bounces back and wounds him in the throat, anticipating perhaps the stupefaction that Astyages himself will experience when he hears the echo from his marble victim. But the shard does not kill Echemmon; so Perseus has to finish him off, with the hooked sword of Mercury, making him a Gorgon in death.

These corrosive effects of a process of recognition that, by failing to establish difference, collapses crucial distinctions between self and other—a phenomenon we have now found at the mythical level in the figure of Medusa, who during this battle herself changes from enemy to ally,⁷⁶ and acted out in the account of the destructive consequences of violence in the episode—have implications not just for the viewers within the story but for the reader’s of Ovid’s text. For Ovid manipulates literary allusions in the passage, especially to Vergil’s epic, to challenge the reader’s own sense of distance from what he is reading. Many scholars have recognized how closely different aspects of the Perseus story echo points in the *Aeneid*. These echoes cluster around two phases of the narrative: obviously, the battle in Cepheus’s palace replays the essential contest of the poem’s second half after a foreign suitor arrives to claim a king’s daughter.⁷⁷ The

long deferral of the battle between Perseus and Phineus, and the latter’s final act of supplication, sharpen the parallelism as well as further pointing to the patterns of sacrifice and substitution, whose importance in the conclusion of Vergil’s poem has been much explored. The second group of references summons up the first books of the *Aeneid*, describing Aeneas’s interactions with Dido in Carthage: as Hardie has suggested, Perseus’s first perception of Andromeda as a statue coming to life recalls the way the Trojan hero sees Dido initially as an extension of the sculptures on the temple of Juno.⁷⁸ The African setting and a narrative pattern that puts the best-known exploit of the hero in his own mouth in the form of a personal reminiscence delivered at a banquet also encourage reading Perseus’s story against the first four books of the *Aeneid*.

This crude map suffices to suggest how Ovid’s deployment of Vergilian allusions in the episode replicate the cognitive challenges we have been tracing. First there is the simple process of comparing and contrasting the two texts. For Anderson has observed a number of crucial ways in which none of the figures at Cepheus’s palace lives up to his Vergilian prototype. And figuring out the pattern of Ovid’s allusions raises its own set of challenges. One could for example focus on the broadly progressive trend in the narrative, with Perseus too living through a complete mini-*Aeneid* from book 1 to book 12. And yet many elements of his story challenge such a reading. Most strikingly, Perseus never moves on from Africa as Aeneas has to in order for book 12 to be reached.⁷⁹ Rather his battle for preeminence takes place in this, from one perspective, much more compromising setting, as though we were reading an *Aeneid* where the love of Dido wins out, a difference that also has implications for understanding the Actian preechoes in the battle with the sea monster. And if we remember that Perseus finally does leave Africa to return home, this too significantly contrasts with the movement of the *Aeneid*, where, of course, the hero cannot and must not make such a return.⁸⁰

But the act of plotting Ovid’s Perseus against Vergil’s Aeneas also allows the reader to revisit the strategies the earlier poet used to delineate the development of a distinctively Roman national identity. For as Ovid’s reader cannot tell whether to place the hero in Africa or Latium, so too Vergil’s text tempts the reader to see the arrival at Latinus’s court as a replaying of the poem’s first books. Ovid thus borrows and further complicates the process of differentiating between the special destiny of Rome and the various foreign roads-not-taken that the *Aeneid* sets in

⁷⁶ *auxilium ... ab hoste petam* (5.178–79).

⁷⁷ For a full treatment of the epic echoes in this section, see Keith 2002.240–45, with further bibliography. On the ending of the Perseus tale and the *Aeneid*, see Hardie 2002c.179; and on the use of the second half of Vergil’s poem, Anderson 1996, esp. 498–519, who acutely notes references to and contrasts with the situation in *Aeneid* 7–12.

⁷⁸ Hardie 2002c.183–86.

⁷⁹ The first Persean tableau, showing a winged figure’s encounter with Atlas, makes the reader particularly aware of this difference, for it was against such a backdrop that Mercury descends to spur Aeneas’s desertion of Dido (*Aen.* 4.246–51).

⁸⁰ See the essential discussion of circularity in the *Aeneid* by Quint 1993.50–96.

motion. Again there is a figure for this confusion of forward motion and circularity in the story of his adventures that the hero tells at an African banquet—one of the most Vergilian moments in the episode and one that has at its focus the face of Medusa herself. Perseus’s tale of his encounter with the Gorgon is framed by potential anachronisms, nothing flamboyant like Ovid’s calling the Milky Way the Palatine of the gods, but suggestions to the Ovidian audience that the conditions created by the narrative itself have been projected back to its beginnings, so that the world of Perseus’s experience and the world after Perseus fold back in to one another. Thus, Perseus begins his account, as Ovid does, with a reference to Atlas (4.772). But he describes Atlas as a geographic feature rather than an anthropomorphic figure as he should have been before Perseus made a mountain of him. So too Perseus ends (again predictive of the larger tale as Ovid frames it) with Minerva, already sporting Medusa’s head on her aegis, although the hero clearly still has possession of it (4.799–804).⁸¹ These temporal distortions gain their disorienting effect by blurring the contrast between a mythical space of flying heroes defeating monstrous opponents and the familiar world where Atlas names a mountain chain and the goddess Minerva was depicted with a Gorgon’s head. When Perseus tells of his first glimpse of the island of the Gorgons, he describes seeing “statues of men and beasts here and there among the fields and roads” (4.779–80). Beyond the curious similarity to a contemporary Roman garden landscape, which might well contain such *simulacra*,⁸² the setting, with a transposition indoors, and minus the wild animals, anticipates where we will leave Perseus at the end of the very conflict into which the narrative directly leads, a room filled with the stone likenesses of two hundred men.

And while neither Ovid’s reader nor the internal audience of feasting Ethiopians can have any foreknowledge that Perseus’s adventures have brought him full circle to the point where they began, the next section of his prehistory, in which he answers the question of why Medusa alone of her sisters had snakes intertwined among her hair, might have recalled to them a familiar moment from their own recent past (4.790–804). Medusa too emerges as a subject, rather than simply an agent, of metamorphosis. She was originally not unseeable but beautiful, and her hair was the part most worthy of being seen. So desirable was she that the god Neptune raped her in the temple of Minerva, and in punishment for this violation, for which she was hardly responsible, the goddess turned her hair to serpents. This etiology, and Ovid makes Perseus use all the narra-

tological and generic markers deployed to juxtapose present and distant past in that genre, allows its audiences to see, so to speak, the quintessential face of the monstrous other as the same as that of their own princess Andromeda, another maiden subject to violation by a creature of the sea who, while being punished for something for which she bears no particular culpability, is especially concerned to redeem her own reputation through narrative.⁸³

The Gorgon’s head, here perhaps most terrifying because it is not monstrous, sits at the core of a series of internal representations and, like the similarly situated syrinx discussed in the first chapter, contains the power to collapse the distinction between the fictive and the real, bridging the distance between the experience of the internal Ethiopian audience and Ovid’s Roman audience, both of whom are looking into a narrative mirror where the familiar seems strange and a tale about an “other” suddenly approximates the realities of the present. As we have seen, this effect of narrative also becomes disquietingly familiar if it is read as itself miming representational strategies and social practices central to the maintenance of the contemporary Roman state—self-expression through the language of sculpture and the affirmation of unity and legitimacy through sacrificial ritual, both of which, as representations, open the door to a similar recognition of the self in the face of the conquered that can fragment as well as unify. It is no accident perhaps that, just after the appearance of this Gorgon’s head in Perseus’s account, the festival celebrating union (*coniugalia*, 5.3) turns to internal violence, and the distinctively human ritual of the wedding reverts to the bestial (*festa* 5.3 ~ *fera* 5.4).⁸⁴

It is time now to step back from the narrative to ask about the consequences of Ovid’s exposure of what happens when stories come true for understanding the political role of his own fiction and, more specifically, his poem’s evocation of sculpture. First, it is remarkable how the dynamic of recognizing figures represented in statuary traced in Ovid’s narrative of the battle in Cepheus’s palace runs precisely counter to the

⁸³ Andromeda overcomes her modesty and tells Perseus her identity “lest she seem unwilling to confess faults that were her own” (4.685–86). It is also no accident, I think, that the first detail that transforms Andromeda in Perseus’s eyes from a statue back to a maiden is the breeze moving her hair (4.673).

We may also note that Ovid’s version of Medusa’s early history, with its temple setting and emphasis on the responsibility of Neptune for the action (*vitiassse*, which can connote a ritual lapse is here uniquely used as a metaphor for rape in the poem), adds a sacrificial aspect to both figures, who suffer as substitutes for others. In the case of Andromeda, who is distanced from the crime of her mother, the punishment seems unjust and rallies viewers to her defense.

⁸⁴ The simile comparing the disruption of the banquet to a stormy sea subtly signals this link between representation and present by recalling the figure of Neptune as the violator of Medusa within Perseus’s story.

⁸¹ Both anachronisms are noted by Kenney 1986.402 and by Anderson 1997.402–6, and discussed by Bömer 1976.222 and 227.

⁸² A comparison developed by Kuttner 2002.

claim Perseus, the internal commemorator, makes for it. Within the context of the battle, petrification is above all a way of enforcing a distinction between friend and enemy. “If any friend is present, let him look away,” is Perseus’s injunction as he lifts the Gorgon’s head (5.179–80). Only foes, this implies, should turn to *simulacra*, and vice versa. As Perseus’s own success and fame require these inherently ambiguous artifacts to be read in particular ways by particular audiences—as recognizable likenesses of themselves perhaps by other potential opponents, who will thus be warned of their own fate if they challenge Perseus, as commemorations of Perseus’s triumph over violators of justice by everyone else—so too he relies on a particular reading of what it means to realize fictions. For the hero Perseus on the one hand owes his prestige to bringing the fabulous into the present, while on the other denying that it is a *fabula*, a lie, or a story. The kind of disorientation that results not from framing the marvelous in a solid bulwark of normality but rather from allowing the unbelievable to reshape the present, or to make the fabulous recognizable as an aspect of that normal reality, plays no part in his scheme. Thus, the Medusa he defeats is not an innocent woman but a terrifying monster, and, in a different sense, the sea creature that he defeats is not a ship with a snout attached. An anti-Persean reading of his life story can be generated either by an excess of distance—those deeds are not true but are indeed fictions—or by an excess of identification with the fictional.⁸⁵

We can see one aspect of how monumentalization and the control of what is believed work together by looking more closely at the fate of one of Perseus’s stone foes, and this will be a bridge back to the original starting point of this discussion, the reading the poem offers of artistic monuments in the public sphere. The third of Phineus’s allies to fall victim to the Gorgon’s head is the Egyptian Nileus, “who falsely claimed that he was the son of the sevenfold Nile and had even embossed seven rivers on his shield, partly of silver and partly of gold. ‘Behold,’ he said, ‘the origins of our race! You will bear great consolation for your death to the silent shades to have fallen at the hands of such a great man’—the last part of his words were suppressed in mid-utterance, and you would

⁸⁵ A historical example of such an identification with the marvelous comes in the curious crowd response to Pompey’s staging of the killing of elephants in his games of 55 BCE. Not, obviously, a mythical creature on a par with Gorgons, elephants were nevertheless important as a symbol of the conquest of far-off Asia brought before the eyes of an audience of Romans. When these elephants were killed in the arena, their groans are said to have sounded so human that the crowd was frightened and appalled by their death and so turned against Pompey (Plin. *HN* 8.21). In addition to the agency of sympathy at work here, perhaps in taking on a human voice, so to speak, Pompey’s creatures had become too fabulous for their master’s own good.

think that his open mouth wished to speak, but it offered a path for no words” (5.188–94). Of all Perseus’s foes, Nileus is the most like him in his attempt to fight fire with fire, to defeat one image with another image. But this is only the beginning of the resemblance between the two figures because the very image at the center of Nileus’s shield not only looks like the Medusa’s head with its winding rivers but in fact also stakes a claim of identity with Perseus. When Nileus speaks of “our” race, this is no mere poetic plural, for Perseus too, the Danaeus hero, as he is called in the first line of the fifth book, is also very much a Danaid hero, a literal son of Egypt, descendant of the only Danaid who did not kill her Egyptian bridegroom on her own wedding night. And Perseus now plays out the mirror image of that scene as a suitor who is foreign because he is a Greek in an African land. The author’s almost italicized insistence that Nileus’s story is a fiction (with *ementitus*, 5.188, emphasized by enjambment), while superficially rebutting the Egyptian’s own claims to superiority over Perseus, simultaneously suggests a more dangerous potential for assimilating hero and victim. It is important to note that Nileus too, like any challenger was interested in creating a difference between Perseus and himself, and that difference has to do with the quality of silence (*tacitas*, 5.191, thrown into relief by both metrical position and extreme hyperbaton). Perseus responds not with words but by turning Nileus to stone, a form of monumentalization more absolute than Nileus’s not only because it emphatically shuts his mouth but also because it leaves no scope for fiction, for the representation to be anything less than what it seems to be. Beyond that, in silencing Nileus, he has won the battle for difference. It is not Perseus but his rival who suffers the fate of becoming like the image that he attempts to impose on another in a reflexive action that mimics the deflation of Idas’s earlier boast. In another sense, the triumph of reality over fiction involves stopping the chain of “sacrificial” recognitions that blur the boundaries between victor and victim and so rob victory of its semantic certainty.

The defeat of Nileus also instantiates more directly than any other moment in this elaborate story the relationship between verbal and visual artifacts as we encountered it in the previous discussion of the Niobe episode. While not silenced by death, Perseus’s absence of utterance contrasts dramatically with Nileus’s boast; not only are deeds stronger than words, but the perfect image needs no other narrative explication. It is what it seems to be and, importantly, is nothing more than what it seems to be, not a representation conjuring up the absence/presence of Nileus but a fact in itself, a perpetual deed of Perseus. And yet when statues are viewed, their self-sufficiency vanishes. When “you” look at Nileus, you do recognize a person there, and in assenting to the idea that this is a

representation, you come to believe—as one might believe a fiction—that Nileus will speak (*adapertaque velle ora loqui credas*, 5.193–94).

In actuality, then, as the episode as a whole shows, there is no such thing as a statue without text or a reality that does not conjure up some measure of fiction in the act of being viewed. Nor do texts live quite apart from monuments. In fact, the Nileus episode not only makes present internally generated images—the shield of Nileus, which is on different levels a product of both Nileus’s and Ovid’s artistry, and the stone figure of Nileus himself—but gains meaning from a complex network of external referents that are at once verbal and sculptural. The mixed metals of the shield, which Ovid goes out of his way to mention (5.189), perhaps recall the blazon of the most famous Roman epic shield, Aeneas’s in *Aeneid* 8. At its center was another water image crafted in both silver and gold,⁸⁶ the defeat of Cleopatra at Actium, which obviously also answers the claim to Egyptian supremacy made here.⁸⁷ But the narrative reference to the Danaids simultaneously alludes to one more of that poem’s most important sculptural artifacts, the belt of Pallas, the presence of which as a *monumentum* in the possession of Turnus prompts Aeneas to take revenge (*Aen.* 12.945). The importance of the belt for the Perseus scene as a whole has been briefly discussed by Hardie, who finds in Perseus’s threat to Phineus that he too will be a *monumentum*, a reminder of this final moment in the *Aeneid*. Building on a claim of Michael Putnam, who notes not only that the belt of Pallas inspires action in the poem but that it and the poem depict the same thing, the deaths of young men, and in the case of Turnus a would-be bridegroom, Hardie suggests that the effect of verbal and visual image coalescing, already predicted in the *Aeneid*, is taken to a new level of reality in Ovid by the direct creation of an image, the statue of Phineus, through a narrated event.⁸⁸

But this is only part of Ovid’s rivalry with the *Aeneid* in the realization of ecphrases. First, he has integrated his echo into an episode that comments precisely on the connection between representation and violence. The role of the belt of Pallas in the *Aeneid* mirrors the importance of what we might call representational reciprocity in Ovid’s battle, the danger of becoming one’s own image and, in that way, coming to resemble the defeated. As Idas and Nileus see their boasts cast back on themselves, so Turnus is destined both to share the fate of his own victim, Pallas, and

to become like the image that he bears. And, as in Ovid, it is the representational capacity of the image, here made inseparable from its monumental value—for what it shows, a dead young man, now looks like what it reminds Aeneas of, the death of a different young man, Pallas—that opens the door to future violence.

Beyond this thematic integration into the much darker mirror of the *Aeneid* produced here, Ovid also competes with Vergil in the authenticity with which his text depicts that crucial image. The actual scene on the belt of Pallas is described as follows: a band of youths slaughtered on the very night of a wedding and bloody chambers, *una sub nocte iugali / caesa manus iuuenum foede thalamique cruenti*, *Aen.* 10.497–98. While the *Aeneid* does in some measure reproduce aspects of the scene, that is nothing to the closeness with which Perseus’s own battle does, as is indeed appropriate given Perseus’s own special connection to the events described. And if Ovid has realized in narrative the scene on Pallas’s belt, at the same time, to extend Hardie’s original point, he has also done without the intermediary services of Clonus, son of Eurytus, in turning the scene to art, for he has created a scene that produces its own representation.

If Ovid rivals Vergil’s text in terms of both the realism and the reality of the image he offers, bringing the embossed scene to narrative life and at the same time creating artistic representations inseparable from the original, that is but one of the ways in which he approaches Vergil’s poem as much as an artifact as a text. For from Perseus’s first glimpse of Andromeda as statue, to the belt of Pallas, to the Shield of Aeneas, Ovid’s text evokes Vergil’s poem through the visual images that that poem in turn has created. In other words, Vergil’s poem is entered by means of its own poetic power to generate images that count as real. And yet, in the case of the Danaid tableau, it is not just a question of whether to see Vergil’s poem as image, for the Danaids, as we have seen, also existed as an actual sculptural image in Rome in the temple of Palatine Apollo; even as Ovid competes with Vergil in the vividness with which he turns poetry to stone, he is also renarrativizing the sculptures of Augustus, giving them their own capacity to speak.

What the triangulation of Ovid’s scene with both the textual artifact of Vergil’s *Aeneid* and the real monuments of Augustan Rome suggests is a double process in which Ovid’s poetry aims simultaneously at “monumentalization” and at the conversion of monuments back to the more fluid context of narrative. Ovid thus measures his authority against both kinds of *auctores* by turning Vergilian fable into hard fact and giving human expression to Augustan marble. And this way of reading the episode helps clarify how Ovid’s figuration of his own personal authority, studied in the second chapter, coexists with the distinctive political effi-

⁸⁶ *Aurea* (*Aen.* 8.673); *argento* (*Aen.* 8.674).

⁸⁷ The river Nile itself is also featured on Aeneas’s shield at 8.711–12, though anthropomorphized. Interestingly, as the image of Nileus seems to demand that one supply an imaginary utterance, so the Nile on the *Aeneid* shield is shown “crying out,” *vocantem* (*Aen.* 8.712).

⁸⁸ Hardie 2002c.179, citing Putnam 1998.205.

cacy of Ovid's text in allowing its viewers to entertain multiple perspectives on scenes that are—and are not—also images affirming the construction of Roman *imperium*.

One final device Ovid uses to articulate these different points of view, as well as to remind the reader of his own personal role in crafting the scene, has to do with the contrast between erotic and martial sensibilities throughout the episode. We have already observed how the process of petrification evoked alternatively the experience of the lover and the warrior. The tension and overlap in imagery and diction between poetic descriptions of these aspects of experience was of course a phenomenon central to practically all contemporary poetry, elegiac or epic. When Perseus looking at the chained Andromeda mentally opposes her too real bonds with the metaphorical bonds of love, his train of thought is thus one that any experienced reader would be conditioned to share. But Ovid's deployment of this effect here deserves attention because of the way that he integrates it with the larger question of the relationship between texts and monuments. As elegiac and epic codes offer their own distinctive transformations of reality into poetry, revealing the same image "chains" or "wounds" from radically different perspectives, so Ovid has linked the doubleness of his central figure of the alterity emerging from artistic creation, Medusa's head, to this generic metamorphosis as well. For, as Perseus's story reminds us, the Gorgon could inspire love as well as terror. And even in her present form, her head is not all scales and fangs. Rather, Ovid specifies that every other hair has turned into a snake (*alternos inmixtos crinibus angues*, 4.792).⁸⁹ Perhaps one may even detect a generic pun in the "alternating" coiffure of the Gorgon recalling the alternating lines of elegiac couplets. The last suggestion becomes more plausible in light of the preceding verse, where *unus ... ex numero procerum* can mean not only "one of the throng of heroes [interrupted asking ...]" but also "[asking] according to (moving away from?) the meter of heroes," that is, dactylic hexameter.

Beyond possessing this double aspect herself, Medusa bestows it on her creations as well. Philip Hardie has observed that Perseus's final taunt to Phineus couples references to two very different functions of statues: to commemorate victory and to provide erotic replacements conjuring up absent loved ones: "No, I will produce monuments to last through all eternity and you will always be gazed upon in the home of *my* father-in-law so that *my* wife may console herself with the image of her beloved"

⁸⁹ See the comments of Anderson 1996.495: "Bömer protests that the picture does not fit the traditional frightfulness of the Gorgon, but that is Ovid's point. The poet has slipped out of the epic mode, and he is now combining the elegiac and the aetiological."

(5.227–29).⁹⁰ Perseus's irony in the last line, though, points to the pattern that we have already observed throughout the narrative as a whole: the capacity of "statues" to petrify lovers merges into their destructive capacity in war. But the lover's response to the vision of the beloved contrasts with the experience of a Phineus or an Astyages in ways that reinforce the tensions we have seen in the responses the poem generates to images. The effects of petrification bear different consequences when read against the different generic codes of epic and elegy. So, for example, when Perseus almost forgets to beat his wings at the sight of Andromeda, the gesture recalls the dangerous "stilling" of the epic hero who is distracted and turned away from his aims, as Aeneas was by Dido. By contrast, the desirability of Athis, described in an ecphrasis that seems to forestall the coming destruction of the battle, is suddenly "shattered" as the hero Perseus smashes in his face with a wooden beam. This generic transition is also signaled by the placement of Perseus's erotic viewing at the beginning of the story and the erection of *monumenta* at its end, for while the glimpse of a statue can often provide the beginning of a love story, the proper role for statues in a historical narrative is to impose finality on a successful campaign or to instantiate the glory already won at home by a victorious politician.

Once again, this contrast in whether to take statues as the starting points for elegiac desire or as the ultimate ends of epic accomplishment is not just an issue in the reading of texts but also in viewing the monuments of the Roman city. We have already seen how Propertius elegized the sculptural decoration of the temple of Palatine Apollo. That poem was framed as a fictive conversation. "You ask me why I am late," it begins (2.31.1). If we imagine the fictive addressee here as the poet's lover, then he has substituted the viewing of Augustan monuments for a lover's meeting. And yet, as he tells it, the temple itself offered both a rival and a substitute for the beloved in the form of a whole "crowd of women," who were none other than the Danaids.⁹¹ And this bevy of femininity appears all the more striking because it emerges from a setting of markedly imperial significance, a portico set with columns of "Punic" marble, a reminder, when described this way, of Rome's defining victory as well as an evocation of the first book of *Aeneid*. For here, as in the moment when the sculpted Penthesilea on Carthage's temple of Juno seems to come to life as Dido, the effect of Propertius's account is to suggest not statuary decoration but a throng of real women enjoying the colonnade.

⁹⁰ Hardie 2002c.178–79.

⁹¹ ... *Poenis digesta columnis, / inter quas Danaï femina turba senis* (Prop. 2.31.3–4). *Poenis* also paronomastically recalls the punishment of the maidens for their disobedience, which, it has been suggested, was central to the political iconography of the complex (see chapter 2).

But the remapping of the new Roman city as a setting for erotic adventures was most sweepingly accomplished by Ovid himself in the first book of the *Ars Amatoria*, (1.67ff.), where the new monuments of the emperor were imagined as places to find a lover (again the beginning of the erotic adventure). Such an elegiac view of actual *monumenta* provides an interesting possibility for relocating the fabulous meeting of Perseus and Andromeda to a contemporary Roman space.⁹² The sight of a barbarian maiden, whether as a real woman in the context of a triumph or as a sculptural representation—as, for example, the allegorical figures on the shield of the Prima Porta Augustus—was central to the Romans’ visual experience of their imperial success. Among the most recent manifestations of this pattern, as Kellum has argued,⁹³ was the display of caryatids in the attic level of the Forum of Augustus, where they alternated with other elements easily glossed as symbols of conquest, shields bearing the heads of Jupiter Ammon.⁹⁴ There is nothing especially erotic about caryatids, and their heavy dress was an important part of their iconography.⁹⁵ But their upright posture, their association with captivity, and the presence of Jupiter Ammon in the narrative background to Ovid’s scene make possible the visual juxtaposition that I have been describing. And the questions that Perseus asks Andromeda would be precisely those a Roman viewer might ask in making sense of these allegorical images: “What is the name of your country, and your own, and why are you wearing chains?” (4.680–81).

This distinctive erotic pattern of reading images may compete with a memorializing, imperial signification, or it may be that for other readers it realizes an element of eroticization already latent in the choice to represent conquest by reducing defeated people to female slaves. Conversely, what seems a striking juxtaposition in interpretative context may also point, as in the Pygmalion episode,⁹⁶ to the extent to which the representation of love in much Latin discourse involves a certain amount of objectification, if not actual conquest. But the degree of competition between these perspectives involved in the reading of images should not obscure the important connections that unite the lover’s and the hero’s

capacity to create images. A key point about the chained Andromeda’s metamorphosis into a statue is that it is hypothetical. So too Athis may be presented as though he were a work of art, but Perseus’s club quickly destroys that illusion together with Athis’s appearance.⁹⁷ In both cases, the lover makes the interpretative mistake of treating real people as statues, only to have movement—and, particularly, the possibility of death, threatened in the case of Andromeda and tragically accomplished in the case of Athis—correct the lover’s error. Thus, Perseus, whose statues are real statues, can seem a greater artist than the lover-poet, who only comes close to such a miracle. But mortality again imposes a limit on the permanence of those images as well and not just because, as ancient poets perpetually remind their audiences, time destroys even bronze and marble. As the lovers see reality transformed into statues, so warriors in the poem like Astyages, and Phineus make the mistake of seeing statues as people. Even miraculous statues must be viewed by human eyes, and this always involves a possibility of experiencing the absence caused in this case emphatically by death in personal and human terms, of the viewer experiencing this death as his own. And if few viewers of Augustan monuments were actually turned to stone by the sight, if the Ovidian reflection of this experience seems to distort the real phenomenon it reflects, that just proves again that fact is not always more powerful than fiction.

⁹⁷ I am assuming for the sake of this argument that the luxurious description of Athis’s beauty in 5.49–54 is focalized through the gaze of his lover.

⁹² Of course, as we have seen, the episode was also already presented in the painted decoration of many a wealthy Roman house.

⁹³ Kellum 1996.171 and 1997.167–68.

⁹⁴ It is unclear how many of the shields bore this figure as opposed to other male heads. The imitation of this design in the forum at Merida in Spain showed Ammones alternating with the heads of Medusa (Kuttner 1995.251, n. 71).

⁹⁵ According to Vitruvius 1.1.5, the Greeks made the women of the medizing city of Caryae retain their matrons’ robes as a further reminder of the state from which they had fallen.

⁹⁶ See Sharrock 1991a.

Playing Gods

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