

A Commentary on Ovid's Ceyx and Alcyone Narrative (Met. XI.410-748)

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyze the longest story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the tale of Alcyone and Ceyx. Despite its length, its placement within the entire work, and the presence of the work's eponymous hero, Morpheus, the Alcyone and Ceyx story has no major commentary in English and has earned little attention from most scholars. What has been written on it often scants the darker details of the episode, persuaded that Ovid has here sketched a portrait of an ideal, happy marriage, albeit one crossed by circumstances. In order to counterbalance this overly optimistic reading, this commentary carefully analyzes the language, motifs, and intertextual references that thread through Ovid's version of the Ceyx and Alcyone story. Particular attention has been paid to: the ambiguities in Ovid's narrative of Alcyone's attitude towards parting from her husband; the story's portrait of the gods, including Alcyone's own father, Aeolus; allusions to the earlier epic tradition (*Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*) in the Tempest scene; and the ecphrasis of the House of Sleep, including the character of Morpheus. This analysis will show that the tale of Alcyone and Ceyx is not a simple encomium to marital fidelity, but a picture of conjugal love darker than most Ovidian scholars have suspected.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Roger Federer & Shane Butler, two men who never let me down and always show me what it means to live.

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements	vii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Alcyone and Ceyx Before Ovid	7
2. Prelude to Alcyone and Ceyx Story	10
3. Separation of Ceyx and Alcyone.....	12
4. Death of Ceyx: The Tempest	19
5. House of Sleep	25
6. Morpheus and Alcyone.....	44
7. Reunification of Lovers	51
8. Conclusion	60
Bibliography	63

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Introduction:

The story of Alcyone and Ceyx is the longest story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Spanning nearly 500 lines, it tells the tale of two lovers who are tragically separated and finally, after much trial and tribulation, are reunited as they undergo a mutual metamorphosis into halcyon birds. Unlike many other stories of conjugal piety and devotion in Ovid's work,¹ this one of Alcyone and Ceyx seems to end happily. They are reunited in love and the once-childless couple's marriage becomes productive in their new lives as sea-bird parents. Scholars have generally regarded this story as depicting the triumph for conjugal love—a husband and wife beset by misfortune, but ultimately rewarded by the gods for their matrimonial devotion. Aside from Donald Lateiner and (less forcefully) Joseph Reed (Reed 2013, 343-71), most scholars agree that among "a few narratives of mutual love, even married love, which the poet has treated with a special sensitivity," that of Alcyone and Ceyx is the "most tender of these love-stories."² However, as Lateiner demonstrates at length, this long-held viewpoint will not entirely withstand closer scrutiny. The echo of Vergil's Dido and Homer's Andromache in Ovid's portrayal of Alcyone, unexplained ambiguities in the language used to describe

¹ Lateiner 2013, 54: "Ovid paints no picture of happy conjugality, human or divine, in the *Metamorphoses*' vast canvas of human passions and fatal errors. The happy marriages become a null set, once one correctly analyzes his very few other, allegedly happy, companionate marriages in the ocean of erotic catastrophe." There is, however, one marriage among the tales of Ovid that can be described as happy and unproblematic: marriage of Iphis and Ianthe.

² Fantham 1979, 330.

their marriage, and clashes of epic and elegiac erotic ideals point to greater complexity beneath the surface of this portrait of a putative conjugal ideal. Carefully sifted, Ovid's tale of Alcyone's and Ceyx' marriage more closely resembles his tales of nuptial troubles, such as the *Metamorphoses* VII story of Procris and Cephalus, marked by their compulsive mutual jealousy, which has been analyzed by Gregson Davis. In his book, Davis' structuralist and semiotic analysis elucidates the basic elements of various seemingly disparate love stories. He shows how Ovid repeatedly deploys those elements in a way that pivots on fundamental oppositions (e.g., hunter:prey::lover:scorner of love). His study compels us to see with new eyes story-patterns whose inveteracy have made them unquestioned. Thus, he offers a dark critique on stories generally considered to be compelling romantic tales, such as of Apollo/Daphne, Atalanta/Meleager, and (his primary focus) Cephalus/Procris. Davis' analysis of the *Metamorphoses'* Cephalus and Procris narrative demonstrates that it "is anything but a celebration of conjugal love. Rather, it elegantly defines, within the oppositional system of a narrative code, the moral conditions under which a conjugal *amor* may be transformed and fatally perverted."³ Similarly, clashing narrative elements, such as the posturing of Ovid's abandoned heroines in the *Heroides* superimposed upon the characterization of Alcyone, mix uneasily with motifs of faithful married love in Alcyone and Ceyx' story. Juxtaposing these elements

³ Davis 1983, 155-6.

problematizes any wholly sanguine reading of Alcyone and Ceyx, and sets their story apart from less problematic tales of conjugal bliss, (such as those of Baucis and Philemon and of Iphis and Ianthe).

However, it is not only Alcyone and Ceyx' marriage that is doubted by Ovid in this story. Rather, the way the marriage of these two devoted lovers fares suggests that they inhabit a world vastly different from the one that has been depicted by earlier epic tradition. The world of epic, as portrayed in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*, is one in which divine and human spheres often interact, whether to work for mortals' benefit or suffering. In the epic worlds described by Homer and Vergil, there is a divine plan—albeit often driven by the gods' selfishness and other all-too-human character flaws. Homer and Vergil unfold epic narratives that—at least on one level—reach their conclusions according to a divine plan (in Vergil's case, the culmination of his epic is the reign of Augustus, which ushers in the *Pax Romana* to be enjoyed by the entire world under Rome's hegemony). In the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, there is no divine plan. There is minimal intervention from gods: only late in the narrative does Juno intervene, and then purely out of irritation at Alcyone's repeated futile prayers at Juno's altar for her already-dead husband's safe return. The only act that seems to proceed from divine generosity (albeit a generosity oddly limited in its temporal scope—see below on lines 741-746) is performed by unnamed gods, who out of pity transform the suicidal Alcyone

and the dead Ceyx into living birds. Ovid's epic world, having neither a divine plan nor much concern for humans on the part of gods, is diametrically opposed to the world that is described by the Homeric and Vergilian epics. Not only does Ovid portray a cosmos sharply different from the one that was set out by his predecessors, he also challenges their vision of *kosmoi* that are—within broad limits—able to be fathomed. It might only be the gods who are afforded this comprehensive vision—only Zeus who knows Hektor must die, or that Aegisthus will be punished for his recklessness; only Jupiter who can assure Venus that the fates have decreed a glorious Roman future for her Trojans—but their cosmological insight at least confirms the theoretical knowability of the poets' worlds. By contrast, Ovid questions not only the ability to understand the relationship between mortals and immortals, but also to understand the world in its entirety—and nowhere more relentlessly than he does in Ceyx and Alcyone's tale. For example, only here does he introduce what Lateiner calls the "eponymous hero"⁴ of Ovid's work: the shape-shifting god of dreamscapes, Morpheus. Morpheus, who is the greatest actor and illusionist, can match all human beings. Together with his two brothers—Phobetor and Icelos, the illusionists of animate and inanimate nature, respectively—the three sons of Sleep have the capabilities to mimic the entire cosmos of the *Metamorphoses*. They, just like Ovid, their creator and author, create illusions and bring them to life. However, Morpheus, though he is the best *artifex* and *simulator* bar none, does not create perfect

⁴ Lateiner 2013, 56.

copies. There are slippages between Morpheus' portrayal of Ceyx and the visage of the real (albeit now dead) Ceyx. This slippage that Morpheus cannot forestall represents the space between the exterior appearance and the inner reality of the world of the *Metamorphoses*, where most of the figures—indeed, according to Ovid's Pythagoras, all of them—are souls inhabiting bodies that are strange to them. No tree is just a tree, as no bird is just a bird; everything is ultimately a possible veil to metempsychosis. This space between the outer experience and inner reality that Ovid explores through his character of Morpheus and his story of Alcyone and Ceyx, Lateiner sees as an oblique comment on the often ungraspable nature of Rome's social and political milieu under Augustus, who rewrote the Roman past and future so as to place himself and his family at the center of both. As Lateiner explains,

Slippage between reality and appearances is more than a literary motif; it disconcertingly happens every day. Very little was what it seemed in Ovid's slippery postwar Rome and his poem refracts that multiplicity.⁵

Reflections upon contemporary politics can be found in many of the story's details, but appear most obviously in the scene of Ovid's Perfect Storm, where he uses the imagery of Gigantomachy—a mytheme that pivots on a struggle to consolidate power under a single ruler against forces disputing that hegemony.

⁵ Lateiner 2013, 53.

This commentary addresses the entire story of Alcyone and Ceyx, but takes as its focus Ovid's portrait of their marriage, and therefore concentrates on scenes involving either husband, or wife, or both. The two exceptions to this rule are the two extended ecphrases: Ovid's extravagant description of the storm that takes Ceyx' life, and of the House of Sleep, from which Juno summons a dream to tell Alcyone of Ceyx' death. These two scenes' complexity demands a more discursive approach. In commenting upon them, this commentary's typical line-by-line format expands into fuller analysis.

Metamorphoses XI, within which Ovid locates the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, begins with the death of myth's most famous poet figure, Orpheus. Orpheus is able to charm all the creatures and even inanimate objects through his songs. However, his sound is unable to be heard by Maenads who rip him apart and are, in turn, turned into oak trees. What Orpheus is able to do in Book X— tell beguiling stories of human vicissitudes—Morpheus is able to achieve and surpass in the story of Alcyone and Ceyx. To the poet's narrative voice, Morpheus adds vision: representations of human shapes and gestures to complete his illusions.

Ovid also draws connections between the Ceyx-Alcyone narrative and the books of the *Metamorphoses* that succeed it. For example, the story of the Trojan War brackets

and comments on this interlude of faithful conjugal love. Peleus' rape of Thetis—who vainly tries to elude him by shifting shape in a way that anticipates Morpheus' plasticity—engenders Achilles, the hero pivotal to a war waged over Alcyone's opposite: Helen, the mythic archetype of the faithless wife. Immediately following the conclusion of Alcyone's and Ceyx' story, Ovid returns to Troy in telling the tale of the Trojan prince Aesacus and his similar transformation into a seabird. But Aesacus is not a husband—in fact, he is a would-be rapist (albeit a repentant one, unlike Peleus). Emerging from the brief vignette of raising offspring in the calm of the halcyon days, Ovid turns once more to themes of assault and betrayal, preparing the reader for the realization of these themes on a larger scale when the Trojan War opens Book XII. Positioning Alcyone and Ceyx as an interlude in the midst of epic themes urges the reader to interpret the story in the context of his most illustrious epic predecessors, Homer and Vergil. However, as this commentary will show, Ovid's tale of conjugal misfortune differs significantly from the epic of Homer or Vergil. Ovid blends various generic elements, including many drawn from Latin love elegy and didactic poetry, to portray a cosmos dominated by deception, illusion and doubt.

Alcyone and Ceyx Before Ovid

The tale of Alcyone and Ceyx appears in several versions that predate the *Metamorphoses*. The very first instance can be found in the *Iliad*. In book IX, as Phoenix

warns Achilles by unfolding his parables of the dire consequences to stubborn anger, he mentions Alcyone, but without Ceyx, within his tale of the sullen Meleager. She paradigmatically figures female lament:

κεῖτο παρὰ μνηστῆ ἀλόχῳ καλῇ Κλεοπάτρῃ
κούρη Μαρπήσης καλλισφύρου Εὐηνίνης
Ἴδεώ θ', ὃς κάρτιστος ἐπιχθονίων γένετ' ἀνδρῶν
τῶν τότε: καί ῥα ἄνακτος ἐναντίον εἴλετο τόξον
Φοίβου Ἀπόλλωνος καλλισφύρου εἵνεκα νύμφης,
τῆ δὲ τὸτ' ἐν μεγάροισι πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
Ἀλύονην καλέεσκον ἐπώνυμον, οὐνεκ' ἄρ' αὐτῆς
μήτηρ ἀλκυόνος πολυπενθέος οἴτον ἔχουσα
κλαῖεν ὃ μιν ἐκάεργος ἀνήρπασε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων:
(9.552-60)

He lay at home idle beside his wife. She was the lovely Cleopatra, child of slim-ankled Marpessa, Evenus' child, and of Idas, the mightiest man on the face of the earth in those days, who raised his bow against Phoebus Apollo to keep Marpessa for his own. Her father and mother called Cleopatra, Alcyone, because the mother had mourned like the kingfisher with its plaintive call, when far-darting Apollo had snatched her child.⁶

As Lyndsay Coo writes, "the implication is that the Homeric Alcyone, like Marpessa, mourned because of forcible separation from her own husband."⁷

⁶ http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Iliad9.htm#_Toc239244216

⁷ Coo 2010, 101.

The first instance where Ceyx and Alcyone appear together is the *Ehoae* of Hesiod. Here, Alcyone and Ceyx suffer metamorphosis as a punishment because of their hubris; they dared to address each other as “Zeus” and “Hera.”⁸ On the other hand, in the Hellenistic pseudo-Lucianic *Halcyon*, the couple is portrayed sympathetically. In the *Halcyon*, Alcyone is given wings by gods so that she might fly over the sea and search for the corpse of Ceyx.

Ovid develops and enlarges upon the themes explored in the earlier tradition of the Alcyone and Ceyx story. In Ovid's version, Alcyone and Ceyx are completely blameless and quite pious. Yet they suffer tribulation, and finally undergo metamorphosis. Their transformation into sea-birds is supposed to be late-coming evidence of the gods' mercy (*tandem superis miserantibus*, *Met.* XI.741). Yet their “merciful” change hardly differs from other avian transformations that punish violence and impiety (e.g., Tereus, Procne and Philomela; see fuller discussion below, lines 741-746). What scholars often consider to be Ovid's story of perfect conjugality, which is divinely rewarded, is threaded through with more complicated reflections on the problematic nature of *pietas* and divine mercy, the value of love, human ability to decipher truth (if any) from appearances—all complexities this commentary will unfold.

⁸ Hesiod. fr. 10a96 MW.

266-409: Prelude to Alycone & Ceyx story

271 *Lucifero genitore*: The character of Ceyx is complex, in regards to his status as a *divi filius*. Although he is a child of god, he is accorded no special privileges or aids¹ – a fact underlined by his miserable demise at sea, an end that negates his loving oath to return, sworn to his wife by the light of his father, Lucifer, *per patrios ignes* (452). Only Ceyx' corpse returns to Alcyone, floating back to her as she stands on the very shore where Ceyx took his departure from her. (For more on the problematic nature of *filius divi*, see Note 474-553)

386 *colloque infusa mariti. infusa*: As Ceyx prepares to fight the wolf, Alcyone attempts to dissuade him by throwing herself upon his neck, "pouring herself over him." As noted by Philip Hardie, *infusa* is an unusually strong expression for an embrace, used by Ovid only twice, here and in the *Heroides* 2.91-95 when Phyllis is writing to Demophoön: *ausus es amplecti colloque infusus amantis* (II.93). Here, Phyllis, like Alcyone, stresses Demophoön's extravagant gesture in her attempt to "maximise the togetherness of the moment" against their imminent separation.²³ Ovid's intertextual reference to *Heroides* 2 not only foreshadows the separation of Alcyone and Ceyx by a

¹ This in itself is not unusual in the cosmos of the *Met*. For instance, despite his divine lineage and love and attention bestowed upon him by his divine parent, Phaethon suffers a gruesome fate.

² Hardie 2007, 273.

³ Even an earlier precedent can be found in the *Aen*. 8.406 where Vulcan is described to be *coniugis infusus gremio*, upon his wife, Venus.

sea-journey, but it also introduces a standard motif of love elegy — the permanent parting of hitherto inseparable lovers. Ceyx and Alcyone’s intimately intertwined existences are emphasized through the repetition of the word *coniunx*. This word, whose appearance in the *Metamorphoses* totals 152 instances, appears 13 times in this story alone, accounting for nearly 10% of all of its occurrences.⁴ *coniunx* first appears in line 384, as Alcyone attempts to prevent Ceyx from arming himself and his men for a battle against the wolf (*Alcyone coniunx excita tumultu*, XI.384). Such repetition, emphasizes the uxorial *pietas* shared between the lovers, but the whiff of excess casts a shadow over this apparently happy marriage. Lateiner regards Ovid’s emphasis on the couple’s closeness as evidence of unhealthy co-dependence between husband and wife,⁵ but that prematurely limits to the individual psyches of Ceyx and Alcyone what these patterns imply. This commentary will try to show that—whatever might be read from the story regarding its protagonists’ personal deficiencies—their story also reflects on meta-literary concerns, such as audience expectations and the appropriate generic frame within which to read this story—and indeed, to read this epic.⁶ (See below on lines 421-426.)

⁴ In Book XI, lines 384, 440, 445, 563, 580, 655, 658, 660 (2), 672, 721, 725, and 727.

⁵ Lateiner 2013, 65-66.

⁶ Lateiner 2013, 54.

410-473: Ceyx and Alcyone Separate

412 *consulat ut sacras, hominum oblectamina, sortes* : Ovid writes that Ceyx sails “in order to consult the oracles, *oblectamina*, the amusements of men.”¹ The *Metamorphoses* first attests this word, which is likely Ovid’s invention (cf. Kenney 2011, *ad Met.* XI.342). It occurs only here and in the story of Dryope’s innocent but disastrous plucking of flowers as “delights” for her baby son (the nymph she has unwittingly violated turns the mother into a tree).² The word suggests that oracles are less sources of instruction for human beings than ways in which people beguile themselves with the illusion that gods are caring enough to disseminate helpful information. This dismissive description of oracles, one of the primary methods of communication between immortals and mortals, seems further to problematize the notion that the relationship between gods and mortals is orderly and knowable. (Indeed, the notoriously enigmatic nature of oracles raises the question: is *hominum* in Ovid’s phrase a subjective or objective genitive? Do oracles delight human beings, or do mortals’ attempts to interpret the vagaries of divine pronouncement make humans ridiculous, and thus amusing to the observer? Certainly the oracle Ovid’s Pyrrha and Deucalion receive after the devastating Flood of *Metamorphoses* I—in answer to their prayer to Themis they are told to “toss their

¹ *Ov. Met.* XI.412.

² *Met.* IX.342: Iole narrates the story of his sister, Dryope who while picking flowers to delight her son, *carpserat hinc Dryope, quos oblectamina nato*, plucks a lotus and is instantaneously turned into a tree.

mother's bones over their shoulders" in order to regenerate the human race—shocks and tortures Pyrrha needlessly, until Deucalion figures out the riddle as meaning "toss rocks"—the "bones" of Mother Earth, *ossaque post tergum magnae iactate parentis!*³ Unlike Deucalion and Pyrrha, Ceyx does not seek the oracle in order to enquire regarding a specific problem he wishes the oracle to solve. He has simply seen a series of portents (his brother's transformation into a bird, a monstrous wolf ravaging his countryside until miraculously turned to stone). Why exactly he thinks consulting an oracle is mandatory is never stated. The necessity of his journey to consult one thus seems problematic, especially in the face of a blockade that forces Ceyx to attempt a perilous sea journey to Claros rather than set out on a more straightforward land expedition to Delphi. The separation of husband and wife on which the entire story hinges is subtly depicted as of dubious necessity, at best.

421- 426 Reed perceptively notes that Alcyone's impassioned attempt at dissuasion most closely resembles the addresses of the abandoned heroines to their lovers that Ovid perfected in his *Heroides*, and developed further in the stories of Scylla and Byblis in Books VII.1-151 and IX.439-665, respectively, of the *Metamorphoses*. But here, this speech jars in the context of a happily married couple. Alcyone's combination of self-accusation and appeals for compassion, although it fits the "elegiac" generic parameters established by the *Heroides* and—in the *Metamorphoses*—by the story of

³ *Met.* I.381-389.

Scylla, implies a psychology that its context—a happy marriage—does not make completely clear.⁴ In addition to this plaintive speech, as Marcus Bate points out, Ovid pays a careful attention to the psychological status of Alcyone by emphasizing her expressions of distress at the separation from her husband through an obsessive usage of the haunting image of the sea. Furthermore, Bate notes that Alcyone's insistence of her oneness with Ceyx will endanger her when he is endangered. This theme of a problematic union between lovers is a classic *topos* of elegiac poetry.⁵ Alcyone hyperbolically expands upon the *topos* of lovers being “as one,” and of the sea either threatening that oneness or destroying two lives with the death of either lover. Like Ovid’s Leander, she sees her existence as essentially fused with her beloved’s (*Her.* 18.125-26)—and in extending that logic, she obsessively returns to the imagery of the waves (like Ovid’s Hero, *Her.* 18.189-207). Combining these themes from *Heroides* 18 and 19, Alcyone urges the living Ceyx to take her with him, so that whatever he suffers, they shall endure together—and after seeing his supposed ghost, declares that she herself has died, that the sea already has her (though she was formally absent from Ceyx’ sea journey), because it has taken the life of her Ceyx during his maritime journey: “*nunc absens perii, iactor quoque fluctius absens, / et sine me me pontus habet,*” *Met.* XI.701-702. This mixing of generic parameters, by superimposing the discourse of abandoned heroines

⁴ Reed 2013, 345-346.

⁵ Bate 2004, 302.

upon the portrait of a loving marriage, develops an expectation of disaster for Ceyx and Alcyone.

In addition, such “mixed generic messages” create dissonance in the reader’s horizon of expectations. The Ceyx and Alcyone story thus invites a question that long vexed scholars in their discussion of the whole *Metamorphoses*: what is the poem’s generic allegiance? The *Metamorphoses* strays from epic tradition most obviously in turning its attention to a series of largely independent stories, many of which are built upon erotic themes (rather than, say, unfolding a single story-line of martial conquest or its aftermath, as the *Aeneid*, *Iliad*, and *Odyssey* do). But in the Ceyx-Alcyone story specifically, when Ovid evokes in the midst of his epic portrait of a “good” marriage the elaborately narrated distress of separated lovers—drawn from an erotic, elegiac genre he himself perfected—he leads the reader to wonder how exactly this *Metamorphoses* XI “love” story should be read.

430 - 432 Alcyone warns Ceyx to not have faith in his father-in-law to protect him from the winds: *neve tuum fallax animum fiducia tangat, / quod socer Hippotades tibi sit, qui carcere fortes / contineat ventos, et, cum velit, aequora placet* (430-32). These lines are occasionally overlooked by scholars. For example, Elaine Fantham reiterates Brooks Otis' point of view that "death of Ceyx will be treated not as malice or retribution from gods, but as the arbitrary cruelty of impersonal elements."⁶ However, at the end of the story, it is shown that Aeolus can control the winds if he desires, as Alcyone has said earlier when she attempts to warn

⁶ Fantham 1979, 223.

Ceyx against his sea voyage. Aeolus quells his winds for seven days in the winter on behalf of his grandchildren, *tunc iacet unda maris: ventos custodit et arcet / Aeolus egressu praestatque nepotibus aequor* (747-48). Aeolus' indifference to his son-in-law's danger, Lucifer's inability either to see or to aid his son,⁷ and (later) Juno's impatience with Alcyone's grief (See note 583-84), point to a cold vacuum where divine concern for human beings should be.

454 - 461 *quaerente moras Ceyce*: There is an inherent conflict that is demonstrated in Ceyx's departure scene. Ceyx, as a husband, is caught between the antique masculine ideal of being a young and active epic hero, as represented by his young rowers who are eager to set sail,⁸ and the elegiac ideal of perfect unity and domesticity. This is noted by Lateiner in his discussion of an antithesis between Ceyx' promise to hasten his return and his actual, speedy departure, *spes est admota recursus, / protinus educatam navalibus* (454-55).⁹ Ceyx' pledge of love for Alcyone and promise for a speedy return seem to be cancelled out by the speedy nature of his departure. However, in line 461, Ovid writes that Ceyx seeks delay, but his rowers bear him away, *ast iuvenes quaerente moras Ceyce reducunt*.¹⁰ Ceyx' alternating centrifugal and centripetal impulses, his odd vacillation between impulse and passivity, point to instability in this "ideal" marriage, wrought (perhaps) by conflicting paradigms of masculinity.

471 - 473 A precedent for Alcyone's gesture can be found in Book IV of the *Aeneid*, where Dido reacts to seeing her bed, now empty of Aeneas but not his accoutrements:

hic, postquam Iliacas vestis notumque cubile

⁷ XI.570-72: *Lucifer obscurus nec quem cognoscere posses / illa luce fuit, quoniamque excedere caelo / non licuit, densis textit sua nubibus ora.*

⁸ *Met. XI.461-63.*

⁹ Lateiner 2013, 60.

¹⁰ *Met. XI.461.*

conspexit, paulum lacrimis et mente morata
incubuitque toro dixitque novissima verba:¹¹

Then as she saw the Ilian clothing and the familiar couch,
she lingered a while, in tears and thought, then
cast herself on the bed, and spoke her last words:¹²

Dido's love affair unfolds in reverse order the chief events of the last days of Alcyone's marriage: first Dido is deluded by Cupid in form of Ascanius, then comes her secret suffering over the love the god has enkindled; only afterwards does her "marriage" to Aeneas take place. By contrast, Alcyone first marries Ceyx, then suffers over Ceyx' absence, then is deceived by Morpheus in the shape of Ceyx. These intertextual references underline the *Aeneid's* own engagement with metamorphosis—a god's transformation that jeopardizes epistemological certainty for the *dramatis personae* of Vergil's epic. Vergil certainly sketches more than one such divine change to bewitch humans—Iris emulating Beroë (*Aen.* V. 613-644) and Allecto imitating Calybe (*Aen.* VII. 413-434) come most immediately to mind—but Ovid's own poem centered on metamorphosis directly asks the question that the *Aeneid* only poses implicitly: is belief in divine providence compatible with gods who are both whimsical and masters of illusion?

¹¹ *Verg. Aen.* 4.648-50.

¹² <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilAeneidIV.html>

Furthermore, the outcomes of these two relationships do not vary wildly. What should be the conjugal paradigm, the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, does not fare much better than the illegitimate pseudo-marriage of Dido and Aeneas. Dido commits suicide after Aeneas leaves her; Alcyone is (perhaps) reunited with the corpse of Ceyx and together, after which they suffer a transformation into birds (see note 741-46 for further elaboration on Alcyone's and Ceyx' transformation). Yet, in the *Aeneid*, there is a direct and proactive intervention on the part of Juno and Venus in trying to bring about the illegitimate pseudo-marriage of Dido and Aeneas. And, Juno, using Iris, intervenes in order to end Dido's long-suffering death.¹³ As perverse as this might be, the intervention shows that gods have some concern over affairs in the human sphere. This concern is completely absent in the Alcyone and Ceyx story.

¹³ *Aen.*, V. 693-705.

474-572: Death of Ceyx: The Tempest

474-553: The *Grand Guignol* depiction of the storm that takes the life of Ceyx and his men invites comparison to other epic storms with dramatic effects. The most obvious intertexts are:

1) the two storms that winnow Odysseus' cohort returning from Troy down to himself alone as the successful survivor and returnee;

2) the storm that opens *Aeneid* I, blowing Aeneas and his surviving crew onto the shores of Carthage (in separate groups eventually recombined).

The contrasts to these predecessors, with which Ovid unfolds Ceyx and Alcyone's story, are striking, and deserve detailed parsing, because they speak to Ovid's engagement not just with his literary predecessors' meteorological aesthetics, but with the cosmology their tempests imply. For example, the fate of the storm-tossed *divi filius* Aeneas is vastly different from his Ovidian counterpart: not only does Aeneas survive the storm, he and his men are welcomed as the guests of Carthage. And Carthage's queen falls in love with him, lavishing him with rich gifts.¹ All this, both the adversity of the storm, and its amelioration and aftermath, happen (according to Vergil) because of concerted divine intervention. On the one side, Juno conspires with Aeolus to release the storm winds. On the other, Poseidon calms the storm, Jupiter reassures Aeneas' mother Venus of the Trojans' glorious future, and Venus strives to secure that future by making Dido fall in love with Aeneas. Furthermore, even Odysseus, who is not descended from any immortal,² is the

¹ *Aen.*, I. 50-720.

² Pherekydes mentions that Odysseus was a great-grandson of Hermes. Although Odysseus might not divine in Odyssey, in later tradition he could be considered to be.

object of divine intervention. At the end of *Odyssey* V, Leucothea intervenes to help him survive the storm Poseidon wreaks upon his flimsy raft, as he sails away from Ogygia and Calypso;³ when he attains Phaiakia, a prayer to the river god calms its waters enough to let him crawl from its mouth onto the dry land.⁴ In *Odyssey* XII, Helios asks Zeus to wreck Odysseus' ships as retribution for eating his cattle. But Odysseus alone survives.⁵ Such fine distinctions between guilt and innocence are not usually observed in the divine punishments, which antiquity records, including in the *Metamorphoses* (for example, in *Metamorphoses* I, despite the fact that it appears only Lykaon offended Jupiter, the whole world drowns for the King's offense). The storms in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* balance vengeful deities with ameliorating deities; on both sides, the storms and their calming sketch agenda. The *Odyssey's* storms conform to the vision of divine justice with which the epic opens: Jupiter opines that men blame the gods for their evils, but in fact bring these adversities on themselves by their bad behavior. He cites the instance of Aegisthus, repeatedly warned by the gods to spare Agamemnon and keep away from his wife; ignoring these warnings, Aegisthus has now met his death at the hands of Agamemnon's son, Orestes.⁶ As often noted, the gods' attempted shepherding of Aegisthus exemplifies the epic's general hunger for a justice greater than the *Iliad* can

³ *Od.*, V. 262-387.

⁴ *Od.*, V. 441-453.

⁵ *Od.*, XII. 374-453.

⁶ *Od.*, I. 22-43.

envision (where human ends are governed by Zeus' apparently random mixing from the two jars of purely evil circumstances, and evil mixed with good). In the *Aeneid*, Jupiter's watch over the Trojans' fate fits his divine plan to bring the whole world under Rome's allegedly benevolent and beneficial hegemony, and to make all of history Rome's history. Insofar as amelioration triumphs over revenge, the storms fit within these agenda as instruments of justice, and (in the case of the *Aeneid*) of providential history.

By contrast, despite his divine father and father-in-law (Aeolus), Ceyx dies in a storm owed to nothing but complete divine indifference. No gods conspire to drown him, but neither do any intervene to keep him safe—including his father-in-law, who controls the winds. It seems, in fact, that Ovid's gods are the "reductio ad absurdum" of Lucretius' sublimely indifferent deities.⁷ But if Ceyx' kith and kin do not trouble themselves over his fate, one might at least have expected Juno, the goddess of marriage, to sympathize with loving spouses and a paradigm of companionate marriage. But Juno's only response to Alcyone's fervent prayers for her (now dead) husband's return is irritation at being bothered. Given his status as a *divi filius*, the indifference and/or negligence from gods that result in his death stands in a stark contrast to the ways in which gods conspire together, albeit in factions, in alignment behind the protagonists of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. Hence, the idea that gods have

⁷ Lucretius, e.g., expels the gods from the creative work of the world (*DRN* 1.158, 2.1090-2) and purges them of any emotion that might ruffle their serenity or motivate them to intervene in human affairs (*DRN* 3.18-24).

any comprehensible attitude towards human beings, including their own progeny, seem to be undermined by Ovid's Great Storm and its consequences for his protagonists.

554 - 557 This imagery of stacking of mountains recall the events of the Gigantomachy in the *Odyssey*, Ὀσσαν ἐπ' Οὐλύμπῳ μέμασαν θέμεν, αὐτὰρ ἐπ' ὈσσηΠήλιον εἰνοσίφυλλον (XI.315-16). For Hesiod, the battle with the monstrous and enormous Typhoeus is the last challenge that Zeus had to overcome in order to consolidate his power; though formally Zeus's battles for supremacy involve separate conflicts with the Titans, the Giants, and Typhoeus, ancient sources often are indifferent to such distinctions, and see them all as types of a cosmic conflict between order and chaos.⁸ Ovid's troping of the theme of gigantomachy by naming new mountains to replace Ossa, Olympus and Pelion implies a fresh challenge to divine order—specifically, a challenge to the epic ideal (sketched in the *Odyssey*, painted fully in the *Aeneid*) that the gods seek to foster the highest good for humans. (The gods of the Ceyx-Alcyone story—like most of the *Metamorphoses'* divinities—have no concerns but themselves, reacting either with indifference or pique to mortals' vulnerabilities.)

Philip Hardie, in his *Cosmos and Imperium*, has demonstrated how the theme of the Gigantomachy is central to the *Aeneid* and is often linked to actual storms, or storm imagery. For example, when Vergil describes the way Aeolus has imprisoned his winds in a cavern—winds that Juno begs him to use to shipwreck the Aeneadae—he evokes

⁸ *Hesiod.Theog.*881-885.

the gigantomachic motif of mountain-mass piled on mountain-mass: *molemque et montis insuper altos / imposuit* (I.61-62). Hardie draws a further connection between this imagery of uprooted and conglomerated mountains and the ships likened to clashing mountains in the depiction of Battle of Actium on Aeneas' shield in Book VIII.⁹ Vergil's depiction of Actium implies that this battle will decisively clinch the supremacy of Jupiter's providential order, establishing the *pax Romana*, and a providential future for the world under Rome's rule, against the monstrous divine and perverse human, forces arrayed against such goods.¹⁰ By contrast, the juxtaposition of storm with gigantomachic imagery in Ovid represents divine and human interests as eternally divided, with gods incapable of magnanimity or forethought.

Implicit in Ovid's revisionist view is not just a challenge to the *Aeneid's* view of the gods, but to its construction of time as a linear progression whose providential fulfillment is Augustus. The parade of heroes in Book VI, although not entirely chronological, progresses in a more or less linear fashion towards the fulfillment of history seen as Roman domination of the world (admittedly darkened by the projected death of Marcellus, but not negated entirely). The replay of Roman history on Aeneas' shield also stretches toward the Battle of Actium as the decisive moment in history, making the beginning of the Roman hegemony over the world. Vergil reflects the

⁹ Hardie 1986, 100-102.

¹⁰ Hardie 1986, 363.

chronological message of Augustan monuments such as the *Horologium Augusti*: The Horologium's gnomon cast its shadow precisely upon the Ara Pacis on the anniversary of Augustus's nativity—the implicit message being that with Augustus' advent in the world, time need no longer progress, but simply circle around the Golden Age of peace he has established.¹¹

The Gigantomachy, an emblem not of complacency with the *status quo*, but of a violent attempt to throw it over, posits an entirely different understanding of the cosmos. The divine forces that dominate the universe have ended neither linear time nor chaotic upheaval—nor is there anything about Ovid's gods that would deserve such serene resolution. In Ovid's cosmos, chaos re-emerges regularly, driven by divine anger, allowed by divine indifference, quelled—at best—by grudging divine intervention.

¹¹ Holliday 1990, 554.

573-649: House of Sleep

573 *Aeolis*: Ovid refers to Alcyone as *Aeolis*, daughter of Aeolus, the ruler of winds. Not only is Ceyx a *filius divi*, so is Alcyone a *filia divi*. The fact that these *filiivivorum* receive little or no attention from their divine fathers or the gods in general, attention begrudging even when granted, further highlights how much this story of Ovid's contrasts with earlier epic tradition. (For more on *filius divi*, see note on 474 ff.)

575 The scene of Alcyone making clothes for her husband draws upon the *Iliad*, in particular Andromache's preparations for the return of Hector (*Il.* XXII.440-1)¹. Both of these women are, at the moment of their husbands' death, preparing new garments to welcome back their husbands and supplicating the gods for returns that are no longer possible.² For more on the comparison between Alcyone and Andromache, see note on 710-720.

578 *tura*: *tus, turis*, usually translated as frankincense, is used to describe scent offerings for religious ceremonies, including in funeral rites (cf., e.g., *Ov. Ep.* 13.113). Although Alcyone's prayer and words indicate that she is not yet aware of Ceyx' fate, her burning of *tura* could indicate her unconscious suspicion that he is dead.

¹ Rudd, Niall, pp. 104.

² Fantham 1979, 337.

579 *Iunonis*: Alcyone prays to Juno and to Juno alone since she is the goddess of marriage. On the other hand, Otis reads this prayer of Alcyone to Juno as an instance of Ovid's expunging from the tale Hesiod's story of a couple guilty of having insufficient reverence for the gods, insofar as they themselves aspired to divine status in their marital love. Otis writes that Ovid is "deliberately stressing Alcyone's piety towards Juno as an implicit contradiction of the old tale."³ However, this comparison of the Ovidian story to the Hesiodic precedent magnifies a problem that is raised in the Ovidian story: it is piety that draws Alcyone and Ceyx to their doom, rather than redeeming them. Ceyx sets out in order to consult the oracle in Claros concerning the troubling fate of his brother:

Interea fratrisque sui fratremque secutis
anxia prodigiis turbatus pectora Ceyx,
consulat ut sacras, hominum oblectamina, sortes,
ad Clarium parat ire deum (410-413)

Meanwhile Ceyx, troubled by heart's anxiety, concerning his brother, and what had followed his brother's strange fate, was preparing to go and consult the sacred oracle of Apollo, at Claros, that reveals human affairs.⁴

³ Otis 1970, 232 ff.

⁴ <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph11.html>

And Alcyone's show of piety -- her visits to the temple of Juno and her prayers to the goddess -- irritates Juno and inspires the goddess' cruelest deception. Thus, Ovid shows that piety is not an unqualified good.

The virtue the Romans thought peculiarly theirs, that particularly defined the ethical side of *Romanitas*, was *pietas*.⁵ Certainly Ovid's most illustrious Latin predecessor, Vergil, had both lauded and problematized this most Roman of virtues in the *Aeneid*. As David Quint has shown, *pietas* in the *Aeneid* conflicts with *clementia*; in Vergil's vision of *pietas*, honoring the deepest social bonds and obligations becomes the driving force behind violent vengeance.⁶ The *Aeneid* raises troubling questions about the value of *pietas*, and whether it is workable as a society's chief ethical principle. Ovid, however, unfolds this question further. For instance, his Althea must struggle within herself when she has to make the agonizing choice between avenging her brothers or protecting her son, who killed her brothers (*Met.* VIII.445-514). This story points out that *pietas* is unworkable in the world of the *Metamorphoses* because its demands are too often competing against each other. Althea cannot satisfactorily fulfill her *pietas* to her brothers as well as her *pietas* to her son. In the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, Ovid seems to problematize *pietas* and its necessity even further; the world of Alcyone and Ceyx is the world in which *pietas* sends Ceyx to death and, by irritating Juno, causes Alcyone's

⁵ See, e.g. Karl Galinsky's discussion of *pietas* within the constellation of Roman virtues (Galinsky 1996, 80-140).

⁶ Quint 1993, 50-96.

deepest suffering. *Pietas* is a concept that hinges on the principle of reciprocity – which renders it inoperable in Ceyx and Alcyone’s world, where gods have no sense of concern with, or obligation to, humans, even when humans are related to them by blood. Here, gods do not observe *pietas*. Ovid’s general elaboration on the conflicting demands of *pietas* in the *Metamorphoses*, and his particular attention to its unintended consequences in the Ceyx and Alcyone story, develops Vergil’s most chilling vision of *pietas* becoming divine ruthlessness. In Book X, in a council amongst the Olympians, Venus speaks:

si nulla est regio Teucris quam det tua coniunx
dura, per eversae, genitor, fumantia Troiae
excidia obtestor: liceat dimittere ab armis
incolumem Ascanium, liceat superesse nepotem.
Aeneas sane ignotis iactetur in undis
et quacumque viam dederit Fortuna sequatur:
hunc tegere et dirae valeam subducere pugnae. (X.44-50)

Father, if there’s no land your relentless queen will grant
the Trojans, I beg, by the smoking ruins of shattered Troy,
let me bring Ascanius, untouched, from among the
weapons: let my grandson live. Aeneas, yes, may be tossed
on unknown seas, and go wherever Fortune grants a road:
but let me have the power to protect the child and remove
him from the fatal battle.⁷

Unlike Ovid’s Althaea, Venus’s decision to choose one object of *pietas* over another (her grandchild over her child) is made apparently without a moment’s regret,

⁷ <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilAeneidX.htm>

and with the same utter negation of any interests but her own that Ovid's testy Juno shows toward *pia* Alcyone.

It is perhaps significant that Alcyone never prays to the gods most closely involved with sea storms—to Poseidon, for example, or her own father, Aeolus. As her warning to Ceyx shows (see note 430-32), she is aware of the unsympathetic and unhelpful attitude of gods toward mortals. Apparently, her desperate investment in her husband's safe return makes her forget this precept and obsessively beg Juno for help.

580 - 582 It is not actually clear which of the three wishes does come true, if any. Ceyx is no longer *sospes* (580); as a matter of fact, the narrator remarks that Ceyx is already dead by the time when Alcyone makes this prayer, *qui nullus erat* (579). The matter of his return is also questionable. In lines 727-28, Alcyone remarks, "*sic, o carissime coniunx, / sic ad me, miserande, redis?*" However, it is not clear whether this floating back of a corpse can be considered a true return of Ceyx. In regards to Ceyx' fidelity, his faithfulness to Alcyone is never questioned by the narrator. A. H. F. Griffin calls him "uxorious"⁸ and Fantham emphasizes that "in everything that precedes the storm Ovid stresses the couple's loyalty."⁹ If his marital loyalty was and is unimpeachable—ironically, made the more certain by his death!—and only one of these wishes came true, it would seem to follow that not only is Ceyx dead (as we already knew), but that he

⁸ Griffin 1981, 147.

⁹ Fantham 1979, 336.

does not, in fact, return to Alcyone, and the lovers are not reunited in posthumous bliss. That would make their “reunion” another instance of illusion. At the moment the transformed Alcyone leaps onto Ceyx’ corpse and begins “kissing” him with her beak, Ovid underlines this dubiety by remarking that people (presumably witnesses) were uncertain whether Ceyx felt the kisses, or whether a wave lifting the corpse’s head had created the appearance of responsiveness (“*senserit hoc Ceyx an vultum motibus undae / tollere sit visus, populus dubitabat,*” XI.739-40). The narrator asserts unequivocally that Ceyx did feel the kisses (“*at ille / senserat,*” XI.740-41)—but without any evidence to refute the witnesses’ perfectly logical deduction that the waves were responsible for creating a mirage.

583 - 584 Juno here is rather unsympathetic. Kathleen Perry even writes, “Her impatience with Alcyone is expressed in minimal terms and so seems scarcely justifiable.”¹⁰ Juno’s chief motivation for sending Iris to the house of Sleep is not to console her suppliant, but to remove Alcyone from her altars. Lateiner remarks that Juno’s orders are “ritually correct,”¹¹ while Fantham calls it an “embarrassment that Ovid’s rather Callimachean Juno is driven to disabuse Alcyone.”¹² However, this indifference that Juno displays toward Alcyone reflects the dichotomy between Ovid’s

¹⁰ Perry 1990, 27. In her discussion on the arbitrary nature of metamorphoses and flawed gods in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

¹¹ Lateiner 2013, 66.

¹² Fantham 1979, 337.

world in the *Metamorphoses* and the cosmological vision that is espoused in the earlier epic tradition, where divine concern for humans existed. (See Notes on lines 474-553).

586 Ovid's Juno calls upon Sleep to act as her agent of deception—to contrive the appearance of the drowned Ceyx in a dream-vision to be sent to Alcyone. Ovid is drawing upon a long epic tradition of Sleep acting as a god's factotum to dupe others. For example, in the *Iliad*, Juno bribes Sleep with a golden throne as well as Pasithea, one of the younger Graces (when the promise of golden throne alone does not convince Sleep), so that Sleep will beguile Zeus to slumber on the heights of Ida. While Zeus slumbers, Hera and Poseidon spur on the Achaians to resist Hector, with the result that Hector is wounded.¹³ In the *Aeneid*, Sleep is given the added power to simulate a living man.¹⁴ Sleep comes to Palinurus, helmsman of the Aeneas' ship, in the form of Phorbas and entices him to sleep,¹⁵ hence making him the single sacrifice that will allow the Aeneadae a safe passage to Italy.

However, it must be considered why Juno sends Sleep rather than the ghost of Ceyx himself. Fantham argues that Ovid substituted the dream impersonator for the spirit of Ceyx because he wanted the episode to culminate in a reunion—of *both* the lovers' bodies—as a precondition for their joint metamorphosis and united happiness. But, as noted above, whether Alcyone's encounter with the drowned corpse can be

¹³ *Iliad*.14.230-268.

¹⁴ Fantham 1979, 338.

¹⁵ *Aen*.5.840-846.

considered a true reunion is open to question; the lovers seem rather to enact a series of substitutions and near-misses, rather than reunions.¹⁶

592 - 604 *Cimmerios*: first appears in the *Odyssey*, ἔνθα δὲ Κιμμερίων ἀνδρῶν δῆμός τε πόλις τε (11.14). Here, Odysseus is preparing to meet the ghosts of the Underworld. LSJ defines the Cimmerians as *a mythical people dwelling beyond the Ocean in perpetual darkness*. Ovid integrates the themes associated with Death to this scene of House of Sleep. In a sense, this is not surprising since Death and Sleep are described as brothers (*Theogony* line 758-76 and *Iliad* 14.231). Homer has them appear together when called to duty by the Olympians—as in the *Iliad* 16, when Death and Sleep carry away the corpse of Sarpedon at Zeus' behest (16.569). However, Ovid conflates the other features from the mythical geography and landscape of the Underworld with the House of Sleep—most notably, the presence of the river Lethe. In the House of Sleep, there should be no need of forgetfulness. There are no mortals present, *non moti flamine rami / humanaeve sonum reddunt convicia linguae* (11.600-601). In the literary tradition, only mortal souls drink from Lethe¹⁷ (see footnote 30 on Lethe in the *Aeneid*). This raises the question: why would a river that induced forgetfulness be necessary to the House where Sleep and Dreams dwell? Ovid nowhere suggests that either the gods or the dreams partake of these amnesiac waters; the detail seems pointless. However, its very

¹⁶ Fantham 1979, 342.

¹⁷ cf. book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Simonides.184.6, Aristophanes' *Frogs*.186, and Plato's *Republic* Book 10 (621a).

incongruity may be the point. The presence of this eye-catching, but inexplicable, detail, strengthens the intertextual connection, not to all epic representations of Hades—Homer seems unaware of Lethe, and Plato regards it as the name of the plane, not the river, from which souls drink to forget (*Rep.* 10.261a)—but specifically to the *Aeneid's* Underworld. Vergil's Lethe confers upon souls the oblivion necessary to their willingness to take on bodies and suffer again through another life—in the case of the future Romans, a stoic endurance crucial to their achieving the glorious future of Rome Anchises outlines for his weary son (*Aen.* VI.748-51). In Ovid's version of the traffic between the realm of the living and an Underworld (Sleep, too, dwells far underground, XI.592-5), only empty dreams and divine illusionists visit the earth—presumably intervening at random when not prompted by some god. Their interventions in history are guided by no overall divine plan such as the one that Vergil's Anchises implies is directing souls returning to earth (*Aen.* VI.713-51). Anchises believes awareness of such a plan should, in particular, inspire his son and his posterity to greater achievement (*Aen.* VI.806-7). Though the difference between a human soul and a dream may seem sharp, Ovid's implicit analogy draws upon the fact that Vergil describes in detail Aeneas' exit from the Underworld through the gate of ivory that releases deceptive dreams (*Aen.* VI.893-9)—as if Aeneas himself were not only a dream, but a false one, just like the false Ceyx Morpheus conjures for Alcyone.

592 Griffin points to the similarities between Lucian and Ovid in both general outline and in detail of the description of the House of Sleep as pointing to a Hellenistic original from which both authors are drawing. He cites as shared details the dim and dusky light of the House of Sleep, the presence of poppies, and a slow, quiet river that meanders through the House.¹⁸ However, Ovid is never a slave to his sources—and the association of such details with Sleep has a long epic history. For example, poppies with their sleep-inducing power are mentioned in *Iliad* VIII.306-7 and *Odyssey* IV.220-30. In Book IV of the *Aeneid*, Dido calls poppies *soporiferum* (IV.486). We should not prematurely dismiss any detail as owed, not to Ovid's textual strategy, but to a merely putative Hellenistic predecessor.

602 - 604 *muta quies ... tamen ... riuus ... murmure*: pleonasm followed by a seeming contradiction. However, *muta* makes it clear that this silence is a dumb, inarticulate silence, unbroken by, e.g., the noise of animals likely be part of the daily experience of Ovid's audience. The juxtaposition of inarticulate murmuring and a river may be significant. In *Met.* XI, after Orpheus is killed and ripped apart, as his head floats down the River Hebrus, his tongue is said to have murmured, *flebile lingua / murmurat exanimis* (Book XI.52-53). Given that the House of Sleep seems to be *fons et origo* of the kind of persuasive vision Orpheus strives to attain with words and music

¹⁸ Griffin 1981, 150.

alone (X.83-85, 148-154), perhaps Ovid is glancing back at his previous arch-artist as outstripped by the House of Sleep's fertile illusionism.

603 *Lethes*: according to the *OLD*, means *a place in the underworld, or its river, whose waters were believed to confer oblivion on those who drank of them*. Aside from associating the Underworld of Sleep with that of Hades—by importing Lethe, traditionally associated with the Underworld¹⁹, to the House of Sleep—the scene also allows for a "contrast between the violence of the former scene (Tempest) and the peacefulness of the latter (House of Sleep)."²⁰ The peacefulness of the House of Sleep is achieved partly through the presence of Lethe, which induces forgetfulness. But perhaps the motif of forgetfulness in a realm ruled by a divinity comments obliquely on the goddess who initiates Iris' visit to Sleep. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas' journey to found the Roman race is shaped not only by Jupiter's great plan for Rome but also by a Juno whose anger is "mindful" (*memor*); she can neither forget nor forgive the causes of her anger: *multum ille et terris iactatus et alto / vi superumsaevae memorem Iunonis ob iram* (Aen. 1.3-4). A few lines later(22-28), this remembering anger of Juno is further elaborated:

Id metuens, veterisque memor Saturnia belli,
prima quod ad Troiam pro caris gesserat Argis—
necdum etiam causae irarum saevique dolores
exciderant animo: manet alta mente repostum
iudicium Paridis spretaeque iniuria formae,

¹⁹ Lethe is described to be in the lower world in: book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Simonides.184.6, Aristophanes' *Frogs*.186, and Plato's *Republic* Book 10 (621a).

²⁰ Bate 2004, pp. 33, as well as Otis.

et genus invisum, et rapti Ganymedis honores.

Fearing this, and remembering the ancient war she had fought before, at Troy, for her dear Argos, (and the cause of her anger and bitter sorrows had not yet passed from her mind: the distant judgement of Paris stayed deep in her heart, the injury to her scorned beauty, her hatred of the race, and abducted Ganymede's honours)²¹

Juno's anger stirs up the storm against Aeneas and the Trojans, and Aeneas is able to survive only through the intervention of Neptune. In the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, on the other hand, there seems to be no divine motivation for the storm that takes away Ceyx' life and no divine intervention to rescue Ceyx. Juno's insistent, mindful divine anger is supplanted by the vagaries of weather. When Ovid's Juno finally makes her appearance in this story, no comment is made about her emotional state. At worst, she appears bored and irritated with Alcyone's constant prayers for the safety of a man already dead. Far from wishing for a decisive intervention into history, Juno wishes nothing more than that Alcyone cease her futile petitioning and leave the goddess' altars alone (XI. 583-4). Ovid's Juno typifies the way this story represents the divine: either as negligently absent (Aeolus and Lucifer, who fail to protect their children) or stirred from indifference only when a mortal breaks in upon their self-absorption (Juno).

²¹ <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilAeneidI.htm>

Penelope relates that dreams come through either an ivory gate or a gate made of horns:

δοιαὶ γὰρ τε πύλαι ἀμενηνῶν εἰσὶν ὄνειρων:
αἶ μὲν γὰρ κεράεσσι τετεύχεται, αἶ δ' ἐλέφαντι:
τῶν οἱ μὲν κ' ἔλθωσι διὰ πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος,
οἱ ῥ' ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπε' ἀκράαντα φέροντες:
οἱ δὲ διὰ ξεστῶν κεράων ἔλθωσι θύραζε,
οἱ ῥ' ἔτυμα κραίνουσι, βροτῶν ὅτε κέν τις ἴδηται.²²

For two are the gates of shadowy dreams, and one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory. Those dreams that pass through the gate of sawn ivory deceive men, bringing words that find no fulfillment. But those that come forth through the gate of polished horn bring true issues to pass, when any mortal sees them.²³

This is echoed in the *Aeneid*:

Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur
cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris,
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes.
his ibi tum natum Anchises unaque Sibyllam
prosequitur dictis portaque emittit eburna,
ille viam secat ad navis sociosque revisit.²⁴

Two gates of Sleep there are, whereof the one, they say, is horn and offers a ready exit to true shades, the other shining with the sheen of polished ivory, but delusive dreams issue upward through it from the world below. Thither Anchises, discoursing thus, escorts his son and with him the Sibyl, and sends them forth by the ivory gate:

²² *Odyssey* 19.562-567.

²³ Translation by A.T.Murray. [from Perseus]

²⁴ *Verg.Aen.* 6.893-898.

Aeneas speeds his way to the ships and rejoins his comrades.²⁵

In contrast to these two precedents, there are no gates for dreams in the world of the *Metamorphoses*. Hence, there is no mechanism at all to discern whether or not their dreams represent events that will come to pass. By removing the gates of dreams, which have been a feature of the earlier epic tradition, Ovid seems to further problematize the epistemology of Ceyx' and Alcyone's world—of human capacity accurately to perceive or understand the world. As Perry observes,

Ovid seems concerned with all too human inclination to misperceive, the most crucial weakness of human cognitive powers being the inability to make subtle distinctions, including, inability to distinguish true perceptions from false ones -- dreams or hallucinations all too often replace reality in the minds of Ovid's characters."²⁶

If dreams and/or hallucinations being sent by gods symbolize another method of communication between mortals and divinities, the loss of a mechanism to discern the truthfulness of the message further problematizes the nature of the relationship between immortals and humans. Prophetic dreams, albeit often as puzzling as spoken oracles or observed portents, are often represented as a channel of communication that may give

²⁵ Translation by H.R. Fairclough (theoi.com)

²⁶ Perry 1990, 39.

humans an insight into what the gods already know (e.g., Latinus' incubation to divine in *Aen.* VII.81-101).

Ovid's blurring of the two different types of dreams, true and false ones, through the omission of the gates of dreams, indicates a further degeneration of the human ability to know the truth and in what terms such a question can be considered. Penelope, as mentioned above, is able to speculate on (though not determine decisively) the validity of her dream using her knowledge of the two different types of gates of dreams: there is a mechanism for discernment, she knows, even if it is unavailable to her. But in the world of the *Metamorphoses*, even this theoretical ability to analyze the truthfulness of a dream disappears.

626 *quae veras aequent imitamine formas*: Here, Iris relays Juno's command to Sleep: to send a dream who, in the guise of Ceyx, will communicate his death to Alcyone. However, this line is perplexing for various reasons. One, *imitamine* seems unnecessary. To equal (*aequent*) already implies that one echoes something else. And it is not at all clear what the *veras formas* are. The presence of "true" forms indicate that there are also false forms, yet there can only be one form for Ceyx. The simple reading of this line would be to assume that the true form of Ceyx is equal to his dead form. However, a dream cannot equal the true forms of Ceyx because the duplicated form would not be able to mimic the real man's—or even the real corpse's—flesh and-blood status. The imitation can only equal the true form to a certain degree. Alcyone's words about her

vision may be significant. She remarks, *non ille quidem, si quaeris, habebat / adsuetos vultus nec quo prius, ore nitebat* (XI.689-90). The obvious way of construing these lines is as a reflection of Ceyx' drowned state—a dead man would not retain the flourishing appearance (*nitebat*) he had in life, and perhaps not his same expression (*vultus*). But Alcyone is also just speaking the plain truth: Morpheus does not share Ceyx' shining beauty or expression, because he is not Ceyx. A third way of reading these lines is as indicating the Morpheus himself is not quite himself—he has not, in this instance, lived up to his reputation as the premier emulator of human shapes (XI. 633-38). No matter how we grapple with these lines, the idea of a reliable, univocal reality behind them—or even the means by which to grope towards one—escapes our grasp.

627 *Herculea Trachine*: Trachis became a Spartan colony in 428 B.C. and was renamed Heraclea as Thucydides tells us.²⁷ Griffin explains this as the "source showing through," but another significance of the adjective *Herculea* can be discerned. Of all the children of Zeus, Hera hates and persecutes Herakles the most. The story of the goddess' persecuting the hero relentlessly occupies much of *Metamorphoses* IX. However, as a compensation for his labors, he is metamorphosized into a deity (*Met.* IX.243-72). By contrast, Ceyx and Alcyone—also children of divinities, and long-suffering, even if their endurance is not of Herculean magnitude—are transformed into birds. Once again, the relationship between divine and the mortals in this generation contrasts with earlier

²⁷ Griffin 1981, 150 (Thucydides 3.92-3).

eras – as though Ovid’s world, or at least parts of it, were continually re-enacting the rapid downward spiral from Golden to Iron Ages, with a concomitantly increasing distance from divine benevolence (cf. *Met.* I.89-162). Mythic chronology makes Herakles one of the earliest and most pre-eminent of the divine-mortal offspring who are heroes. But Ceyx and Alcyone, though also *fili divorum*, have no such heroic extraordinary powers nor even any special divine consideration for their status. Whereas Herakles’ sufferings eventually propel him across the threshold of Olympus and into the status of a (largely invulnerable) god, the reward for Ceyx’ and Alcyone’s divine lineage and travails is...further travails: the mundane and precarious life of sea-birds, marginally ameliorated by a handful of “halcyon” days. Ovid seems to deny the belief that there is benevolent relationship between mortals and gods, and/or that there is special protection for children of gods.

633 - 645 Of thousands of sons of Sleep, only three are named by Ovid, *Morpheus*, *Icelos* or *Phobetor*, and *Phantasos*. Griffin implies that this division of dream activities was included by Ovid since this "sort of neat compartmentalizing appealed to Hellenistic writers" and is "presumed to have a Hellenistic origin since they also are found in Lucian's island of dreams."²⁸ However, Ovid seems to suggest a design behind the naming only these three figures, of which two seem to play no active role in this story. Together these three gods of transformation could reproduce all of transformation

²⁸ Griffin 1981, 150.

that have taken place, or will do so, in the world of the *Metamorphoses*. These three divine figures can mimic the entire cosmos as described by Ovid. Cunning shape-shifters, with the persuasive power of their visions, they indicate the power of Ovid's poem itself. Naming these figures specifically as illusionists alerts readers to scrutinize closely the changes Ovid depicts in the *Metamorphoses*, and to evaluate their significance carefully. Ovid does not describe the three gods' appearances, almost as if they had no forms on their own. He leaves similarly unspecified the shapes of the dreams these gods produce, and the reality—if any—at the dreams' core; *varias imitantia formas / Somnia vana iacent totidem* (XI.613-14). We "see" these dreams, yet we do not actually see what they are fundamentally, only the appearances that they put on. The dreams reflect the virtually unlimited power of the poem's appearances to cover over a deeper reality at which the human observers within the poem can only guess—after all, Pythagoras' assertion that recycled souls lurk under all phenomena is not a conjecture he can support with incontrovertible evidence (*Met.* XV.158-159) .

635 *Morphea*: Morpheus first appears here in *Metamorphoses*. He does not exist in earlier literary tradition as far as can be seen. Hence, Lateiner calls him "the newly minted, once appearing and underappreciated eponymous hero of *Metamorphoses*."²⁹ Although his appearance in the *Metamorphoses* is brief, as the personification of the entire work, his presence is quite significant. His ability is described as both the ability of a

²⁹ Lateiner 2013, 56.

simulator and a *artifex* (634) of human beings. However, *simulator* and *artifex* represent two different roles. And, it is unclear whether Morpheus is merely changing his form, hence Morpheus playing Ceyx as an actor is wont to do, or if his own identity is disappearing into that of Ceyx, Morpheus making himself into Ceyx. Ovid writes that there is no one more skilled at imitating movement, features, and sound of speech of mortals, *non illo quisquam sollertius alter / exprimit incessus vultumque sonumque loquendi* (11.635-36). However, he is not able to mimic completely the form of Ceyx. As pointed out above (Note 626), Alcyone remarks that Morpheus as Ceyx did not perfectly resemble Ceyx, lacking his accustomed features and the flourishing brilliance of his face. Given that the imitator *par excellence* cannot mimic perfectly, it can be inferred that no perfect imitation can exist. So then the function that Morpheus serves in this tale is not to be a *simulator* or an *artifex* but to point to the limits of representation.

650-709: Morpheus and Alcyone

655 - 658 It is unclear in the text exactly when the dream begins. Morpheus is still himself when he arrives in Haemonia. There, standing before Alcyone, he sheds his wings and *abit* into the guise of Ceyx. Then, Morpheus “seems” (*videtur*) to be crying as he lays down next to Alcyone and begins to speak as Ceyx. It does not appear that Alcyone has perceived Morpheus' transformation. She does not even recognize the guise of her husband at first. In that sense, the beginning of the dream appears even more elusive. Before her deception – believing that Morpheus is Ceyx – she is not dreaming, because she is yet seeing what is true, that the unknown figure of Morpheus is lying next to her. However, as soon as she begins to believe that the spirit of Ceyx has come to her, her dream starts. The end of the dream, on the other hand, is clearly marked. After Morpheus has finished his speech as Ceyx and Alcyone has reacted, she finally wakes up from her dream and her sleep.

How far did Morpheus as Ceyx go in his emulation of Alcyone's husband? He lies upon the bed with Alcyone; he moves his hands in the way she remembers her husband doing – to caress her? She tries to take him in her arms. This mild scene of intimacy nonetheless evokes some of the same problems that Plautus' *Amphitryon* poses. Ovid, like Plautus' comedy, seems to question whether or not marital fidelity is possible in a world where a wife cannot distinguish between a false and real husband. In the

cosmos of the *Metamorphoses*, where everything can change shape and gods can mimic all shapes, ethics appears to be a dubious aspiration: for Ceyx and Alcyone, *pietas* is hazardous (see above Note 579), and *fides* confident of its object is impossible.

658 - 659 Morpheus' double-talk, *agnoscis Ceyca, miserrima coniunx, / an mea mutata est facies nece?* predicts the events in the lines 710 ff. Just as she is unable quickly to recognize Ceyx' corpse at a first glance, Alcyone does not recognize Morpheus who has come to her in the "true" form of Ceyx. However, Alcyone does not actually recognize Ceyx in her sleep; in truth, she is deceived into believing that Morpheus is Ceyx. In turn, her recognition at the shore of a corpse as Ceyx is problematized. If Alcyone could be convinced so easily to believe that Morpheus is Ceyx (despite her doubts, expressed in lines 689-90), then it is not possible for readers to discern whether the corpse that floats along the shore of Haemonia is the corpse of Ceyx. It does, after all, take her some time to recognize the corpse as her husband's. Taking into account that any shipwrecked corpse would likely be battered into something unrecognizable, is she correct to do so, or merely thinking wishfully?

660 *umbram*: this word can mean either a ghost or a semblance. In that sense, this line is not a lie. When Morpheus asks whether or not Alcyone is able to recognize the *umbram* of her husband instead of her husband, *inveniesque tuo pro coniuge coniugis umbram* (VI.660), Morpheus is not lying since he has come as a semblance of Ceyx. Ovid, thus, highlights the difficulties in differentiating between what is true and what is false.

676 Alcyone's reply to Morpheus as well as his own speech to her find their

precedent in the *Aeneid*. In the Book II, the ghost of Hector comes to sleeping Aeneas.

Aeneas exclaims,

'o lux Dardaniae, spes o fidissima Teucrum,
quae tantae tenuere morae? quibus Hector ab oris
exspectate venis? ut te post multa tuorum
funera, post varios hominumque urbisque labores
defessi aspicimus! quae causa indigna serenos
foedavit vultus? aut cur haec vulnera cerno?'¹

"Oh light of the Troad, surest hope of the Trojans,
what has so delayed you? What shore do you come
from Hector, the long-awaited? Weary from the
many troubles of our people and our city I see you,
oh, after the death of so many of your kin! What
shameful events have marred that clear face? And
why do I see these wounds?"²

It is said that Homer remarks that body is preserved as beautifully in death as in

life. In *Il.* XXIV.411-423, Hermes, in the guise of Achilles' servant, remarks to

Priam:

ὦ γέρον οὐ πω τόν γε κύνες φάγον οὐδ' οἰωνοί,
ἀλλ' ἔτι κείνος κεῖται Ἀχιλλῆος παρὰ νηϊ
αὐτως ἐν κλισίῃσι: δυωδεκάτη δέ οἱ ἦώς
κειμένῳ, οὐδέ τί οἱ χρῶς σήπεται, οὐδέ μιν εὐλαὶ
415 ἔσθουσ', αἶ ῥά τε φῶτας ἀρηϊφάτους κατέδουσιν.
ἦ μὲν μιν περὶ σῆμα ἐοῦ ἑτάροιο φίλοιο
ἔλκει ἀκηδέστως ἦώς ὅτε δῖα φανήη,
οὐδέ μιν αἰσχύνει: θηοῖό κεν αὐτὸς ἐπελθῶν

¹ <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/227/227-h/227-h.htm>

² <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilAeneidII.htm>

οἶον ἔερσῆεις κεῖται, περὶ δ' αἶμα νένιπται,
420οὐδέ ποθι μιαρός: σὺν δ' ἔλκεα πάντα μέμυκεν
ὄσσο' ἐτύπη: πολέες γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ χαλκὸν ἔλασσαν.
ὥς τοι κήδονται μάκαρες θεοὶ υἱὸς ἔῃος
καὶ νέκυός περ ἔόντος, ἐπεὶ σφι φίλος περὶ κῆρι.³

Old sire, not yet have dogs and birds devoured him, but still he lieth there beside the ship of Achilles amid the huts as he was at the first; and this is now the twelfth day that he lieth there, yet his flesh decayeth not at all, neither do worms consume it, such as devour men that be slain in fight. Truly Achilles draggeth him ruthlessly about the barrow of his dear comrade, so oft as sacred Dawn appeareth, howbeit he marreth him not; thou wouldst thyself marvel, wert thou to come and see how dewy-fresh he lieth, and is washen clean of blood, neither hath anywhere pollution; and all the wounds are closed wherewith he was stricken, for many there were that drave the bronze into his flesh. In such wise do the blessed gods care for thy son, a corpse though he be, seeing he was dear unto their hearts.⁴

This noble portraiture of how gods treated the body of Hector seems to be questioned by Vergil in this quote from the *Aeneid*. And in turn, Ovid questions Vergil's version, where the sufferings of the Trojans (such as Hector) are not only the catalyst for Roman history, but seemingly the justification for this martyred people's transforming from history's losers into history's winners by whatever means necessary—including imperial hegemony over the Mediterranean. Ovid's dead do not come from the Underworld and bear no necessary prophetic knowledge; they originate in the

³ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/homer/greek/ili24.htm>

⁴ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Hom.%20Il.%2024.438&lang=original>

repository of illusions that is the House of Sleep. Ovid aligns the figure of Morpheus with the figure of a writer on the axis of representation. As Garth Tissol writes, there is a "parallel between Morpheus' imitation of forms and the powerfully suggestive *phantasia* of the author, addressed to the imagination of his readers."⁵ Hardie takes this one step further and remarks that "in Morpheus the model (of a figure of the poet) is perfected."⁶ Through Morpheus' ability to mimic not only physical features but also gestures and voices, the god creates a fiction that is life-like, just as a writer does.

686 - 687 *manusque ad discedentem cupiens retinere tetendi*: this line recalls another ill-fated conjugal love from *Met.*, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. This gesture has a long history in Greco-Roman literature. For instance, Achilles tries to hug the ghost of Patroclus in Book XXIII of the *Iliad*: ὡς ἄρα φωνήσας ὠρέξατο χερσὶ φίλησιν / οὐδ' ἔλαβε (99-100), *so saying, he stretched out his hands in vain.*⁷ This phenomenon also appears in Book X of the *Metamorphoses*: *bracchiaque intendens prendique et prendere certans / nil nisi cedentes infelix arripit auras* (58-59). However, the meaning of this gesture is completely different in the story of Alcyone and Ceyx. Both Orpheus and Achilles reach out to touch actual, real spirits of their beloved's. Alcyone fails to grasp Morpheus, not Ceyx as she intends. By inserting what has been an earnest and sincere gesture amongst friends and lovers into the context of deception that was motivated by divine irritation.

⁵ Tissol 1997, 79-81.

⁶ Hardie 2007, 277.

⁷ Translation by A. S. Kline.

700 - 701 *nunc absens perii, iactor quoque fluctibus absens / et sine me me pontus*

habet: this linguistic doubling reflects Alcyone's desire to reunite herself in an absent presence with her husband drowned at sea. A precedent for this doubling can be found in the speech of Dido in the Book IV of the *Aeneid*:

sequar atris ignibus absens
et, cum frigida mors anima seduxerit artus,
omnibus umbra locis adero. (IV.384-86)

Absent, I'll follow you with dark fires,
and when icy death has divided my soul and body,
my ghost will be present everywhere.⁸

As Hardie writes, "there is perhaps ... an echo of the perpetual absent presence threatened to a seafarer by Dido whose intense love has turned to hate."⁹ Bound no less closely by vengeance than by love, not only Dido and Aeneas but also their offspring are bound to each other in perpetuity. The eternal haunting of Aeneas' posterity (the Romans) by Dido's offspring (the Carthaginians) ultimately make the relationship between Aeneas and Dido transform from a union based on love to one united by vengeance. First love, then hate, knit together two peoples (the Trojans—the proto-Romans—and the Carthaginians), achieving on a corporate scale the blurred division between self and other enacted by Alcyone's doubled speech.

⁸ <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen4.shtml>

⁹ Hardie 2007, 279.

701 - 702 Alcyone's ironic and heart-breaking cries emphasize both the elegiac nature of this epic story and the indifference from the gods. Alcyone blames her own mind, *mens*, rather than the gods or her own father. This re-emphasizes the lack of culpability on the part of Alcyone and the heartlessness of the gods in return. Furthermore, the lack of reciprocity of piety becomes re-emphasized (See note 579). Alcyone displays piety when she blames her mind for her dream rather than gods. In the *Odyssey* Book I, Zeus tells other Olympians:

ὦ πόποι, οἷον δὴ νῦ θεοὺς βροτοὶ αἰτιώωνται:
ἐξ ἡμέων γὰρ φασὶ κάκ' ἔμμεναι, οἳ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ
σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν
(I.32-34)¹⁰

How surprising that men blame the gods, and say their troubles come from us, though they, through their own un-wisdom, find suffering beyond what is fated.¹¹

Hence, Alcyone is the model mortal in the world of the *Odyssey*. Even when suffering – suffering that is divinely arranged – happens to her, she still blames herself.

¹⁰ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/homer/greek/ody01.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Odyssey1.htm>

710-748 Reunification of Lovers

710 - 720 Ovid portrays two versions of Alcyone: the one that is very much aware of the truth before the return of Ceyx's corpse and the other that lacks the understanding of the world after the return of Ceyx's corpse. The precedent for this inconsistency can be found in the figure of Andromache in the *Iliad*. Before Ceyx's departure, Alcyone warns him of the fate that awaits her if Ceyx is to die and vividly imagines his danger, describing the gruesome realities of the shipwrecked sailor: *laceras nuper tabulas in litore vidi / et saepe in tumuli sine corpore nomina legi* (428-29). Furthermore, she appears to be the only one who possesses the understanding that divine lineage and family connections cannot guarantee one safety from danger and death (see note on 474-553). Even her outcries, *nulla est Alcyone, nulla est* (XI.684) reveals Alcyone's understanding of her situation that with the death of her husband, she herself will become no one, since their marriage is childless and she, as a widow, is unlikely to be able to retain a grip on Ceyx's kingdom. Similarly, Andromache is able to describe to Hector the realities of fighting against Achilles when she recalls her childhood:

ἦτοι γὰρ πατέρ' ἀμὸν ἀπέκτανε δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς,
ἐκ δὲ πόλιν πέρσεν Κιλικῶν εὖ ναιετάουσαν
Θήβην ὑψίπυλον: κατὰ δ' ἔκτανεν Ἡετίωνα,
οὐδέ μιν ἐξενάριξε, σεβάσσατο γὰρ τό γε θυμῷ,
ἀλλ' ἄρα μιν κατέκρη σὺν ἔντεσι δαιδαλέοισιν
ἠδ' ἐπὶ σῆμ' ἔχεεν: περὶ δὲ πτελέας ἐφύτευσαν

420νύμφαι ὄρεστιάδες κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο.
 οἱ δέ μοι ἑπτὰ κασίγνητοι ἔσαν ἐν μεγάροισιν
 οἱ μὲν πάντες ἰῶ κίον ἤματι Ἄϊδος εἴσω:
 πάντας γὰρ κατέπεφνε ποδάρκης δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς
 βουσὶν ἐπ' εἰλιπόδεσσι καὶ ἀργεννῆς οἴεσσι.
 μητέρα δ' ἦ βασίλευεν ὑπὸ Πλάκῳ ὑλήεσση,
 τὴν ἐπεὶ ἄρ' δεῦρ' ἤγαγ' ἄμ' ἄλλοισι κτεάτεσσιν,
 ἄψ' ὅ γε τὴν ἀπέλυσε λαβὼν ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα,
 πατρὸς δ' ἐν μεγάροισι βάλ' Ἄρτεμις ἰοχέαιρα.
 Ἔκτορ ἀτὰρ σύ μοι ἔσσι πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
 430ἠδὲ κασίγνητος, σὺ δέ μοι θαλερὸς παρακοίτης:
 ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτοῦ μίμν' ἐπὶ πύργῳ,
 μὴ παῖδ' ὄρφανικὸν θήης χήρην τε γυναῖκα¹

Achilles killed my noble father when he sacked Sicilian
 Thebe, that many-peopled city with its high gates. But he
 shrank from despoiling Eëtion though he slew him, sending
 him to the pyre in his ornate armour, and heaping a mound
 above him, round which the mountain-nymphs, daughters
 of aegis-bearing Zeus, planted elm trees. And seven
 brothers of mine, swift-footed mighty Achilles sent to
 Hades, all on a day, killing them there among their
 shambling-gaited cattle and white fleecy sheep. My mother,
 queen below wooded Placus, he dragged here with the rest
 of his spoils, but freed her for a princely ransom, only for
 Artemis of the bow to slay her in her father's house. Hector
 you are parent, brother, husband to me. Take pity on me
 now, and stay here on the battlements, don't make your son
 an orphan your wife a widow.²

Thus, Andromache is able to describe the realities and costs of the pursuit of

heroic *κλέος*, the realities and costs which are often overlooked or ignored by the heroes

¹ *Iliad*.6.414-432.

² Translation by A.S. Kline. (poetryintranslation.com)

themselves. Similarly, Alcyone expresses the costs, not of pursuing kleos, but the more peculiarly Roman virtue of *pietas*, in the world of the *Met*.

But, in Book XXII of the *Iliad*, Andromache's calm behavior and execution of daily duties as her husband meets his death is perplexing. Although earlier in the Book VI, she was keenly aware of the consequences that await Hector in battle against Achilles, in *Iliad* XXII her confident preparations for Hector's return suggest that somehow she has forgotten her earlier perilous predictions.

ἄλοχος δ' οὐ πῶ τι πέπυστο
Ἔκτορος: οὐ γάρ οἱ τις ἐτήτυμος ἄγγελος ἐλθὼν
ἤγγειλ' ὅτι ῥά οἱ πόσις ἔκτοθι μίμνε πυλάων,
440 ἄλλ' ἦ γ' ἰστὸν ὕφαινε μυχῶ δόμου ὑψηλοῖο
δίπλακα πορφυρέην, ἐν δὲ θρόνα ποικίλ' ἔπασσε.
κέκλετο δ' ἀμφιπόλοισιν εὐπλοκάμοις κατὰ δῶμα
ἀμφὶ πυρὶ στήσαι τρίποδα μέγαν, ὄφρα πέλοιτο
Ἔκτορι θερμὰ λοετρὰ μάχης ἐκ νοστήσαντι
νηπίη, οὐδ' ἐνόησεν ὅ μιν μάλα τῆλε λοετρῶν
χερσὶν Ἀχιλλῆος δάμασε γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.³

But Andromache, Hector's wife, as yet knew nothing, no one had even told her that her husband had stayed outside the walls. She was at work in an inner room of the lofty palace, weaving a double-width purple tapestry, with a multi-coloured pattern of flowers. In all ignorance she had asked her ladies-in-waiting to set a great cauldron on the fire so that Hector would have hot water for a bath, when he returned, never dreaming that far from all

³ *Iliad*.22.437-446.

thought of baths, he had been brought low by
Achilles and bright-eyed Athene.⁴

Just prior to the death of their husbands becoming a reality for them when they see and recognize the corpses of their husbands, both Alycone and Andromache appear to have lost touch with reality. As Alcyone stands on the shore, recalling Ceyx's last farewell, she perceives a floating body in the sea, yet her first thought is not of Ceyx. Instead, she pities the corpse, *miser ... quisquis es*, and his putative wife, *siqua est coniunx tibi* (720-21). Fantham writes that Alcyone should not be expected to look for her husband's corpse since Ceyx's shipwreck took place halfway to Claros.⁵ However, there is no indication that Alycone is aware that Ceyx perished halfway to Claros and, as pointed out above, Alcyone *just* has been remembering Ceyx's departure after grieving for him all night, which makes puzzling her inability quickly to recognize the corpse as belonging to Ceyx. Nonetheless, it is not until the corpse floats closer that Alcyone recognizes her own Ceyx, if it can be believed that the corpse would still have been intact enough to be recognized. Certainly, there is a literary precedent for the miraculously preserved corpse; gods protect the body of Hector, which Achilles repeatedly drags it behind his chariot, to prevent the body's damage: τοῖο δ' Ἀπόλλων / πᾶσαν ἀεικείην ἄπεχε χροῖ φῶτ' ἐλεαίρων / καὶ τεθνήτοτα περ: περὶ δ' αἰγίδι πάντα

⁴ Translation by A.S. Kline. (poetryintranslation.com)

⁵ Fantham 1979, 341.

κάλυπτε / χρυσεΐη, ἵνα μή μιν ἀποδούφοι ἐλκυστάζων. (*Iliad* Book XXIV.18-21).

However, there is nothing in the story of Alcyone and Ceyx to indicate that gods are vested in the happiness of this couple until the very end, when they are transformed into birds by unnamed gods, *superis miserantibus* (741). Given that there is very little oversight and aid from gods in the world of Alcyone and Ceyx, readers must necessarily speculate that Ceyx' corpse would have been mutilated beyond recognition. Although that alone does not exclude the possibility of the corpse that floats along the shore actually being the corpse of Ceyx, Ovid creates space for doubt to creep into the lovers' reunion. (See note 658-659 for a fuller discussion)

The analogy between Andromache and Alcyone draws a parallel to Rome's mythic roots in Troy. Vergil had used the figure of Andromache—who, unlike Alcyone, looks for the dead Hektor everywhere, even among the living Trojans who appear to her at Buthrotum—to underline a past that Aeneas, Troy's new Favourite Son, had survived and left behind, while pursuing a future predicated on Rome's imperial triumph under the tutelage of the gods (*Aen.* III. 294-355). By contrast, Ovid's intertextual reference to Homer's poignant heroine in the interlude in the *Metamorphoses'* own version of Troy's story momentarily shifts his focus within that narrative to Troy's fallen—to Andromache as emblem both of human fragility and the fragility of empires.

741- 746 Ovid does not name the gods who perform the miraculous transformation and reanimation of Ceyx' lifeless corpse. Omitting their names, he

implies a certain inscrutability in the divine. The gods who are named in this story, including Juno, Iris, Aeolus, and Sleep, have been models of indifference. The first gesture of pity in this story, not surprisingly, is the act of an unnamed collective, which is if not impossible to map onto the gods who have been named, difficult to assimilate with the gods whose attributes and characteristics Ovid has made known to his readers. A similar story pattern can be found in the Book IV. Cadmus, looking back upon tragic suffering of his family, remarks,

'num sacer ille mea traiectus cuspide serpens'
Cadmus ait 'fuerat, tum cum Sidone profectus
vipereos sparsi per humum, nova semina, dentes?
quem si cura deum tam certa vindicat ira,
ipse precor serpens in longam porrigar alvum.'
(VI.571-75)

'Surely that snake, my spear pierced, must have been sacred, when, fresh from Sidon, I scattered the serpent's teeth, a strange seed, over the earth? If that is what the gods have been avenging with such sure anger, may I myself stretch out as a long-bellied snake.'⁶

Cadmus is, in fact, completely innocent: Thebes' troubles have arisen from Bacchus' and Juno's vengeance upon the city for wrongs real and imagined. Yet immediately after his challenge, Cadmus is transformed into a snake. The text does not name which divinity performs this transformation. Thus, not only are the gods are

⁶ <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph4.htm>

being diabolical, but it is impossible to discern which of them is responsible for Cadmus' undeserved punishment. This increases the sense of incalculability of gods and their will.

Furthermore, the "reward" of transformation that is granted to Alcyone and Ceyx is problematic. For instance, as Perry mentions, a similar transformation is granted to Tereus, Procne, and Philomela, who commit violent and bloody deeds (VI.424-674)⁷ in so much as they, too, are transformed into sea-birds. And so, these two episodes speak to each other insofar as being the most elaborated tales of a marriage whose outcome is transformation into birds. The transformations of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela (rapist husband, murderous wife, and rape victim respectively) and Alcyone and Ceyx contain an element of mechanical reiteration insofar as they, as transformed beings, reproduce the troubles of their lives. Procne, as a swallow, bears the red-stain of the murder of Itys, her son, *neque adhuc de pectore caedis / excessere notae, signataque sanguine pluma est* (VI.669-70). Tereus' savagery and bellicosity is captured in his bird form, *ille dolore suo poenaeque cupidine velox / vertitur in volucrem, cui stant in vertice cristae. / prominet inmodicum pro longa cuspidate rostrum; / nomen epops volucris, facies armata videtur* (VI.67-74). And Procne, who was raped and confined in the woods, haunts the woods as a bird, *corpora Cecropidum pennis pendere putares: / pendebant pennis. quarum petit altera silvas* (VI.667-668). There are no physical characteristics in the transformed figures of Alcyone and Ceyx to

⁷ Perry 1990, 33.

reveal their sufferings in life, as there are for Tereus and Philomela. Rather, Ovid superficially appears to grant to Alcyone and Ceyx an idyllic life after their transformation into halcyons. However, the language that describes their post-transformation life casts doubt on this idyll if carefully parsed:

tunc quoque mansit amor nec coniugiale solutum
foedus in alitibus: coeunt fiuntque parentes,
perque dies placidos hiberno tempore septem
incubat Alcyone pendentibus aequore nidis.⁸

Though they suffered the same fate, their love remained as well: and their bonds were not weakened, by their feathered form. They mate and rear their young, and Alcyone broods on her nest, for seven calm days in the wintertime, floating on the water's surface.⁹

What must be necessarily deduced is that Alcyone and Ceyx will only enjoy seven calm days at sea. For the remainder of their lives, they are forced to suffer the vicissitudes of the sea, mimicking Ceyx' last moments physically and Alcyone's emotionally. To a dispassionate observer, there is no necessary link between the outward appearance and their underlying reality – whether they suffered their transformation as punishment or reward. And that lack of distinction between the outcome of violent marital deception (Tereus, Procne, Philomela) and loving marital

⁸ <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.met11.shtml>

⁹ <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph11.htm>

fidelity combined with *pietas* (Ceyx and Alcyone) recalls and reflects upon the similar lack of distinction between false and true implied in the House of Sleep, which serves as the source of illusion (no gates of horn and ivory can distinguish a false vision from a true one, for example). The bird transformations that make Tereus/Procne/Philomela the most obvious intra-text with Ceyx/Alcyone thus raise the question as to how transformation as a punishment can be differentiated from transformation as a reward.

Conclusion:

No major commentary yet exists for the story of Alcyone and Ceyx in English. The work of Anderson only extends as far as Book X. And both German and Italian commentaries remain elusive to English scholars of Ovid. Yet, as demonstrated above, there is a real need for a commentary on this story. One of the reasons is the appearance of Morpheus in this story. Although he appears only in this story, he represents the hero of the *Metamorphoses*.¹ He possesses all the illusionary possibilities; he is able to mimic and double all human beings, including their habits, looks, voices, and characteristics. In doing so, he comes to represent the writer figure who can create illusions that are at once both believable and insubstantial.

Secondly, the story of Alcyone and Ceyx sets the tone of the books and stories to come. Starting with Book XII, Ovid moves into the "historical" realm, beginning with the Trojan War. He sketches the outline of how the Roman power came to be, starting with the noble Trojans who lose their city, Troy, only to gain an empire, Rome, finally secured and perfected under Augustus. Although epic in its subject matter, the tone that is set by the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, which differs vastly from the themes conveyed in the earlier epic tradition of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*, alerts readers that the

¹ Lateiner 2013, 56.

history of how Rome came to be will be treated very differently from his predecessors' versions of world history. With the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, he sketches a world without divine guidance or divine care. As a matter of fact, there is no plan at all. Alcyone and Ceyx seem to be punished for their piety, rather than for their sins; even the reward that they receive from some unknown gods who take pity upon the pair is not a reward. Under Ovid's direction, the cosmos of the *Metamorphoses* becomes a murky and mysterious place, where the clarity and separation, which began the world in the Book 1, are no longer the governing principles. And this confusion, which Ovid points out, is the status of the Rome in which he lives. Under the rule of Augustus, various aspects of Roman life have been transformed into the purview of the principate and *princeps civitatis*. Even sex, time and history now belong to the emperor: the *Lex Iulia de ordinibus maritandis* dictates how soon, how long and with whom men and women must be in potentially reproductive marriage²; the *Fasti Capitolini* (unlike the consular fasti) start the count of Rome's years from its foundation, rather than from the foundation of the Republic. Now Rome's history is a history significantly rounded into an arc from earliest monarchy to monarchy's latest realization, rather than springing from the decisive rejection not just of Tarquinius Superbus, but of one-man rule. In this new age,³ the most fundamental elements of human existence can shift dizzingly. In essence, the

² Cf. Treggiari 1991, 60-80; Gardner 2013, 33-50

³ Cf. Feeney 2007, 167-82

world that is described by Ovid in the story of Ceyx and Alycone is how Ovid saw Rome.

This story, often valued by scholars for its "seriousness" and "earnestness" as a love story, is a richly woven tale of what it means to exist in a world where we are no longer in control of everything. Nothing is what it appears to be, and there is no way to be certain of anything.

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