Coherence and Context: *Metamorphoses* 14 and Its Place within Ovid’s *carmen perpetuum* Carmen

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The difficulty of defining structural and thematic patterns within Ovid’s *carmen perpetuum* is reflected in the variety of schemes that have been proposed by different critics. Rather than attempting to establish rigidly architectural patterns it is perhaps better to think in terms of structures half sketched out, markers of division which turn out to be only partial barriers against the onward and continuous flow of the poem, clusters of themes and motifs which gradually emerge into clarity and then fade away again – Ernst A. Schmidt uses the musical analogy of an ‘alternating dominance’ of major themes.\(^1\) The text’s impulse to impose order on itself is as often as not followed by an opposing impulse towards disorder. Book divisions are not arbitrary, but the sweep of the narrative across a formal book division can be as effective as the coincidence of the formal beginning or ending of a book with the beginning or ending of a major section of the content of the poem.\(^2\)

I start by looking at the formal features of book division and book numbering. I will then discuss the relationship of the structure of book 14 to the structure of the *Aeneid*, the source of, or at least the point of departure for, much of the content of the book. Comparison of Virgil’s and Ovid’s *Aeneids* will raise a number of themes which contribute to the continuity and coherence of *Metamorphoses* 14.

*Metamorphoses* 14 begins with the continuation of a story already begun, as the frenzy of Glaucus’ frustrated love for Scylla carries him unstoppably from one book to another as he heads for the house of Circe. The reader is also, of course midstream in his passage through Ovid’s ‘little *Aeneid*’ (which had begun at 13.623).

\(\texttt{iamque}\) is the first word of book 3, where the division from book 2 elides the sea-journey of Jupiter in the form of a bull carrying Europa: the story continues as Jupiter has already reached Crete; and of book 7, where the Argo, which had set sail in the last line of book 6, is already in mid-journey. At 14.5-7 Glaucus has already passed through the Straits of Messina, which functions as a narrow geographical divider between major sections of the poem, like the Corinthian Isthmus at 6.419-21 and the Hellespont at 11.194-8.\(^3\) The major section on which we are now entering is the Italian and Roman part of the poem; the transition from Greek myth to Italian stories is a version of the journey from east to west that is the main plot-line of the

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At this point in the *Metamorphoses* Aeneas and the Trojans are still at Messina, where we left them at 13.729. They will not move on from this toehold on Italy, and through the Straits of Messina until 14.75-6, and even then they will not make a proper landing in Italy until they have been blown off course to Africa and come back again. Glaucus’ journey to the home of Circe is thus a displaced continuation of the Trojans’ journey to Italy.

Thus the book opens not with a beginning but with a transition. It closes with one of the most emphatic endings of any book in the poem, the double apotheosis of Romulus and Hersilie, the ending of the successful life on earth of the first king of Rome, and the lasting reunion of husband and wife, a happy ending to marital separation through death. This ending provides a parallel to the happy ending, in mutual love, of the story of Vertumnus and Pomona. This takes place in the time of one of the kings of Alba Longa, but the anachronistic reference to his people as (622) *Palatina gens* illicitly hints that this is already a Roman myth. The story of Vertumnus and Pomona is the last in the series of tales of rapes, or attempted rapes, of nymphs by gods, a series that begins with Apollo and Daphne in book 1. Gregson Davis’ structuralist analysis shows how Pomona, nymph of gardens not of hunting, ultimately defeats our expectations of the behaviour of a nymph towards the erotic approach of a god. As apotheosis, the elevation to the skies of Romulus and Hersilie is parallel to the apotheosis of Aeneas earlier in the book. However, conclusive as it is as an ending to book 14, unlike the Vertumnus and Pomona story, it is not the last in a series, but a foreshadowing of the apotheosis of Julius Caesar at the end of book 15. 14 and 15 both end with apotheosis, a shooting star, and allusion to *Coma Berenices* (on which I will say more below). The penultimate book 14 is already practising the poem’s closural move, in a manner comparable to the multiple openings of the first two books, where cosmogony is followed by a double reversion to chaos, first in the flood, and secondly in the conflagration caused by Phaethon’s chariotteering, in each case followed by renewed acts of creation and cosmic ordering.

Ovid’s narratives of order and disorder are always to be related to the master-narrative of the *Aeneid*. In a book where Ovid is going over the same legendary material as the *Aeneid* we will expect to see a particularly close engagement with the structures of Virgil’s epic. Book 14 begins with a geographical transition that is central to the plot of the *Aeneid*, but it is not a transition that corresponds to a formal division between books or groups of books. Stephen Hinds has brilliantly shown how Ovid does respond to the division between the two halves of the *Aeneid*: the point of separation between the Odyssean and Iliadic halves of the poem, the gap between books 6 and 7, is, rather unusually within the *Aeneid*, bridged by a single short episode, the arrival of the Trojans at Caieta (6.900-1), and the death there of Aeneas’ nurse, who gives her name to the place (7.1-4). In *Met.* 14 Aeneas arrives at the place which does not yet have the name of his nurse at 157,
but for the death of Caieta and her funerary epigram we have to wait for almost 300 lines, until 441-4, four lines corresponding to the first four lines of Aeneid 7. Ovid wrenches apart the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half of the Aeneid, and into the gap he pours the stories told by the internal narrators Achaemenides and Macareus, respectively a retelling of Achaemenides’ Polyphemus narrative in Aeneid 3, and a retelling of Odysseus’ Circe narrative in Odyssey 10, continued with the non-Homeric story of Circe and Picus and Canens. These two narrative blocks mirror the stories of Polyphemus and Galatea and Acis, and of Circe and Scylla and Glauce that occupy the gap between the Trojans’ arrival at Messina at 13.729-30, and their departure from Messina at 14.75, a little over 300 lines later. The Straits of Messina thus serve a further symbolic function, to mark the gap that has opened up within the Virgilian narrative of the continuous journeying of the Trojans in Aeneid 3. 13.730 Scylla latus dextrum, laeuum irrequieta Charybdis, the line that immediately follows the Trojans’ arrival at Messina, is a near repetition of Aen. 3.420 dextrum Scylla latus, laeuum implacata Charybdis, in Helenus’ description to Aeneas of his onward journey, and it immediately follows a striking account of the convulsive separation of Sicily and Italy, Aen. 3.417-19 uenit medio ui pontus et undis | Hesperium Siculo latus abscidit, aruaque et urbes | litore diductas angusto interluit aetu. This is the gap into which Ovid has here poured his first set of Polyphemus and Circe narratives.

Ovid’s distortions of the Virgilian plot are well known. Major episodes or whole books of the Aeneid are reduced to bare summaries: four lines, 14.78-81, reduce book 4 of the Aeneid to a sample of Ovidian word-play (syllepsis, polyptoton, active/passive contrast). Another four lines, 116-19, summarize Aeneas’ Descent to the Underworld in Aeneid 6, before Ovid’s narrative expands into the Sibyl’s account of her love life. Ovid drains the providential teleology from Virgil’s plot: in the Underworld Aeneas sees his ancestors (117 atauos: corresponding to Aen. 6.648-50), but there is no mention of the glorious future awaiting his descendants, and revealed in the Parade of Heroes.\(^7\) Once the reader has finally been brought to the beginning of Aeneid 7, after the lengthy digressions on Polyphemus and Circe, the Trojans at last arrive in Latium, and war breaks out, all in the space of nine lines, 445-53, ending (452-3) diuque | ardua sollicitis victoria quaeritur armis. But the length of that struggle is measured not by lengthy battle narrative, but by an extended series of narratives of metamorphosis (companions of Diomedes; the Apulian shepherd; the transformation of the ships into nymphs), before we return to Virgilian battle narrative at 566-77. The climactic final scene of the Aeneid, the death of Turnus, is hurried over in two words (573) Turnusque cadit, in the middle of a line which then moves on with a second cadit to the destruction and metamorphosis of the city of Ardea, an event that lies beyond the limits of the Aeneid. Note furthermore that the plot of the Aeneid is here rounded off with a city-sacking, not a city-founding – disturbing, since Virgil’s Aeneas is cast in the role of a city-founder, not a ptoliporthos Odysseus.

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\(^7\) Cf. the elision of the oracle in the Delos and Anius episode at 13.632 ff.
One might say that Ovid deconstructs the tight, Aristotelian, plotting of the Aeneid, modelled on the unified plots of the Iliad and the Odyssey, with a more cyclical kind of epic narrating, in keeping with the aesthetic of a perpetuum carmen. But Ovid does not just apply a narratological vandalism to the Aeneid. In some respects he supplies an insightful commentary on Virgilian practice. The abruptness, as an ending, of Turnusque cadit mirrors the abruptness that most readers feel in the last lines of the Aeneid, leaving a sense of unfinished business; the death of Turnus in Met. 14 does not even fill out a whole line. There is more of a sense of an ending in the Aeneid’s final scene on Olympus, the interview between Jupiter and Juno in book 12, which supplies answers to Jupiter’s opening question to his wife, 12.793 ‘quae iam finis erit, coniunx?’ In the closing lines of his ‘little Aeneid’, following the fall of Turnus and the fall of Ardea, 581-608, Ovid provides a scene on Olympus which does provide the emphatic closure that Virgil had avoided in the last lines of the Aeneid, but which is foreshadowed elsewhere in the Aeneid. Met. 14.581-2 writes finis to the wrath of Juno, iamque deos omnes ipsamque Aeneia uirtus / Iunonem ueteres finire coegerat iras, alluding both to Juno’s renunciation of her anger at Aen. 12.830-41, and to the reference to Juno’s ancient anger at the beginning of the Aeneid, 1.23-6 ueterisque memor Saturnia belli ... necdum etiam causae irarum saeuique dolores / exciderant animo. Ovid then replaces Virgil’s final interview between Jupiter and Juno with a repetition of the Aeneid’s opening scene in heaven, the interview between Jupiter and Venus in book 1. In Met. 14 Venus’ seductive approach to her father slides into a full-scale concilium deorum, which ratifies the apotheosis of Aeneas, which had already been promised by the Virgilian Jupiter to Venus at Aen. 1.259-60 (sublimemque feres ad sidera caeli / magnanimum Aenean), an apotheosis which is then circumstantially narrated by Ovid at 14. 596-608. The Ovidian passage is a source for the description of the apotheosis of Aeneas in the conclusion of Virgil’s unfinished business by the Italian humanist Maffeo Vegio in his book 13 of the Aeneid (1428). As we have seen, the apotheosis of Aeneas is mirrored in the apotheosis of Romulus (and Hersilie) which constitutes the emphatic ending of Met. 14. The reunion of Romulus with his wife, in the form of gods, may contain further allusion to the Jupiter and Juno scene in Aeneid 12, a scene in which a divine husband is reunited with his wife in marital harmony, and a scene which contains allusion to Catullus 66, the Coma Berenices, as too does Ovid’s description of the apotheosis of Hersilie, Met. 14.847-8 a cuius lumine flagrans / Hersilie crines cum sidere cessit in auras.

Other aspects of what at first sight appear to be Ovidian deformations of the Aeneid may instead send us back to look at Virgil’s epic with fresh eyes. It may seem that Ovid fragments a providential plot into a series of tales of metamorphosis, but metamorphosis is in fact an important element in the Aeneid, with consequences for

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8 However the enmity of Saturnia and Venus at 782-3 seems at odds with definitive (?) ending of wrath of Juno at 581-2, and perhaps with Juno’s straightforward support for the wife Hersilie at 829 ff.

the way in which we think about the stability and ‘normality’ of the world of Aeneas, and, by implication, about the stability of the world of Augustus and Virgil’s Roman reader.\textsuperscript{10} The transformation into birds of the companions of Diomedes, and the transformation into nymphs of the Trojan ships, are both narrated by Virgil, in books 11 and 7 respectively of the \textit{Aeneid}. \textit{Met.} 14 begins with the arrival in Italy not of the Trojans, but of Glauclus, leading into a story about the harmful transformative power of Circe. In \textit{Aeneid} 7 the Trojans sail past the home of Circe, so avoiding what happened to the companions of Odysseus. But when they arrive in Italy they find a land where the effects of Circe’s dark magic are still present, where animals can behave like humans, and humans – above all Turnus - are threatened by bestialization of a more figurative kind.\textsuperscript{11}

The eroticization of the \textit{Aeneid} in \textit{Met.} 14 is of a piece with Ovid’s irreverent treatment of the epics of Homer and Virgil elsewhere, but here, as elsewhere, there is a serious point: love, and the destructive power of love, do play an important role in the \textit{Aeneid}. Ovid touches briefly on the roles of Dido and Lavinia, so important for the plot of the \textit{Aeneid}; the reunion in heaven of Romulus and Hersilie, I have suggested, may allude to the ultimately harmonious marital relationship between the Virgilian Jupiter and Juno, while the ill-starred love triangle of Picus, Canens, and Circe resonates thematically and verbally with the triangle of Aeneas, Lavinia and Turnus. Within the \textit{Aeneid} doomed and passionate love must yield to stable marriages, although notoriously Virgil tells us nothing about the happy home life of Aeneas and Lavinia. In \textit{Met.} 14 there is a more balanced contrast between destructive and constructive episodes of love: the unbridled eroticism of Circe in the love triangles involving Glaucus and Scylla, and Picus and Canens, is contrasted with the mutual loves of Vertumnus and Pomona, and Romulus and Hersilie. The story of Vertumnus and Pomona is the last erotic narrative in the poem, and Romulus and Hersilie are the last example of happy conjugal love, a theme which has a particular appeal for Ovid in the \textit{Metamorphoses}. The initially reluctant Pomona ends up as the opposite of the stoney-hearted Anaxarete; as a reluctant virgin punished, Anaxarete mirrors the Sibyl earlier in the book. As we have seen, the story of Vertumnus and Pomona is the last in the series of rapes, or attempted rapes, of nymphs, that begins with Apollo and Daphne, and which is satisfyingly brought to a conclusion when attempted rape turns into mutual love. The story of Apollo and the Sibyl is a throwback to Apollo’s first unsuccessful pursuit of a virgin, and so \textit{Met.} 14 in a sense contains the beginning and end of the whole series.\textsuperscript{12}

Finally I want to look briefly at Ovid’s ‘little \textit{Aeneid}’ in the context of the ‘little \textit{Iliad}’ in books 12 and 13, and also in the context of what one might call Ovid’s ‘little

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\item[12] \textit{133 si mea virginitas Phoebi patuisset amans} \textit{1.486-7 da mihi perpetua ... virginitate fru}; with \textit{134 dum tamen hanc sperat} Myers compares \textit{1.491 quodque cupit, sperat}. Daphne is transformed into the evergreen laurel (1.564 \textit{utque meum intonsis caput est iuuenale capillis}); the Sibyl forgets to ask for (14.140) \textit{aeternamque iuuentam}. With 14.142 \textit{innuba permaneo cp. 10.92 innuba laurus}.
\end{itemize}
Annales’ in the closing section of book 14 and in book 15. The ‘little Iliad’ contains much less erotic material than the ‘little Aeneid’, but the Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths, a substitute for a full-scale re-narration of the Trojan War, is occasioned by attempted wife-snatching, as the Trojan War was provoked by the theft of a wife. But the closing sequences of Ovid’s Iliad and Aeneid do converge. In both a war ends with the sack of a city (Troy, Ardea), and there are still closer parallels between the concluding sequences that follow the destruction of a city. Firstly 13.572-622: (i) all the gods and Juno herself are moved by Hecuba’s fate (573-5). (ii) The goddess Aurora is self-deprecating about her own very minor divinity, 587-9 omnibus inferior, quas sustinet aureus aether / ... / diua tamen ueni; but she successfully supplicates the great Jupiter on behalf of her son, who is granted a kind of resurrection, to be repeated in the annual reappearance and mutual slaughter of the Memnonides birds. Turning to 14.581-608: Venus successfully supplicates Jupiter on behalf of her son, who is granted divinity, albeit of a minor kind, 14.589-90 quamuis paruum des, optime, numen, / dummodo des aliquod. All the gods, including Juno, give their consent to the deification of Aeneas (591-2). Furthermore Aurora/Eos’ appeal to Vulcan/Hephaestus on behalf of Memnon, in the Aithiopis, is alluded to by Virgil’s Venus at Aen. 8.384 in her seduction of Vulcan, a scene with which Venus’ approach to Jupiter in Met. 14 has points in common. The general question that I want to raise is whether these intratextual correspondences between Ovid’s ‘little Iliad’ and his ‘little Aeneid’ are some kind of a comment on the intricate intertextuality between Virgil’s Aeneid and Homer’s Iliad. Ovid’s Aeneid reworks and revises Ovid’s Iliad, as Virgil’s Aeneid does Homer’s Iliad. Ovid.

By contrast Ovid’s ‘Odyssey’ is incorporated within his ‘Aeneid’, at 14.158-440, which retell adventures of Odysseus in books 9 and 10 of the Odyssey. Achaemenides’ narrative of Polyphemus is a tour de force of intertextual play, engaging with the Homeric original and with Virgil’s version thereof in Aeneid 3. Macareus retells a Homeric episode, Circe and the companions of Odysseus, which is not directly reworked by Virgil, and then supplements it with a non-Homeric episode which combines Homeric and Virgilian elements in a different fashion: the story of Picus and Canens is both another example of the Homeric Circe’s lustfulness and magic powers, and an expansion of Virgil’s brief allusion to the metamorphosis of Picus (Aen. 7.189-91).

Finally just two points on Metamorphoses 14 in the context of Ennius’ Annals. Imitation of the Annals comes after the ‘little Aeneid’, in terms of literary history chronologically out of order, but a straightforward reflection of the fact that Virgil chose a legendary subject that predated the historical subject-matter of the Annals (unless one wants to think of both Virgil’s and Ovid’s Aeneids as expansions of the presumably very summary Ennian account of Aeneas’ flight from Troy). Secondly, when we come to the end of Met. 14 we find the kind of exact marching in step with the structure of the Ennian original that we did not find with respect to the structure of the Aeneid in the bulk of the book. Met. 14, like Annals 1, ends with the apotheosis of Romulus, and Met. 15, like Annals 2, begins with Numa. It is only thereafter that Ovidian games with the structure of Ennius’ Annals begin, as the Speech of Pythagoras takes us back to the very beginning of the Annals and the Speech of Homer.