HUMOUR IN THE UNDERWORLD OF OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*
HUMOUR IN THE UNDERWORLD OF OVID’S METAMORPHOSES

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LAY ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with Ovid’s representation of the Underworld and its inhabitants in the *Metamorphoses*, as depicted in the episodes of Aeneas (*Met.* 14.101-157), Cerberus (*Met.* 7.404-424), Juno and Tisiphone (*Met.* 4.432-511), Pluto and Proserpina (*Met.* 5.356-571), and Orpheus (*Met.* 10.1-11.66). Each chapter has two aims: to provide a thorough literary criticism of the episode, concentrating on Ovid’s use of humour and wit (and pathos, where appropriate), and to examine the intertextuality between the episode and the corresponding literary model. Ultimately, Ovid, by using a combination of literary techniques, brings levity and humour into these scenes while recognizing the often-serious subject matter and evoking sympathy from the reader. In addition, Ovid embraces his literary models, but always alters them, whether by omitting details that do not suit his purpose, ‘correcting’ particular aspects established by his predecessors, or inserting features of his own invention into his work.
ABSTRACT

The Underworld, a realm of misery, pain, and both literal and figurative darkness, is perhaps an unlikely place for humour and levity, yet in the *Metamorphoses*, not even it is exempt from Ovid’s characteristic wit. While scholars have explored Ovid’s use of humour in the poem overall, little focus has been given to the Underworld itself.

The introduction will serve as an overview of Ovid’s Underworld, providing a catalog of the flora and fauna (both mortal and immortal, human and beast) present there, as well as its geography (the location of the entrance to the Underworld, the regions and the structures within it). Each subsequent chapter will explore a specific passage, presenting a detailed critical appreciation that examines the tone, structure, style, plot, language, sound, and narrative techniques (such as irony, imagery, allusion, similes, etc.), and also compare each episode with its corresponding literary model. Relevant passages include the descent of Aeneas and the Sibyl into the Underworld (*Met.* 14.101-157), the retrieval of Cerberus by Hercules (*Met.* 7.404-424), the destruction of Athamas and Ino at the hands of Juno and Tisiphone (*Met.* 4.432-511), the abduction and rape of Proserpina by Pluto (*Met.* 5.356-571), and the descent of Orpheus into the Underworld to revive Eurydice (*Met.* 10.1-11.66).

This thesis will demonstrate that Ovid’s Underworld is depicted as dark and dismal – perhaps as expected – but it is also erudite, cleverly crafted, complex in tonality, and often a source of humour. Ovid consistently lightens the mood of traditionally serious myths and pokes fun at his predecessors, often achieved at the expense of the Underworld’s inhabitants, by diminishing their dangerous and fearsome nature to
exaggerate their ineffectuality and absurdity. Ultimately, the Underworld of the

*Metamorphoses* effectively exhibits Ovid’s wit and ingenuity.
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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The author declares that the content of this thesis has been completed by Emily Sumpter, with recognition of the contributions of the supervisory committee, consisting of Dr. Paul Murgatroyd, Dr. Kathryn Mattison, and Dr. Spencer Pope, during the researching, writing and editing process.
INTRODUCTION

At several points within the *Metamorphoses* Ovid uses the Underworld as a backdrop and its denizens as central figures of the narrative (*Met*. 4.432ff, 5.356ff, 7.408ff, 10.1ff, 14.101ff). When these multiple accounts are combined, a clear and consistent image of Ovid’s Underworld emerges, revealing its location, geography, structures, and inhabitants. This catalog of Ovid’s Underworld can then be compared to a more expansive tradition of the description of the Underworld, comprised of the accounts of Homer, Hesiod, Bacchylides, Aristophanes, Tibullus, Lucretius, and Virgil, to determine which aspects Ovid adopted from his predecessors, or apparently conceived himself. This chapter will first provide an overview of Ovid’s Underworld, and then identify the traditional and the rare or unique aspects that Ovid chooses to include in his accounts, and the effect they have on the Underworld. It is important to note that these new aspects are apparently rare or unique up to Ovid’s time, but due to the vast amount of lost texts it is possible that Ovid was drawing on works which are no longer extant.

There are several entrances to Ovid’s Underworld: a cave in Scythia with a shadowy entrance (*Met*. 7.407-9), at Avernus (*Met*. 14.105), and the gates of Taenarus (*Met*. 10.13). Beyond the entrance, a downward sloping footpath leads to the Underworld proper (*Met*. 4.432, 7.410, 10.53), passing *per muta silenta* (*Met*. 4.433), and lined with funereal yew trees, causing the path to be enclosed by gloom (*Met*. 4.433). The Underworld itself is described as dark (*Met*. 5.359, 10.15), shadowy (*Met*. 4.455, 5.507), awful (*Met*. 4.477, 10.29), desolate (*Met*. 4.436), vast (*Met*. 10.29), and cold (*Met*. 4.436). Those who inhabit the Underworld appear just as unpleasant as the place itself: Ovid
mentions the presence of Pluto, Proserpina, Charon, Cerberus, the Furies, and the sinners of Tartarus, including Tityus, Tantalus, Sisyphus, Ixion, and the Danaids. Pluto, referred to as terrible (*Met. 14.116*), dark (*Met. 4.438*), and the *rex silentum* (*Met. 5.356*), rules over the Underworld alongside his wife Proserpina, and the pair reside in a palace amongst the shades (*Met. 4.438*). Charon, although not mentioned by name and only referred to as the ferryman, continues with his traditional task of ferrying the dead across the river Styx (*Met. 10.73*). The Styx, which *nebulas exhalat iners* (*Met. 4.434*), is one of the three rivers of the Underworld mentioned by Ovid, as well as the rivers Acheron and Phlegethon.

Cerberus, ever the terrifying beast, is described as Echidnean (*Met. 7.408*) and *Medusaum monstrum* (*Met. 10.22*), and guards the entrance to Tartarus with his three necks, which are *villosa colubris* (*Met. 10.21-22*). In addition to Cerberus, the Furies also guard the adamantine gates of Tartarus – they sit outside the prison, which holds the most wicked individuals, and *suis atros pectebant crinibus angues* (*Met. 4.454*). They are referred to as the *sorores Nocte ... genitas, grave et inplacabile numen* (*Met. 4.451-2*), and Ovid pays particular attention to one of them, Tisiphone, describing her as pitiless, and having a *madefactam sanguine facem* and a *fluidoque cruore rubentem pallam* (*Met. 4.481-3*). The sinners are separated from the common shades and suffer their traditional punishments in the *scelerata sedes* (*Met. 4.456*): Tityus is stretched out over nine acres and exposes his entrails for birds to peck at; Tantalus tries in vain to catch water and overhanging fruit that always escapes his grasp; Sisyphus rolls a boulder up a hill, which rolls back down before it ever reaches the peak; Ixion spins around on a wheel; and the
Danaids attempt to carry water in vessels which contain holes. While the wicked are tortured, the common shades reside in the Stygian city and spend their afterlife as though they were still alive, wandering about the forum and palace, practicing the trades that they formerly practiced in life (Met. 4.444-5). Despite the obvious funerary nature of the Underworld, signs of life still remain as the foliage seems to thrive: there are well-tended gardens (Met. 5.535) and references to pomegranate and other types of trees (Met. 5.536, 4.433, 4.459). The exit from the Underworld is by way of the entrance footpath, and involves a similar journey up the steep path and through the thick darkness and mute silence (Met. 14.122, 10.53), but the return is described as fearsome, for unspecified reasons (Met. 14.122).

By Ovid’s time, numerous accounts of the literary Underworld existed and a tradition had been established. This tradition forms the foundation of Ovid’s Underworld. In the traditional literary Underworld, there is a known cast of characters, either featured prominently or only mentioned by name: Pluto, Proserpina, Charon, Cerberus, the Furies, and the greatest sinners, most often Tantalus, Tityus, Sisyphus, Ixion, and the Danaids. Pluto and Proserpina, as rulers of the Underworld, are influential figures, and appear consistently in the works of Hesiod, Homer, Bacchylides, Aristophanes, and Virgil. These authors often describe them using language that emphasizes their power, position and danger, such as ἱφθιμὸς Ἄιδης καὶ ἐπαινὴ Περσεφόνεια (Hes. Theog. 768; Hom. Od. 11.47), regem tremendum (Virg. Georg. 4.469) and ἀγαυὴ Περσεφόνεια (Hom. Od. 11.214). Charon is not always present in accounts of the Underworld, but he remains an important figure, charged with the task of ferrying the dead, and occasionally the living,

Cerberus is a popular denizen of the Underworld, mentioned in Hesiod, Bacchylides, Aristophanes, Lucretius, Tibullus, and Virgil. He is traditionally the guard-dog of the Underworld, but the area that he guards varies from Tartarus (Tib. 1.3.71-2), the House of Hades and Persephone (Hes. *Theog.* 767ff), to the entrance of the Underworld proper (Virg. *Aen.* 6.417ff). Regardless of his location, his portrayal remains consistent: he is aggressive, dangerous, and monstrous. Authors describe Cerberus as black (Tib.. 1.3.71), huge (Virg. *Aen.* 6.400), terrible (Hes. *Theog.* 769), pitiless (Hes. *Theog.* 770) and the υἱὸν ἀπλάτοι᾽ Ἐχίδνας (Bacchyl. 5.62). He has jagged teeth (Bacchyl. 5.60), and triple jaws (Virg. *Georg.* 4.483) that produce a *latratus trifaux* (Virg. *Aen.* 6.417), and *horrere colla colubris* (Virg. *Aen.* 6.419) which hiss from their wide mouths (Tib. 1.3.71). He is a threat to both the dead that reside in the Underworld, whom he devours when they try to escape (Hes. *Theog.* 769), and the living that journey there. The Furies are similarly terrible and menacing: they are described as savage (Virg. *Aen.* 6.572), having wild (Tib. 1.3.69) and *caeruleos implexae crinibus angues* (Virg. *Georg.* 4.482), and Tisiphone in particular as avenging (Virg. *Aen.* 6.570) and *palla succincta cruenta* (Virg. *Aen.* 6.555). Their appearance matches the grotesqueness of the area in which they reside, and their duties. They inhabit the worst region of the Underworld, Tartarus – also referred to as *sedes scelerata* (Tib. 1.3.67) – where the wickedest sinners are imprisoned and tortured (Tib 1.3.67ff.; Lucr. 3.978ff; Virg. *Georg.* 4.481ff; Virg. *Aen.*
6.542ff): in some accounts they guard these sinners (Virg. *Aen.* 6.554ff) and in others they administer the punishments themselves (Tib. 1.3.69-70; Virg. *Aen.* 6.570ff). The combination of sinners present depends on the account: Tantalus is described in Homer, Lucretius, Tibullus, and Virgil; Tityus in Homer, Lucretius, Tibullus and Virgil; Sisyphus in Homer, Lucretius and Virgil; the Danaids in Lucretius and Tibullus; Ixion in Tibullus and Virgil. However, they all suffer their traditional punishments, with the exception of Tantalus in Lucretius’ account, where he is forever threatened by a boulder looming overhead (Lucr. 3.980).

Despite the influence of previous authors on Ovid, and his adoption of the literary tradition of the Underworld, he seems to have included distinctive details to make his account original. A small and seemingly insignificant detail that Ovid includes is the presence of yew trees along the path into the Underworld (*Met.* 4.432). The yew tree, with its gnarled trunk and roots, makes for an unsightly and unsettling addition to the Underworld. While ugly in appearance, the yew is useful in function: its low-hanging branches and dense foliage blocks the light and obscures the surrounding area. It is also fitting that the yew is the tree of the Underworld, as it is death-bringing due to its poisonous berries. However, it would only serve a symbolic purpose, since the poison could surely cause no substantial harm to those residing there, since they are already dead. This detail is in fact unique and it is the first reference to yew trees in the

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Underworld. The specific tree previously associated with the Underworld was the elm, as referenced by Virgil (Aen. 6.282). HIEMS, another seemingly trivial detail, is one of the many words Ovid uses to describe the Underworld (Met. 4.436). Hiems is not significant on its own, but in its context: this is one of the few instances where the Underworld is described as cold. It is often dark, damp and grim, but rarely cold. Hesiod appears to be the first to describe the Underworld as κρυερός (Hes. Op. 153), a detail Ovid later reintroduces. This detail is analogous to the process of algor mortis, the cooling of the body after death, which has a morbid and ominous effect. The use of hiems suggests that the Underworld is an uncomfortable place to be, both physically and mentally: the pervasive and inescapable cold temperature would surely be damaging to the body and maddening to the mind, adding a sense of bleakness to the already depressing atmosphere of the Underworld. The cold often has the ability to shock and stun the mind and body, such as when one is first submerged in ice-cold water, which perhaps suggests that the effect of the Underworld is similar, that it shocks those who first enter due to fear, astonishment, and unfamiliarity.

The traditional literary Underworld features various built structures, similar to those found on earth. Walls and gates made of bronze (Hes. Theog. 724) or adamant (Virg. Aen. 6.552) divide the regions of the Underworld and contain those inside, a broad fortress (Virg. Aen. 6.549) imprisons the most despicable criminals, and the guards oversee the prisoners from an iron tower (Virg. Aen. 6.554), while Hades and Persephone and various other deities reside in their houses and palaces in the Underworld (Hom. Od.

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4 Ibid.
11.571; Hes. *Theog.* 758, 767; Bacchyl. 5.59; Ar. *Ran.* 162). Ovid follows this tradition, but takes it further by incorporating an entire city into the Underworld (*Met.* 4.437ff). This Stygian city is described as vast and populous (*Met.* 4.437, 439), and although similar to a mortal city, it still includes unnatural or exaggerated features, such as *mille ... aditus et apertas undique portas* (*Met.* 4.439-40), and it *omnes animas accipit, nec ulli exiguis populo est, turbamve accedere sentit* (*Met.* 4.441-2). The city contains various buildings, including a forum where the shades wander, and a palace where Pluto and Prosperina reside among their subjects (*Met.* 4.443-4). This is the first reference to a city existing in the Underworld, and so its presence is strange and unexpected; it is somewhat unnerving that the Underworld mimics life on earth in such a way, but it also makes the Underworld appear normal, like a proper mortal kingdom, which possibly offers comfort and a sense of familiarity to the dead. This city is an intriguing feature, and raises many questions: there is no suggestion as to why the city was built or even necessary, or who built it. Whether this city has a specific function – cities are typically built as a defense against attacks and for the efficient production and collection of resources, neither of which pertain to a dead population – or if it is merely decorative, is unclear. However, it does demonstrate a high level of organization within the Underworld: some workforce was brought together to build the city, which presumably functions efficiently and orderly, and the citizens appear to have specialized jobs. How exactly these ghostly citizens spend their days is uncertain, besides wandering the forum and pointlessly

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practicing their trades. Ultimately, there is little known about this city and how it functions.

Within the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid narrates the descent of several individuals, both human and divine, including Juno, Orpheus and Aeneas. These are not the first accounts of the descent of a deity or hero, but Ovid’s account of Juno’s journey to the Underworld is the first account of her descent, and the first descent of a female deity. Once in the Underworld the individual, not wanting to delay or sightsee, sets out on his or her quest, which often involves interacting with the denizens. According to the tradition, many of the quester speak exclusively with the shades of their former friends and family, and their conversations are directly quoted: Heracles speaks to Meleager’s shade (Bacchyl. 5.86ff); Odysseus to the shades of Elpenor, Tiresias, Anticleia, Agamemnon, Achilles, Ajax and Heracles (Hom. *Od.* 11.57ff, 90ff, 155ff, 397ff, 473ff, 553ff, 617ff); and Aeneas to the shades of Palinurus, Dido, Deiphobus, and Anchises (Virg. *Aen.* 6.341ff, 456ff, 500ff, 687ff). Occasionally, the quester speaks directly to one of the divinities of the Underworld, either the King or Queen themselves, or a lesser divinity, such as the Furies: Dionysus speaks mainly to Charon, and the shades of Aeacus, Euripides and Aeschylus, but also quips back and forth with Pluto (Ar. *Ran.* 463ff, 830ff, 1416ff); Juno speaks to Allecto, although not in the Underworld (Virg. *Aen.* 7.331ff); Orpheus addresses the entirety of the Underworld, but none of his song is quoted directly (Virg. *Georg.* 4.469ff). In Ovid, two of the three questers speak directly to divinities: Juno addresses the Furies in

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7 Galinsky (1989): 84.
merely three lines (*Met.* 4.466-8), while Orpheus, seemingly without precedent, sings specifically to Proserpina and Pluto in over twenty lines, with his entire song directly quoted (*Met.* 10.17-39). This lengthy address places emphasis on Orpheus, rather than the more powerful and important deities: the attention of the reader and the occupants is directed towards him as he sings. He is respected by the inhabitants and has a commanding presence, in control of the situation as the entire enthralled Underworld listens to this song silently and without interruption. Interestingly, not even Pluto’s reply to Orpheus’ song is quoted, suggesting an inequality: here, Orpheus is the active, speaking individual, and Pluto the passive, listening one.

Ovid’s detailed account of Cerberus’ ascent to earth is also unique, although it is not the first allusion to Hercules’ forceful removal of Cerberus from the Underworld. Typically, references to Hercules’ twelfth labor are vague (Hom. *Od.* 11.623-5; Ar. *Ran.* 111, 467-8; Bacchyl. 5.60; Virg. *Aen.* 6.395-6) – it is mentioned only in passing and with little detail, and Cerberus barely leaves the Underworld. Ovid, on the other hand, allows Cerberus to be the focus of the account, and devotes almost a dozen lines to describing Cerberus’ emergence from the Underworld, and the results of his presence on earth (*Met.* 7.408-19). The description is detailed and violent, with Cerberus howling, shaking his head and spraying froth from his mouth everywhere, almost as if he is rabid (*Met.* 7.414-5). Cerberus is built up as a formidable enemy, one that is terrifying, vicious, and hard to control. In turn, this reinforces Hercules’ heroism and the magnitude of his labour, as well the courage of anyone that subsequently encounters and subdues Cerberus. Since Cerberus’ presence on the earth’s surface, as well as descriptions of it, are rare,
descriptive accounts such as Ovid’s appear significant, authoritative, and inventive. Despite the largely terrifying nature of the beastly residents of the Underworld, Ovid also includes small, unique and often humorous details that give a glimpse of a different side to these creatures. Ovid has the Furies, those vindictive and murderous sisters, sit in front of Tartarus’ prison, where their prisoners are being tortured, and comb out the snakes in their hair, tangled and unruly (*Met.* 4.453-4). This ridiculous detail has a paradoxical effect: it both diminishes them, and also makes them frightening. Having snakes in their hair is already absurd and entertaining, but to see the Furies performing such a mundane task makes them appear less formidable, and more like normal, human women.\(^8\)

However, their snaky hair is also disgusting and disturbing, and to see them combing them out is both strange and unsettling: they are calm and casual, despite their surroundings and the snakes, and act like mortal women, despite being far from that.\(^9\)

This behaviour is unexpected and unlike the Furies from the literary tradition, which makes them both ridiculous and intimidating.

Ovid’s description of the ascent from the Underworld is unique in itself: he is the first to detail the return journey to the earth’s surface (*Met.* 10.53ff; 14.120ff). Among the accounts of the Underworld, two mention the return home, and only one provides details of how this is accomplished (*Ar. Ran.* 1524ff; *Virg. Aen.* 6.893ff). In the *Aeneid*, the exit from the Underworld is different from the entrance: here, the twin gates of Sleep are the exit to the upper world. One of the gates provides an exit for true spirits, and the other for false dreams – Aeneas passes through the latter gate, and the narrative jumps to him,

\(^8\) Galinsky (2009): 83.
suddenly back on earth (Virg. *Aen.* 6.893-8). There is no description of the landscape or 
atmosphere of the return, unlike in Ovid, where the same attention is given to both the journey there, and back again. By describing the ascent, Ovid manages to bring a sense of completeness to the journey: he provides a conclusion to the narrative, perhaps more satisfying than previous accounts, with the hero having returned back to where the journey first began.

Ovid does not ignore or rely totally on the tradition of the literary Underworld; instead he embraces it and apparently adds his own innovative details to make his account fresh and personal. Ovid has clearly been inspired by the descriptions from his predecessors, evidenced by his inclusion of traditional elements, such as the presence of key inhabitants and structures, the focus on particular denizens, and the use of similar, specific descriptive language. However, he also adds seemingly rare or unique details, all of which have intentional effects on the Underworld: the poisonous yew trees, the inhospitable climate, and vicious Cerberus emphasize the danger of the Underworld, and the threat it poses to both the living and dead. The presence of a city, yew trees, a climate and the snake-combing Furies all contribute to the idea that the Underworld mirrors life on earth: these details produce a sense of normalcy and familiarity in the Underworld, which is a comforting thought, but they also have an unsettling effect. There is an uncanny likeness, and a feeling that something is just not quite right, as if these things should not exist in the Underworld. Finally, the absurdity of the Furies and Cerberus’ exaggerated fierceness are both dramatic, but allow for some levity and lightheartedness in the otherwise dark and depressing Underworld. Ultimately, Ovid produces a detailed
and comprehensive account of an Underworld that is frightening, strange and dramatic, yet still humorous. In his account, Ovid manages to expertly merge his own work and the work of others, by maintaining a balance between his own innovations and an established tradition.
CHAPTER ONE

Aeneas and the Sibyl (Met. 14.101-157)

Virgil’s account of Aeneas’ journey into the Underworld to visit his father spans more than 900 lines (Virg. Aen. 6.1-901), while Ovid recounts it in just over 50 (Met. 14.101-157). Ovid adopts the basic outline of Virgil’s account, that Aeneas lands at Cumae and gains the assistance of the Sibyl, who informs him of the necessary steps to gain access to the Underworld. The Sibyl then accompanies Aeneas through the Underworld to Elysium, where he meets his father and learns of his future, and with his task completed, the two exit to the upper air. The plot remains the same, but Ovid makes a number of changes, such as the exclusion of the majority of Virgil’s account, save for the beginning (Aeneas’ introduction to the Sibyl and preparations for the descent) and end (Aeneas’ reunion with Anchises and ascent), due to a contrast in motivation between the two authors.  

Miller argues that the purpose of Virgil’s Aeneid was to inspire patriotism and to emphasize Aeneas’ journey by maintaining a tight focus on him alone, while Ovid was “indifferent [to Aeneas’ story], seeing in it nothing save a means to his own ends.” Miller had already described Aeneas’ story at length; Ovid’s aim was not to reproduce the Aeneid, but rather to include his own stories about other characters within its already-established context, because he “was not interested in Aeneas […] and his movements [because there was] no great ‘story’ in them.” By using Aeneas’ wanderings as a

10 Miller, 33.
11 Ibid, 42.
13 Miller, 36.
backdrop, it was not necessary for Ovid to recount the story in detail as most readers were likely familiar with it already, which gave him the opportunity to digress. One such digression occurs during the ascent from the Underworld, an event that was skimmed over in Virgil’s account—here, Ovid inserts a personal story about the Sibyl, which not only helps to develop the character’s backstory and characterization, but also adds emphasis to the departure from the Underworld.\(^\text{14}\) The Sibyl shares with Aeneas the fateful encounter that she had with Apollo in her youth (\textit{Met.} 14.129ff) – how she attracted the attention of the god, who promised her eternal life in exchange for her virginity and offered to grant her whatever she wished as a gesture of his goodwill. The Sibyl chose a long life, but neglected to specify maintaining her youth as well, which Apollo then attempted to bribe her with, but she spurned his advances. This version of the encounter between the Sibyl and Apollo is unique to Ovid,\(^\text{15}\) and by including the story Ovid is able to emphasize some of the differences between his Sibyl and Virgil’s. For Galinsky, the core difference between the two is that the Sibyl of the \textit{Aeneid} is a religious figure, while the Sibyl of the \textit{Metamorphoses} is a human being, a legendary figure that “Ovid has completely humanized” by highlighting her flaws and mortality.\(^\text{16}\) Ovid’s Sibyl is also more approachable than Virgil’s, perhaps as a result of her newly established humanity. She is not only noticeably more helpful and forthcoming to Aeneas by leading him directly to the Golden Bough and giving him clear instructions on what to do with it,

\(^{14}\) Myers, 77; 81.  
\(^{15}\) Hill (2000): 175. See also Fratantuono, 406.  
but Fratantuono argues that she is also “nicer” than Virgil’s Sibyl.\textsuperscript{17} Upon first meeting Aeneas she acknowledges his great achievements and praises his courage and \textit{pietas} (\textit{Met.} 14.108-9), while reassuring him that he need not fear; that he will, in fact, be successful and behold the Underworld, the homes of Elysium, and his father’s shade.\textsuperscript{18}

However, in both versions Aeneas “address[es] the Sibyl in terms consistent with her characterization in \textit{Aeneid} 6.65ff”\textsuperscript{19}: he greatly reveres her, almost to the point of romanticizing her, her position, and her relationship with the gods. Aeneas promises to build a temple for the Sibyl (\textit{Met.} 14.127-8), just as he vowed, in Virgil’s account (\textit{Aen.} 6.69-71), to build temples for Apollo and Trivia, as well as a shrine for the Sibyl, intending to worship her – merely a human – as a goddess, and so she refuses the divine honors which he mistakenly offered her.\textsuperscript{20} Virgil’s Sibyl does not respond to Aeneas’ promise, neither refusing it nor encouraging his veneration; rather, she is immediately overcome by Apollo. It is interesting to note that in Ovid’s account, Aeneas does not offer honors to the gods as he did in Virgil’s, since “praise of Apollo would be out of place here”\textsuperscript{21} due to Ovid’s decision to include an “unflattering legend” about Apollo.\textsuperscript{22}

While Ovid digresses from Aeneas’ journey to provide backstory about the Sibyl, and shifts the focus from Aeneas to the Sibyl, he takes the opportunity to further differentiate his account from Virgil’s by inserting instances of levity, humour and wit. Many of these instances concern the Sibyl and her backstory, even appearing immediately

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17} Fratantuono, 404.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. See also Murgatroyd (2010): 42.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 226.
\textsuperscript{20} Murgatroyd (2010): 42. See also Galinsky (1975): 226.
\textsuperscript{21} Myers, 82.
\textsuperscript{22} Hill (2000): 175.
\end{flushright}
at the beginning of the account and Aeneas’ meeting with her: she is described as *vivax* (*Met.* 14.104), and she embodies both senses of the word, being both venerable and long-lived, a fact which she herself explains later. It is both amusing and sobering that such a long-lived, wise and powerful figure was once innocent and foolish, and that a momentary lapse of judgment as a young girl irrevocably changed her entire life, dooming her for a thousand years. As Ovid attempts to emphasize the mortality and helpfulness of the Sibyl, he does so at the expense of Aeneas’ heroic nature: Aeneas is led directly to the Golden Bough and told how to retrieve it by the Sibyl, and the Bough is easily obtained, which diminishes both Aeneas and the task itself by implying that this is something that simply anyone can accomplish, hero or not, and that the use of strength, knowledge or courage is unnecessary. Similarly, the return journey from the Underworld is referred to as a *laborem*, and Aeneas retraces his *lassos adverso tramite passus*, while the Sibyl, who is human and already 700 years old, appears to be unaffected by the journey in the way that Aeneas is (*Met.* 14.120-1). This further diminishes Aeneas, a presumably relatively young, healthy hero, by making him seem weaker than a hero should be, and weaker in comparison to the Sibyl. Ovid makes another jab at Aeneas at the end of the passage, by putting a witty spin on the story which traditionally is about Aeneas’ wanderings and the hardships he suffers before he fulfills his destiny: here, both the Sibyl and Aeneas endure a lifetime of troubles, but it is evident that she “is really the one with the lengthy and trying ordeal and her lot is worse than that of the epic hero and

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid, 42.
she is even more enduring than him.”²⁷ Aeneas continues to be outdone and overshadowed in a story about his own achievements and sufferings by a human prophetess, which causes Ovid’s account to have a “decidedly human, unreligious, and unheroic focus.”²⁸

Despite the numerous humorous touches, Ovid’s version is not meant to be a farcical parody of Virgil’s, and Ovid balances the dark wit and humour he includes with, as Galinsky asserts, “as much pathos as [one] will find anywhere in the *Metamorphoses.*”²⁹ However, Galinsky does not expound on this statement. Classical scholarship has focused on the use of humour and the intertextuality between Ovid and Virgil’s accounts, while discussion of the more serious and gloomy aspects of the passage has been infrequent and inexhaustive. Since Ovid’s account is neither entirely serious nor completely comedic, it is necessary to consider the use of both humour and pathos – how they are used and their subsequent effect on the passage. The first instance of pathos is found at the beginning of the passage (*Met. 14.103*), as Aeneas passes by the walls of Parthenope and the tomb of Aeolus’ son during his voyage to Cumae. Aeolus’ son, Misenus, was one of Aeneas’ companions, who died prior to Aeneas’ encounter with the Sibyl, traditionally having been drowned by Triton (*Virg. Aen. 6.173*-4). The mention of the late Misenus serves as a reminder, both to the reader and Aeneas himself, that Aeneas has lost those who are close to him throughout the course of his journey: both family, such as Creusa (although she is not mentioned by Ovid) and Anchises, and friends, such

²⁷ Ibid.
²⁹ Ibid, 228.
as Dido and Misenus. It is easy to forget that Aeneas is not the only one who suffers on this journey; his men do as well – after all, Misenus was a fellow Trojan and exile.

Aeneas’ companions are often unnamed and unmentioned, but they endure many of the same things as Aeneas: they have already lost their city, homes and families; they continue to similarly experience his sorrow, pain, and loss, with the difference that they are disposable. Misenus was not the first of those dear to Aeneas to meet an unfortunate end, and will not be the last: he is a reminder that they are innocent men caught up in another man’s quest to fulfill his destiny, and they become the casualties of that quest.

This reference to Misenus is a fitting beginning to the passage, as it introduces the themes of death and loss that are central to the episode. Aeneas is about to enter the Underworld, the epitome of death, where Misenus, having been properly buried, would reside – both men are in the same place, but only one had to die to get there. It is a cruel twist that while Misenus reaches the Underworld because he lost his life, as is the usual way, all that Aeneas has to do is obtain a golden bough, and he does not have to make any personal sacrifice to gain entry. This makes entering the Underworld seem trivial, and it diminishes the suffering, pain and sacrifice that others had to endure before arriving there. Perhaps even crueler is that Aeneas has the ability to leave when he is finished, unlike the dead who reside there, lacking such freedom. The Underworld is described as regna novissima mundi (Met. 14.111): it is the end, the last stop in life for mortals, except for Aeneas. His visit to the Underworld is not as final as it is for others, and the Underworld never becomes the end for him: instead he is spared the second, ultimate journey when he becomes deified as Indiges (Met. 14.581ff). Therefore, this description of the Underworld
is a bleak reminder for the reader, rather than Aeneas, of the finality and inevitability of
death. It is not possible to avoid death like Aeneas does, and eventually all will reside in
the Underworld: one’s family, friends, and oneself.

Not even the Sibyl is exempt from death, although she manages to postpone it at a
cost. At this point, as a 700-year-old mortal, the Sibyl should be dead and inhabiting the
Underworld, but she will be denied this for another 300 years. An extended life may have
seemed desirable to the Sibyl at the time, being young and naïve, but now, old and wise,
she is no longer happy with this ‘gift’ that has become like a punishment. The only way
she is able to behold the Underworld is as a mere visitor, serving as a guide for others, not
in the manner that she rightfully should, as one of its deceased occupants. She engages
with the Underworld as an outsider, not yet truly belonging to it, and beholds that which
she cannot yet have, almost torturing herself, for the benefit of others like Aeneas. The
Sibyl is similar to Palinurus (Virg. Aen. 6.337ff) in that both are temporarily denied entry
to their deserved final resting place. Palinurus, since he has not been buried, is unable to
cross the River Acheron into the Underworld proper, and is forced to wait on the shore
with the desperate swarm of shades, begging to be ferried across, for a hundred years or
until he obtains proper burial. The Sibyl, on the other hand, must endure a thousand years
before she is granted death and entry to the Underworld as a resident rather than a visitor.
Although their circumstances are different, both will eventually be granted that which
they desire, but not until they patiently experience emotional and physical anguish as a
result of the wait.
While Aeneas’ entry to the Underworld was simple, his time spent there, as well as the return journey, seem to have an effect on him: line 14.120 is particularly spondaic ([īndē fē|rēns lā|sōs ād|vērsō | trāmītē | pāssūs]), representing his weary steps and the slow pace with which he walks. Thus far, his journey has presumably been emotionally and physically draining: Aeneas was reunited with his deceased father, saw his ancestors, and learned of future wars. The latter would be especially heavy knowledge to bear: that even after all that has happened, and all that has already been lost, there will be further suffering, danger and war for them, and that more of Aeneas’ men will perish on his behalf. These are all emotional, impactful moments, and combined with the physically demanding return journey (*Met.* 14.120), Aeneas would be exhausted; perhaps this line represents the heaviness weighing upon him. Aeneas then converses with the Sibyl in an effort to make the journey easier, or at least more enjoyable, but their conversation manages to do the opposite – Ovid inserts a touch of humour before he builds the pathos to its climax. Their exchange, particularly the Sibyl’s story, is also an emotional moment; not a heart-warming or awe-inspiring one, but rather a depressing one, and it neither lightens the mood nor distracts from the theme of death and suffering.

One of the most significant differences between Aeneas and the Sibyl is their outlook on their present circumstances and future: within the context of this passage, Aeneas is positive and seems optimistic, while the Sibyl is slightly pessimistic, but realistic. Aeneas does not once hesitate or complain: when he sails past the tomb of Misenus, he does not stop to wallow in his sorrows over all that he has lost, but he continues on to the Sibyl and immediately heads into the unknown of the Underworld.
When he learns of the future dangers he must undergo, he does not protest or curse the gods, but seems to accept this grim knowledge and is no less determined, promptly leaving the Underworld to continue his journey. As he exits, likely emotionally and physically exhausted, he talks to the Sibyl about herself and thanks her profusely, rather than potentially dwelling on the horrors he witnessed or the sadness he feels leaving behind his father. Within the episode, he demonstrates an unwavering determination and confidence in achieving his goal, and appears dutiful and selfless. Ultimately, Aeneas’ optimism is justified: he successfully fulfills his destiny and is compensated for his sufferings. He is victorious in the war against the Latins, gains glory, is rewarded with his own land and a wife, and finally is deified, to live on thereafter. Aeneas receives everything that the Sibyl will not: personal glory, companionship, and immortality, both physical and in the collective memory.

In the beginning of the passage, the Sibyl seems to be similarly positive, praising Aeneas and promising him that she will successfully guide him into the Underworld, confident that *invia virtuti nulla est via* (*Met.* 14.113). It is when Aeneas refers to her as a goddess (*Met.* 14.123, 124) that her attitude changes and she takes issue: she is positive when speaking about Aeneas’ situation, but pessimistic when speaking about her own. Perhaps she is incited by Aeneas’ misguided praise, as it only serves as a reminder of her unfortunate situation and past mistakes: if she were indeed a goddess, she would not be in this situation, with her body naturally withering away, and if she had accepted Apollo’s offer she would be living eternally with her youth as though she were a goddess. Lines 14.129-131 are largely spondaic (*rēspīcit | hūnc vāṭēs || ēt | sūspīrātībūs | hāustīs / nēc*
dēā | sūm dīxīt | nēc | sācrī | tūrīs hōnōrē / hūmānūm dīgnārē cāpūt. | nēu | nēscūs | ērrēs), representing the Sibyl’s long, drawn out sigh in 14.129 and perhaps emphasizing her regret and sadness toward her circumstances. The Sibyl’s pessimism and the pathos in the passage come to a climax in lines 14.143ff. She is noticeably affected by her impending physical degeneration, troubled that she will lose any beauty and youth that she previously had, and become physically insignificant and unappealing. Her outlook toward aging is pessimistic but realistic, as she has no misconceptions about her situation: she will become invisible to others, and no longer appreciated or seen for who and what she was, which is a reality of old age for all mortals. While this is clearly of concern to the Sibyl, she speaks about it in a frank, almost detached manner – the lack of tears and cries of “ah, poor me!” emphasizes her strength and levelheadedness. She does not seem to complain, or become emotional until she mentions Apollo: line 14.151 (vēl nōn | cōgnōscēt | vēl | dīlēxǐssē nēgābīt) is particularly spondaic, and represents her sorrow for her future through slow and mournful speech, and perhaps bitterness towards Apollo that he, who once desired her and started all of her misfortune, would no longer recognize her or be so embarrassed or audacious as to deny his past love for her. It is unfortunate that, aside from those, like Aeneas, who visit to consult her, the Sibyl appears only to have Apollo for company, whom she once rejected and believes will likewise reject her in the future – she seems to be stuck with the one she may reasonably resent, for up to a thousand years.

The Sibyl’s description of her future is bleak: she seems to have no hope, and Ovid uses the cumulative impact in these lines to emphasize this (Met. 14.142ff). First,
she admits that *felicior aetas terga dedit* (*Met.* 14.142-3), yet she has 300 more years of unhappiness left to endure, which seems to disappoint her: line 14.146 (*tēr cēnētūm mēs|sēs, || tēr | cēntūm | mūstā vī|dērē*) is particularly spondaic, and combined with the parallel structure and the repetition of *t*, *c* and *m*, seems to stress the Sibyl’s contempt for the amount of time she has left, and the long, slow pace of the line represents the excessive number of years and the “slow passage of time for the Sibyl.”

During these years she will suffer physically – *tremuloque gradu venit aegra senectus* (*Met.* 14.143), and *consumpta membra senecta ad minimum redigentur onus* (*Met.* 14.148-9) – as well as mentally, seemingly becoming self-conscious about growing old and unattractive (*Met.* 14.149-50), and paranoid that Apollo will reject her (*Met.* 14.150-1). It appears to her as though the worst is yet to come, and that the future holds nothing favourable for her. Unlike Aeneas, she has no hope and does not seem to have anything to live for, and she will find no recompense in death, except perhaps peace: while both the Sibyl and Aeneas will suffer for the remainder of their lives, only Aeneas will be rewarded by becoming a god, but the Sibyl will die as a mortal and remain as one – for her, the Underworld is *regna novissima mundi*, and it is on this note of finality that Ovid ends the passage.

The tragedy of the Sibyl’s story is that she was simply a mortal who attracted the attention of a god, but his desire for her, and the potential gifts he could grant her, were ultimately damaging and doomed her. Ovid uses the Sibyl’s mortality to make the episode more upsetting, as her mortality makes her a more relatable figure to the reader than

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30 Myers, 86.
31 Tarrant, the editor of the OCT, excludes lines 152-3 (*usque adeo mutata ferar, nullique videnda / voce tamen noscar; vocem mihi fata relinquent*), in which the Sibyl claims that her voice will live on, despite the deterioration of her body.
Virgil’s Sibyl. The Sibyl in Ovid’s account is unlike her predecessor in a number of ways, besides her mortality: as previously discussed, she is kind to Aeneas from the beginning, praising him (Met. 14.108-9) and boosting his confidence about the impending journey (Met. 14.110-13), and she is readily helpful and direct with him (Met. 14.110, 115) – it seems as if she truly wishes for him to succeed. The Sibyl, despite being an aged and venerable prophetess, still shows her vulnerability: she made mistakes in her youth, which she regrets, and continues to pay the price for them; as a result she is troubled, and will become increasingly so. The Sibyl is a sad figure, depressed about her current circumstances, and hopeless for her future, and she has no qualms about sharing these emotions with Aeneas. On the other hand, Virgil’s Sibyl is inaccessible and enigmatic, to which Virgil alludes in the description of her cave, procul secreta (Virg. Aen. 6.10): she reveals nothing personal about herself to Aeneas, other than that she was once guided through Tartarus by Hecate (Virg. Aen. 6.564ff). She is not particularly kind or helpful, but rather she is cold and aloof to Aeneas upon their first meeting: she gives him no greeting, but speaks to him condescendingly, and immediately sends him away with a task to complete (Virg. Aen. 6.7-9). Instead of reassuring Aeneas about the descent, the Sibyl speaks frankly and ominously, warning him about the horrors of the Underworld and how difficult the journey will be, referring to it as insanus labor (Virg. Aen. 6.135) – she is very much a no-nonsense figure. She has complete control over the journey, guiding Aeneas through the Underworld, revealing information about the area only when she is asked (Virg. Aen. 6.318ff, 560ff), and hurrying Aeneas along, even breaking up emotional moments between him and his loved ones to keep him moving in a timely
manner (Virg. Aen. 6.539ff). Virgil’s Sibyl is mysterious, intimidating, and unemotional, which makes it difficult for the reader to relate to her character. Ovid, by having the Sibyl open up to Aeneas and reveal her flaws, allows the reader to form an emotional connection with the Sibyl – she is a relatable figure, and her story is depressing; therefore the reader feels sorry for her. There is the sense that, if the reader suspends but a little disbelief, this could happen to anyone, since it happened to a kind and humble mortal, rather than a divine, untouchable ‘other’.

Despite Aeneas’ quest depending on a visit there, Ovid makes little use of the Underworld itself. This is, in fact, the episode which offers the least detail about the Underworld proper – there is no mention of geography, the other inhabitants, or the atmosphere. Ovid nearly omits Aeneas’ time in the Underworld entirely, dedicating a mere four lines to it and choosing to leave the reader on earth while Aeneas travels down – the reader does not accompany Aeneas as before and after he completes his quest. While it is fitting that the Underworld is used as a background in the episode, the theme of which is death and suffering, it may have been just as effective set elsewhere. It seems almost unnecessary to include the Underworld: the reader’s expectations of the dramatic focus of the episode – Aeneas’ exploration of the Underworld, reuniting with his father and loved ones, learning about his destiny, etc. – do not materialize; rather, it is the exchange between Aeneas and the Sibyl, a conversation that potentially could have taken place elsewhere. That there is little dramatic tension leading up to the conversation, and no reason for the reader to expect such a story about the Sibyl, makes it more shocking and upsetting – the reader awaiting an emotional moment concerning Aeneas is not
suspecting to feel sorry for and relate to the Sibyl. Ovid further challenges the expectations of the reader by altering the traditional roles of Aeneas and the Sibyl, who are no longer the mighty hero and the august prophetess that they were in Virgil’s account. Instead, Ovid diminishes Aeneas’ heroic nature to create instances of humour and wit, and emphasizes the tragic and human aspects of the Sibyl for instances of pathos and occasionally levity, and the combination of the two produces a complex tonal blend throughout the episode. It is important to note that it is a blend of two extremes of pathos and humour, as is characteristic of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole: at some points the passage is overwhelmingly serious, and at other points it is less so, in order to create an interesting balance. The passage begins with the gloomy reference to the tomb of Misenus, which establishes the serious tone that is an undercurrent throughout the episode, and then continues for the next two-dozen lines with a lighter tone, accomplished by combining witty jabs at Aeneas’ expense and somber references to the future suffering of both Aeneas and the Sibyl. The seriousness and sorrow of the passage peaks at the end, during the Sibyl’s speech – this is an emotional passage, but Ovid does not allow the depressing and solemn aspects to become oppressive, and lightens the tone of the passage in-between, rendering the emotional reveal at the end all the more effective.

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32 Galinsky (1975), 161.
33 See Hutchinson, 32: “one must not seek […] to resolve the poetry into either extreme (absolute seriousness and entire deflation) – nor even rest content with asserting that it belongs to neither.” Although Hutchinson is concerned with the analysis of tone in Hellenistic poetry (here, Callimachus), the quote seems fitting for a discussion of Ovid’s work as well, especially as Ovid was heavily influenced by Hellenistic poetry.
Cerberus and Medea (*Met. 7.404-424*)

Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses* features Ovid’s version of Medea’s various crimes, and amid the description of her mission to murder Theseus, the son of her current husband, Ovid inserts another digression: he spends twelve lines describing Hercules’ capture of Cerberus and the origin of aconite—details not strictly necessary and not closely related to the outer narrative. The image that Ovid presents of Cerberus is distinctive in that he is not where he should be, beneath the earth, guarding the entrance to the Underworld proper; instead, he is above ground, before one of the earthly entrances to the Underworld. Ovid builds up Cerberus as fearsome and mighty from his introduction by referring to him as *Echidnea canis* (*Met. 7.409-410*), and delaying naming him until 7.413 for dramatic effect.\(^{34}\) Cerberus is described as rabid, enraged, and triple-barking loudly (*Met. 7.413-4*), and Hercules has to use adamantine chains to physically drag Cerberus, but even these are not enough to completely subdue him—he is still able to resist, albeit futilely, struggling against Hercules’s hold. Cerberus has the potential to be as dangerous as he looks—he is quite literally poisonous, and the poison that he produces is virulent: merely scattering froth from his mouth is enough to infect the soil and produce the plants (*Met. 7.415-7*). He would be a frightening sight to behold: thrashing, snarling, and spewing out poison, restrained only by chains.

While the description makes Cerberus appear formidable, Ovid is actually building up his character only to make his subsequent diminishment all the more striking. This is not the menacing, dominating monster that is described elsewhere (e.g. *Met.*

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4.449-451; Hes. *Theog.* 769ff), and Ovid ultimately presents a rather unflattering
description of Cerberus, portraying him as a monster that is ‘all bark and no bite’. Perhaps
it is because he is out of the Underworld, or contending against Hercules, but Cerberus
appears weakened and ineffectual. In this situation, Cerberus has no control: Hercules has
already successfully captured him and led him up to earth, and Cerberus does not even
attempt to attack Hercules – all he can do is involuntarily follow Hercules according to
his will. Although physically imposing and dangerous, he does not appear to frighten
Hercules, and instead Cerberus himself is frightened, and tries to break free from his
chains and escape from Hercules, likely so he can retreat to his familiar abode of the
Underworld. Cerberus is strong, but his desperate and fruitless struggle against Hercules
demonstrates how weak he is in comparison. Indeed, he may be an effective guard-dog
against ghosts, but he is no match for a hero: he appears to be better at keeping things in
the Underworld than at keeping them out. Cerberus is depicted as not only powerless, but
also repulsive: he thrashes around, foaming at the mouth, slobbering and spewing spit –
an appearance that is both disconcerting and off-putting.

Just as Ovid diminishes Cerberus, he similarly diminishes Medea. Ovid first
builds up Medea as an impressive and dangerous opponent by means of her association
with aconite: both Medea and aconite originate from Scythia,35 which is also the location
of the entrance to the Underworld used by Hercules and Cerberus. Therefore, Medea has
a deadly, poisonous association from birth, and she certainly has lived up to this
birthright, bringing about the death of many, and often using poison to do so (*Met.* 7.394;

35 See Anderson (1972): 287: “poets could extend Scythia to include the southern coast of
the Black Sea where Medea had been born.”
see also Eur. *Med.* 764ff). Indeed, both aconite and Medea herself affirm that appearances are deceiving, that something seemingly harmless can actually be deadly: aconite has beautiful flowers,\(^{36}\) while Medea acts the necessary part (often a helpless, fearful woman) in order to manipulate and subdue others. Then, Ovid builds her up by means of a number of parallels between the outer narrative and the digression (between Hercules and Theseus, and between Cerberus and Medea).\(^{37}\) Both narratives feature a hero who contends with an adversary, and this contention first begins when the hero encroaches on his adversary’s territory: Hercules enters Cerberus’ home in the Underworld and drags him off, while Theseus returns home to Athens, where Medea now lives, which perhaps makes her feel threatened.\(^{38}\) The adversary is powerful and threatening, and has poison at their disposal, but, despite this, the hero is not bested. The hero defeats the adversary, who can be regarded as a stand-in for death: Hercules defeats Cerberus, a resident of the Underworld, and successfully enters and exits the Underworld,\(^{39}\) while Theseus unknowingly defeats Medea, who attempts to play the role of Death herself – the hero is able to walk away from ‘death’ unharmed. For Theseus, Medea is the labor that he must overcome (although he is not aware of this, or her plot against him), just as Cerberus is a labor for Hercules. However, it is also through this association with Cerberus that Medea is diminished: as Ovid provides no physical description of Medea, she and Cerberus, a disgusting, slimy, slobbering and frenzied creature, become homologous to the reader – an entirely unflattering and insulting comparison for Medea. Like Cerberus, Medea is no

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\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Russell, 311.

\(^{38}\) Ovid does not supply a reason as to why Medea decides to kill Theseus.

\(^{39}\) Russell, 311.
longer in control of the situation once Theseus is presented with the poisoned goblet: her success or failure is dependent on the actions of others; all that she can do is wait and watch. Despite her violent and determined efforts, Medea cannot rival the great hero, and she is weak and unimpressive in comparison.\(^{40}\) She is not the undefeated murderer previously described: here, she ultimately fails for the first time,\(^{41}\) and makes no attempt to fight back against Theseus and Aegeus once she is outsmarted. Instead, she escapes, unpunished and unharmed, fleeing like a coward, just as Cerberus attempted to do.

Ovid did not include this digression without reason, rather it has two purposes pertaining to the outer narrative: to influence the depiction of Medea, both positively and negatively, and to foreshadow her attack on Theseus. Due to the moody and ominous description of the Underworld at the beginning of the passage (\textit{specus est tenebroso caecus hiatu,/est via declivis} Met. 7.409-410) and the obvious associations with death, combined with the emphasis on the poison and Cerberus’ strength, a reader unfamiliar with the myth may reasonably assume that Medea will be successful and Theseus will die, her murderous reputation notwithstanding. However, due to the parallels between Cerberus and Medea, the digression actually foreshadows Medea’s ultimate failure: just as Cerberus was unable to overpower Hercules, Medea is unable to kill Theseus.\(^{42}\)

In conclusion, the depiction of Cerberus that Ovid presents in this passage deviates interestingly from those offered by previous authors. An important difference is the location of Cerberus: in previous accounts he is always in the Underworld, vigilantly

\(^{40}\) See Russell, 310-11 for how comparisons between Medea and Hercules further diminish her character.  
\(^{41}\) Ibid, 308.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid, 311.
guarding the entrance (Hes. *Theog.* 769; Tib.1.3.71; Virg. *Aen.* 6.417ff). Authors have referenced Hercules’ capture of Cerberus (Virg. *Aen.* 6.395), or narrated the events leading up to it (Bacchyl. 5.62), but Cerberus’ time on earth is not described. Similarly, Cerberus is elsewhere described as physically intimidating and dangerous: he is fearful (Hes. *Theog.* 769), pitiless (Hes. *Theog.* 770), enormous (Virg. *Aen.* 6.418, 423) and black (Tib. 1.3.71), with snakes that hiss and writhe around his neck (Tib. 1.3.71-2; Virg. *Aen.* 419), triple jaws that contain saw-like teeth (Virg. *Georg.* 4.483; Bacchyl. 5.60), and triple throats that produce a resounding bark (Virg. *Aen.* 6.417-8). Previous authors have also demonstrated his use of deception and cunning by means of the trick he plays on those entering and exiting the Underworld (Hes. *Theog.* 770-3), his aggressive and bloodthirsty nature – evidenced by his lack of hesitation to devour those attempting to leave (Hes. *Theog.* 773) – and the fear he instills in the shades, those who are already dead and cannot be harmed (Virg. *Aen.* 6.401). There are no hints of this Cerberus in Ovid’s depiction, however: he makes no attempt to attack Hercules, and certainly not to devour him; he does not use his cunning to try to escape, only his physical strength; and he fails to scare anyone except himself. Cerberus, a traditionally monstrous and terrifying creature, is depicted in the opposite manner by Ovid, and is not even the focus of the passage. Here, Cerberus, an inhabitant of the Underworld, with associations to death and poison, is used as a narrative tool to influence the depiction of Medea, and the reader’s opinion of her. Ovid’s depiction of Cerberus within the digression reflects his depiction of Medea in the outer narrative: he diminishes one to indirectly diminish the other. In the passage, neither Cerberus nor Medea fulfill the expectations of the reader: Cerberus,
perhaps because he is out of his element, is weak and cowardly against Hercules, while Medea, who has thus far been successful in her crimes regardless of her location, is ineffectual and inconsequential against Theseus, and ultimately fails for the first time. It is this failure, emphasized by the Cerberus digression, that is the greatest detriment to Medea, “undermin[ing] her effectiveness as an evil character”\(^{43}\) – she may have killed numerous men, women and children, but she is not capable of killing a hero.

Among the various episodes featuring the Underworld in the *Metamorphoses*, the Aeneas and Cerberus ones are unique in that the Underworld is not the focus. It serves only as the backdrop, mentioned in passing and described in little detail. These passages are not about the Underworld itself, which therefore does not play as important a role as elsewhere. It is mentioned in the Aeneas episode because it is traditionally an important part of Aeneas’ journey, and would be a glaring omission. In the Medea episode only the cave leading to the Underworld is mentioned, but Ovid features Cerberus, one of its inhabitants, more prominently: here, Cerberus conveys the connotations of death and the Underworld that Ovid wishes to associate with Medea in lieu of the Underworld itself. Cerberus is included because he serves a purpose within the outer narrative, just as Aeneas serves an alternate purpose. Neither Aeneas nor Cerberus are the main focus of the episodes, however: rather, the Sibyl and Medea are. Here, Ovid subverts the norm by diminishing both Aeneas and Cerberus: Aeneas appears unheroic and weakened both as a hero and in comparison to the Sibyl, while Cerberus appears to be incapable and not a

\(^{43}\) Ibid, 308.
serious threat. They are both unlike a traditional hero and monster, and do not appear in accordance with their usual depictions. Ovid’s interest is not in exploring the characters of Aeneas and Cerberus, but in using them to accomplish other things within the narrative: their depiction influences that of other characters, either to build them up or diminish them as well. By diminishing Aeneas’ character and his involvement in his own story, Ovid builds up the character of the Sibyl: he more effectively emphasizes her human nature and helpfulness, and stresses the bleakness and sorrow of her fate in order to increase the reader’s sympathy. In diminishing Cerberus, however, Ovid accomplishes the opposite and consequently diminishes the character of Medea, by means of various parallels between the two. Ultimately, both the Aeneas and the Medea episodes contain digressions which, at first glance, do not appear to be crucial to the narrative. Upon further analysis, however, it is clear that these digressions contribute to the narrative in meaningful ways by revealing more about the characters, both directly and indirectly, to influence the emotions and opinions of the reader. The narrative, arguably, would be neither as interesting nor as rich without these digressions – a creative and clever move on Ovid’s part.
CHAPTER TWO

Juno and Tisiphone (Met. 4.432-511)

In book 4 of the Metamorphoses, Ovid recounts his version of Juno’s vengeful destruction of Ino, the last remaining daughter of Cadmus, and her husband Athamas. Ovid’s slant on the story is distinct and significant: Juno does not personally administer their punishment, instead, in an unprecedented move,⁴⁴ she travels down to the Underworld to ask for the assistance of the Furies, and Athamas and Ino are driven mad at the hand of Tisiphone. This is chronologically the first passage of the Metamorphoses to mention the Underworld, and so it is fitting that the episode begins with a description of the realm. The extensive and detailed description signifies the importance of the Underworld in the story, and is transportive, allowing the reader to vividly imagine the scene. Through the cumulative impact in these first fifteen lines of description (Met. 4.432-445), Ovid creates an atmosphere that is gloomy, cold, and repulsive. However, despite the pervasive despair of the Underworld, he manages to include instances of dark humor and levity. Ovid gradually and systematically reveals details about the Underworld, widening the reader’s view and understanding as though they are one of the recently dead, or Juno herself, seeing the Underworld for the first time. This is effective in building suspense and keeping the reader immersed in the scene.

First, Ovid mentions a dark path, seemingly ordinary until he reveals that this particular path leads to the infernal regions. Even the passage down is gloomy, building the atmosphere immediately: the path is lined with funereal yew trees, which were

associated with death because of their poisonous berries.\textsuperscript{45} The path otherwise appears empty and there is an eerie silence throughout the region – a physical and aural emptiness, representing the silence of death. Further down the path lies the River Styx, which \textit{nebulas exhalat iners} (\textit{Met.} 4.434), just as the dead have breathed out their spirit, and this connection is further stressed by the mention of \textit{umbraeque recentes} immediately following in the same line. Ovid’s choice of \textit{exhalat} is humorous, since in a realm full of the dead, the Styx is likely one of very few things still breathing. Then the reader reaches the Underworld proper, which is physically and visually cold (\textit{Met.} 4.436), reminiscent of \textit{pallor mortis} and \textit{algor mortis}, the early stages of postmortem decay: the Underworld is an unwelcoming, inhospitable and foul place. Arriving there is surely a distressing and confusing experience for the recently dead, who have to adjust to both a new residence and to being dead.\textsuperscript{46} Ovid humorously conveys their confusion, having the shades unable to find their way into the city, despite there being a thousand paths all leading there, combined with the jumbled and somewhat stilted word order of the lines (\textit{Met.} 4.436-8). The shades are pitiable, but also laughable: they are like proverbial lost sheep, helpless without any guidance. Ovid’s use of the phrase \textit{loca senta} (\textit{Met.} 4.436) is an echo of Virgil, spoken by Aeneas to Dido, when he encounters her shade in the Underworld (\textit{Virg. Aen.} 6.462), and is another instance of dark humour. Juno, although unintentionally, was partially responsible for Dido’s destruction, and now she herself travels down to the Underworld to arrange for the destruction of others – it would certainly make for an awkward meeting, if the two were to encounter each other.

\textsuperscript{45} Anderson (1997): 460.  
\textsuperscript{46} Jouteur, 90.
Ovid stresses the magnitude of the Underworld in several ways: the ability of even the shades to become lost; the thousand paths and gates surrounding the city (Met. 4.439); and by means of a simile comparing the infinite realm to the sea (Met. 4.440-2). This simile is depressing: on the surface, it asserts that the Underworld is never full, representing its availability and the possibility for others to die, and that on principle it can never be full, representing the inevitability and unceasing perpetuation of death. Upon further analysis, the shades can be compared to the rivers, just as the Underworld is compared to the sea: it does not matter whence the rivers originated, since their waters all mix together in the sea – just as all mortals eventually die, regardless of wealth, profession, and race, and end up together in the Underworld – and who these shades were when alive is inconsequential. Like water, these shades are bloodless, boneless, and bodiless (Met. 4.443) – they are insubstantial and untouchable, and would slip right through the fingers of anyone who tried to grasp them.

Eventually, the shades and the reader find their way into the city itself, which is an unprecedented but absurd addition by Ovid. This infernal city is similar to a mortal one, complete with a forum and palace but, unlike a mortal city, it seems to serve no purpose. Built structures exist in the Underworld, but one of this scale is superfluous, especially considering the nature of the inhabitants: the dead have no use for a forum, and indeed, they do not appear to do much more than wander about it or Pluto’s palace (Met. 4.443-4), again like a lost and mindless flock of sheep. Perhaps Pluto built such an extensive and conventional city to provide himself with some sense of normalcy, as a reminder of the upper world, or for the opportunity to rule over a kingdom comparable to those of the
other gods: the idea of a wistful or envious Pluto is quite humorous. It is clear that the
Underworld is not a pleasant place to be for the dead, despite its resemblance to their
former homes on earth: the afterlife of these shades can be summarized in a mere handful
of words within two lines (Met. 4.444-5), representing their simple and meaningless
existence. This is particularly depressing, and Ovid draws attention to these lines (Met.
4.444-5) through the use of repetition and alliteration.\footnote{Met. 4.444-5: pars forum celebrant, pars imit tecta tyranni, pars aliquas artes, antiquae imitamina vitae.} The shades do not even seem to
interact with each other, which makes for a lonely afterlife – although the apparent
silence of the shades is witty and self-consistent if one recalls the description muta
silentia mentioned previously (Met. 4.433). Even those who committed no grievous
crimes in life seem to suffer in the Underworld to some extent: some shades wander about
with seemingly no sense of purpose, while others continue to work, for whom the reward
for a life of toil appears to be an afterlife of toil. There is an aura of mystery surrounding
the latter shades: Ovid neglects to explain which crafts they practice, whether it is by
choice or command, and to what end. There is clearly a desire to replicate life on earth in
the Underworld, although it appears to be meaningless and unsuccessful beyond
appearance.

Ovid, in his first and most detailed account of the Underworld, portrays it as an
awful, harsh, and sickening place. The inclusion of this unflattering and unpleasant
description, combined with Ovid’s innovative addition of Juno’s catabasis is no
coincidence: such a place is fitting for Juno, who is about to make her appearance. Ovid
demonstrates that the Underworld is indicative of Juno’s terrible nature, and the cruel
deeds that she will instigate by going there – suggesting that “Hell [is] precisely where this vengeful goddess belong[s].” Juno’s arrival in the Underworld is unexpected, and for emphasis Ovid delays naming her until the end of line 4.448, where she is referred to as *Saturnia Juno*. The epithet is a reminder of exactly who she is and of the great power and influence she has, and is used similarly by Virgil throughout the *Aeneid* (particularly *Aen. 7.428, 560*). Here, the epithet can have a favourable meaning, and another that is less so: it stresses that such a dignified and formidable goddess has lowered herself to come to such an awful place, or that such a dignified and formidable goddess could be so petty and easily controlled by her emotions. Indeed, there is support for both in the narrative: Juno’s catabasis is not an easy or appealing task, instead it is something to be endured (*Met. 4.447*), even by a goddess. It is clear that her reason for travelling to the Underworld is very important to her – although Ovid does not reveal the purpose of her descent until she summons the Furies and announces it to them herself (*Met. 4.469ff*) – and she is determined, doing what she believes to be necessary in order to accomplish her goal. However, Juno is driven by hatred and wrath, and this causes her to take extreme action – namely embarking on the unnecessary trip to the Underworld to employ the assistance of the Furies herself, demonstrating that she is overwhelmed by her negative emotions and desire for revenge, and they dictate the decisions she makes.

Before Juno has even appeared in the narrative, Ovid has portrayed her as a powerful goddess, resolute in her purpose, wrathful and emotional, and he subsequently

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49 Amerasinghe, 65. See Amerasinghe for further discussion on Virgil’s calculated use of *Saturnia* within the *Aeneid*.
deflates with some light humour this serious image that he has created. Upon her arrival, the threshold groans beneath her body, which can be interpreted as both a compliment and an insult to Juno: referring to either the “supposed venerable majesty of the queen of the gods […] [or] the real weight of the deity” – regardless, it is likely unwise to discuss the weight of such a vengeful goddess.\(^{51}\) This is reminiscent of Aeneas’ visit to the Underworld, when Charon’s boat groaned beneath his weight (Virg. \textit{Aen.} 6.413-4), and is an instance of Ovid one-upping Virgil:\(^{52}\) Ovid’s goddess is capable of causing the threshold of the entire Underworld to groan, while Virgil’s hero outweights a boat designed to transport shades. ‘Heavier’ Juno is portrayed as the more powerful of the two. Here, \textit{ingemuit} (\textit{Met.} 4.450) most obviously refers to the creaking of an object, but it can also refer to a verbal groan or lament, such as those made by the sick and dying, and the loved ones of the dead mourning their loss, which is only fitting for a region of death and despair. On a lighter note, however, it is as if the Underworld is lamenting Juno’s arrival, displeased by her presence, and this is the beginning of a disappointing welcome. Immediately upon Juno’s entrance, Cerberus barks at her but, although he is presumably loud and intimidating, appears to be rather useless. He is vigilant and acknowledges the arrival of an outsider, but does nothing more – it is not as if he makes a move to attack and then stops once he recognizes her; nor does he seemingly alert anyone to her presence, since no one comes running over to see who or what set off his barking; nor is he an effective deterrent, since Juno appears completely unperturbed by his presence and failed attempt at intimidation. Or he barks not out of hostility but fear – perhaps he is

\(^{51}\) Ibid.  
\(^{52}\) Jouteur, 94.
distressed by the divine visitor, rather than the intruder being afraid of him, as the reader might expect. Regardless of his intention, Cerberus is about as effective as a doorbell in an empty house. In addition, it seems that Juno’s arrival is of little interest to Pluto, both as the ruler of the Underworld and as her own brother, since he does not make an appearance, either to investigate the identity of the trespasser, or to receive his sibling. When Juno summons the Furies, whom she has made the visit to see, they do not heed her, either ignoring her call or because they did not hear her nor Cerberus’ barking – although that would be challenging in an apparently quiet realm. Juno, perforce, has to travel further through the Underworld and find the Furies herself. The nonexistent reception that Juno receives befits neither a goddess of such high standing nor the sibling of the realm’s ruler.

Before the Furies make their appearance, Ovid briefly describes them as *grave et inplacabile numen* (Met. 4.452) – an accurate description of Juno as well – and a partnership between the Furies and Juno seems both appropriate and dangerous for their target, and the description serves almost as a warning to the reader of what they are about to encounter. However, this description of the Furies does not agree with their initial portrayal: they do not appear to be particularly cruel or vicious, but are instead “well-mannered ladies” who show their respect to Juno by rising when she approaches.\(^5\) When Juno finds them they are sitting, apparently unaware that she had summoned them, in the *sedes scelerata*, which can be interpreted as both the place of punishment for the sinners,

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but also, rather wittily, as the literal seat from which the Furies rise.\footnote{Anderson (1997): 463.} These apparently ruthless creatures are doing the mundane task of combing their hair; it is less innocent, of course, since there are snakes entangled in their hair, cleverly reflected both in the narrative and the word order (\textit{suis atros [...] crinibus angues}; \textit{Met.} 4.454). This action is “logical, in a way. [...] The thought however, is totally out of place in the atmosphere or horror surrounding the Furies, an atmosphere which Ovid both depicts at great length and undercuts by introducing incongruous notions.”\footnote{Galinsky (1975): 28-9.} The inclusion of a city within the Underworld, as seen previously, has a similar effect. However, while combing hair is a natural action, attempting to comb snakes is decidedly unnatural: they are untamed, mobile, living creatures that are not about to comply with the Furies’ grooming, and the futility of the task becomes evident later (\textit{Met.} 4.474-5). The description of the snake-combing in line 4.454 is spondaic (\textit{dēqūe sūlīs ā|rōs || pēc|tēbānt| crīnībūs| āngūes}) – in addition to being a Golden line (abVAB structure) – which draws attention to this grotesque and absurd action.\footnote{Anderson (1997): 463.} Based on this description alone, the Furies do not seem particularly suited to guarding the \textit{sedes scelerata}: they are entirely engrossed in combing their hair, and not focused on the task at hand. They keep close watch over neither the criminals they are meant to guard nor any unexpected visitors, since they only rise once they recognize Juno: they were unconcerned by the unknown being that approached, and were clearly unprepared to attack, if necessary, which raises the question: who did they expect to see approaching, unbidden? Perhaps they have dealt with few attempted break-
ins and break-outs, and have grown unwary and bored with their task over time, and have
taken to grooming themselves to pass the time. Regardless, these Furies do not yet act as
would be expected of the fierce and murderous inhabitants of the Underworld.

With the introduction of the Furies, Ovid provides additional details about the
Underworld and its denizens, further contributing to the dark atmosphere. The region
which the Furies inhabit is shadowy, recalling the dark and misty nature of the descent,
but more so: here, the shadows are so dark and thick that the Furies cannot easily perceive
Juno through them. This gloomy and unnerving atmosphere is fitting for the *sedes
scelerata*, considering its purpose and occupants: the region features a prison, which
confines threatening and violent individuals who have committed terrible crimes in life.
Here, Tityus, Tantalus, Sisyphus, Ixion, and the Danaids suffer their eternal punishments,
among the descriptions of which Ovid manages to include several instances of wit, while
conveying the futility of their situation.\(^{57}\) Ixion is described as following and chasing
himself (*Met. 4.461*) – a witty and embellished phrase to describe his spinning on the
wheel, which is evocative of an animal chasing its own tail, never to catch it. Sisyphus
and the Danaids are the only ones of the sinners who have some measure of control over
their punishments: they are not immobilized, and could potentially cease from their tasks,
yet they continue to futilely roll the boulder and attempt to fetch water, continuing the
cycle. Logistically, an area with poor visibility is not the ideal location for a prison, but
Ovid seems unconcerned by this, and instead he stresses the *sedes scelerata* as a
dangerous place. That a prison for shades is required at all, and that it is necessary to keep

\(^{57}\) Jouteur, 92.
these individuals contained and separated from the general population is unsettling. It seems excessive that the prison is fitted with gates made of adamant, and guarded by the Furies, but perhaps there is a legitimate threat of the prisoners breaking out, and so the adamantine gates and the Furies act as extra defenses in case of such an emergency. The strength of the sinners, and the danger that they would pose should they escape, is uncertain but it would seem to be a serious matter, if the need for them to be confined is so great.

The sinners, many of whom committed crimes against a deity, demonstrate the boundless power and wrath of the gods – who have the ability and desire to punish mortals both in life and in death – and they serve as a warning that this is what happens to individuals who dishonor or offend the gods. The presence of the sinners is also useful as it allows Ovid to make a pointed contrast between them and Juno: the sinners are ruthlessly and relentlessly punished for transgressions against the gods or family members of gods, while Juno acts as she pleases without any consequence. Here, she plots a similar crime – to destroy the remaining family of Bacchus, a god himself – and, victorious, suffers no such similar consequence. Through this contrast, Ovid comments on the hypocrisy and injustice of the gods, Juno in particular. Similarly, there is a contrast between the sinners and Athamas and Ino, who are soon to be punished at Juno’s behest: the sinners have committed legitimate crimes against the gods, one even against Juno herself, and they suffer justly, while Athamas and Ino, who have committed no discernable offense against Juno, or at least none comparable to Ixion’s, will be unjustly punished and subsequently destroyed. The plight of Athamas and Ino demonstrates Juno’s
cruelty and unfairness while creating pity for the two innocent mortals, strengthening the idea that the Underworld, and the sedes scelerata in particular, is a befitting place for her.

The sinners are not unnoticed by Juno when she enters the sedes scelerata: she pauses for a moment to glower at them, apparently displeased with even those who did not harm her personally. She is particularly displeased to see Ixion, whom she glares at above all, again revealing her unforgiving and bitter nature. Here, Juno is referred to as Saturnia (Met. 4.464) for the second time, perhaps to stress whose wrath has been invoked by these criminals, particularly Ixion and his audacity and insolence to attempt to assault a goddess – the daughter of Saturn no less. The confrontation between Ixion and Juno demonstrates the clear power disparity between the two: Juno has effectively defeated and subdued Ixion, and stands before him as a reminder that he is powerless, unable to retaliate and no longer in control of his own movements. However, it would be difficult and absurd to engage in a stare-down while Ixion constantly spins around on his wheel, making the confrontation less effective. Juno is momentarily distracted by Ixion and her earlier retribution, but when she sees Sisyphus, she is reminded of her purpose and impending vengeance. Juno’s hatred for Athamas and Ino, and the entire house of Cadmus, is obvious and consuming: her wrath is mentioned twice (Met. 4.448, 469) and her bitterness is evident in her interaction with Sisyphus, as Juno laments that he is the only member of his family to suffer eternal punishment. The alliteration in lines 4.467-70 is forceful, representing Juno spitting out her words in anger, and superbum and sprevit are both in an emphatic position, emphasizing the apparent crime of Athamas and Ino,

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and her preoccupation with it.\textsuperscript{59} It is dark and twisted that Juno, seeing these individuals suffering excruciating and maddening punishments for eternity, instead of feeling some pity for them, wishes for even more mortals to suffer similarly. For Juno, the \textit{sedes scelerata} is not a depressing place, instead it is an inspiring one: her desire to destroy Athamas and Ino does not waver, but is strengthened. However, the fact that Juno is so driven by her anger and focused on gaining vengeance, yet does not personally take part in the destruction of Athamas and Ino, only orchestrates it, makes her appear slightly weak and cowardly. She has the ability to destroy them herself, and it would surely be satisfying for her to do so, but she employs Tisiphone to do her dirty work instead.

Juno’s appeal to the Furies is swift and direct: line 4.471 is dactylic (\textit{stārēt ēt īn fācīnūs | trāhērēnt Āthā|māntā sō|rērēs}), representing Juno’s eagerness and her desire to have the task done quickly, as well as the immediacy with which it will be accomplished. The asyndeton in line 4.472 (\textit{imperium, promissa, preces confundit in unum}) further represents her desperation or eagerness for their assistance. Juno not only commands the Furies to do her bidding, but makes promises and entreats them as well – for \textit{Saturnia Juno}, it should be enough to simply inform them of their task, but instead it seems as if she has to convince them to help her. Juno thus appears less powerful and influential, and at the mercy of the Furies\textsuperscript{60} – it is amusing to imagine the mighty and dangerous Juno groveling at their feet. However, Juno’s appeal is successful, and Tisiphone agrees to fulfill her request, in a blunt and succinct manner as if completing a business transaction.

\textsuperscript{59} "\textit{Perpetuas patitur poenas Athamanta superbum/ regiadives habet, qui me cum coniuge semper/ sprevit?}"
\textsuperscript{60} Jouteur, 94.
Yet such a short response has a tragic and resounding effect: four words (Met. 4.476: \textit{facta puta, quaecumque iubes}) effectively seal the fate of Athamas and Ino, and ensure their destruction and that of the house of Cadmus. But Ovid once again undercuts the gravity of the situation by means of the snakes: before Tisiphone speaks her fateful words, she performs the ridiculous action of tossing back the snakes which have slithered into her face – it would seem that all the previous combing was for naught, since her hair remains an unruly mess. Tisiphone then advises Juno to leave the realm immediately, she herself thinking it to be repugnant – if Tisiphone, an intimidating and gruesome deity with snakes for hair, and responsible for the death and destruction of countless others, finds the Underworld – her home – to be so repugnant, it must truly be an awful place. However, this dismissal further diminishes Juno: Tisiphone appears to be tougher and more persistent than Juno who, as a goddess, should fear neither the Underworld nor be affected by its horrors. But Juno obeys Tisiphone’s command and rushes off without another word: she is content to spend no more time in the Underworld than is necessary.\footnote{Fratantuono, 103.} Indeed, her entire visit is completed within thirty lines, and ends in her success.

However, it is unnecessary for Juno to travel to the Underworld at all: she could instead have sent a messenger to the Furies in her place, enlisted the help of another ruthless deity, exacted revenge on Athamas and Ino herself, or summoned them to her on earth, just as she does in \textit{Aen.} 7.323ff – but Ovid is not content for Juno to do things the easy way, or to abide by Virgil’s model, and takes it upon himself to one-up Virgil. In Virgil’s episode, Juno similarly seeks the assistance of the Furies to destroy Aeneas.
because she has thus far been unable to subdue him herself, and admits that she does not have the power to do so (Virg. *Aen.* 7.310-4). Juno’s desire for vengeance and her plot to destroy Aeneas and the Trojans are understandable, since she has had a long-standing conflict with them, while Ovid’s Juno seeks revenge against Athamas and Ino because of their arrogance and scorn for her (*Met.* 4.467-9). However, this is “not warranted in what Ovid has told us. As often, Juno distorts the situation to serve her rhetoric and wrath.”

Athamas and Ino’s offense against the goddess is unsubstantiated, and so Juno lacks a justifiable motive for their destruction, making her appear irrational, vindictive, cruel and manipulative, more so than her Virgilian counterpart. Juno calls upon Acheron for assistance but it is the Fury Allecto, sister of Tisiphone, who responds to her plea and travels up to the earth to meet Juno, unlike in Ovid, where Juno demeans herself and descends into the Underworld. Ovid’s description of the Furies is quite unlike that of Virgil, where Allecto is built up as a fearsome and loathsome creature: she is described as *luctifica* (Virg. *Aen.* 7.324), and as being consumed with various evils, including sorrowful wars, wrath, deceit, and crime (Virg. *Aen.* 7.325-6). She is hated by Pluto, as well as her own sisters; here, Allecto is truly a monster, while Tisiphone appears to be more human in comparison. Virgil’s Allecto and Ovid’s Juno would be well matched, alike in their inescapable wrath and insatiable desire for destruction.

In Virgil, Juno does not beg or offer promises to the Fury, instead she commands her outright to assist, and informs her specifically of what she wants her to do to the Trojans. Juno remains assertive, but takes advantage of her own rhetorical cunning to

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flatter Allecto: she emphasizes Allecto’s power and skill, admiring her for the great and terrible things she is capable of. The Fury is advised by Juno of her precarious situation, admitting that at stake are her own honour and reputation, and making them the Fury’s responsibility as she herself is unable to secure them. Juno’s appeal to Allecto’s pride and pity, combined with her address to her as *virgo sata Nocte* (Virg. *Aen.* 7.331), appears almost deferential – not necessarily because she fears Allecto, but because Juno is clever and manipulative. Juno crafts her speech to the Fury carefully, in the manner that will best suit her, just as Ovid’s Juno exaggerates or fabricates the offense against her to persuade Tisiphone to give aid. Virgil’s Juno gives a rousing, formidable speech, and it is easy to imagine her wrath and intensity; while Ovid does not relate Juno’s speech to Tisiphone, it must have been equally convincing. As soon as Juno is finished speaking, Allecto eagerly rushes off, silently accepting the task, which provides a climactic ending to the encounter: there is no break in the action, creating suspense and curiosity for the reader. Ovid’s ending to the section is less animated: it is Tisiphone, as opposed to Allecto, who actually speaks, and although she agrees, does not seem particularly moved by Juno’s words. Tisiphone replies to her rationally and unemotionally, and is almost dismissive, abruptly agreeing and then sending her away, showing a touching and unexpected concern for the goddess’ well-being. Although her response appears to be mostly indifferent at the prospect of assisting Juno, there is perhaps a darker, chilling reason: Tisiphone is not enthused by the prospect of destroying Athamas and Ino because she has done something similar so many times before. She is a terrifying enemy: a cold-blooded killer, indifferent to the destruction and death of mortals. While there may
initially appear to be few similarities between the two sister Furies, apart from their snakey hair, once Tisiphone is unleashed upon Athamas and Ino, her disturbing and dangerous side is revealed. Her sorrow-causing and death-dealing behaviour is morebefitting a Fury than idly combing her hair.

It is not until Juno has left the Underworld that Tisiphone springs into action, quickly preparing herself for her own anabasis, as represented by the largely dactylic nature of lines 4.481-2 (nēc mōrā.| Tīsīphō|nē || mādē|fāctām| sāngūinē| sūmīt/ ĭnpōr|tūnā fā|cēm, || flū|dōqūe crū|ōrē rū|bēntēm). Here, Tisiphone transforms into an almost entirely new character altogether: Ovid uses cumulative impact in lines 4.481-8 to build her up as a terrifying creature, and has Athamas and Ino react to her accordingly. To begin the section, she is described as inportuna (Met. 4.482), a trait thus far unsubstantiated, similar to the claims of grave et inplacabile (Met. 4.452), but which shortly will be proven. She first grabs her torch, which is covered in blood, likely with the spattered blood of her victims; she then puts on her robe, which has been stained red from the gore that is dripping from it, and finally she girds herself with a snake, presumably one still alive and potentially dangerous, which contributes to her intimidating demeanor.

But Tisiphone does not travel alone; rather she is accompanied out of the Underworld by several personifications: Grief, Fear, Terror, and Madness (Met. 4.484-5). This band of creatures is an unstoppable but superfluous force, as represented by the use of polysyndeton in line 4.485 to stress her numerous companions, with the clear advantage in a confrontation against two mortals – unlike Allecto, who confronts Amata, Turnus, and Ascanius alone. Tisiphone’s actions and the condition of her belongings are an
indication that she is a particularly violent, and presumably efficient, killer, and may suggest to the reader that a similarly violent and bloody death awaits Athamas and Ino, building anticipation for their encounter. Ovid further increases suspense by foreshadowing this encounter, and the effect it will have on Athamas and Ino, through the ominous reaction of their surroundings to Tisiphone’s arrival (Met. 4.486-8): the doorposts of their house shake, just as Athamas and Ino will soon tremble in fear before Tisiphone; the doors lose their color, just as they will become pale, both with fright and in death. Even the Sun itself flees from Tisiphone, just as they will attempt to, but ultimately fail. These strange marvels demonstrate the extensive power of Tisiphone, and serve as a warning to Athamas and Ino, who are understandably terrified. Line 4.488 is largely spondaic, stressing the dramatic reactions of the Sun and Ino (sölqē lō|cūm ē|gīt. || Mōn|strīs ē|x|ērītā| cōnīnx): it is as though time slows while they panic and try to comprehend the situation, and decide what they should do.

However, as dark and disturbing as the description of Tisiphone may be, Ovid also maintains a light tone and brings out the ridiculous aspect of her appearance and actions. Tisiphone’s arming scene is entirely over-the-top: from the torch and robe she seems to have intentionally left bloody – but keeps set aside and puts on to do nefarious deeds – to her impractical decision to use a snake as a belt. It is almost as if Tisiphone is putting on the costume of a horrible monster in order to spook Athamas and Ino, and she is simply playing the role: a true monster would proudly wear that bloody robe, just as Tisiphone does in Virgil’s version of the Underworld (Virg. Aen. 6.555). Since Tisiphone

63 Ibid, 466.
64 Jouteur, 96.
has already demonstrated a concern for superficiality, perhaps she does not want to splatter blood throughout her home and takes her robe off before entering, or only wears it when she kills so as not to stain her clothing underneath – all unreasonable concerns for a murderous Fury. The effects she has on her surroundings are similarly ridiculous: although unsettling spectacles, they are completely harmless and unnecessarily dramatic, and yet Athamas and Ino are terrified, which is ironic considering these are pale in comparison to the considerably more frightening events that await them.

The possible twofold interpretation of Ovid’s words, of both horror and humor, continues in his account of Tisiphone’s attack on Athamas and Ino, where Tisiphone manages to make herself appear even more unpleasant and ridiculous. Athamas and Ino are face-to-face with Tisiphone, who physically blocks their exit from the house – she is a menacing figure, now in complete control of the situation. She is covered in snakes, and it is excessive to the point of absurdity: they are girded around her, in her hair, around her arms, on her shoulders and chest (Met. 4.493-4). As though the mere presence of the snakes were not enough, they also vomit gore onto Tisiphone as they slither around her body, hissing and flicking their tongues, but she appears untroubled (Met. 4.494): this image is so disgusting and outrageous that it is comical. Perhaps her robe is not wet with the blood of a fresh kill, but with the bloody vomit of her snakes, which makes her appear less threatening and more repulsive. Allecto is much more restrained in her use of snakes, having them in her hair, and throwing only one of them at Amata, which appears well mannered in comparison to Tisiphone’s: its movements are smoother and more graceful, and it is almost beautiful, likened to a gold necklace and fillets, and does not appear to be
as disgusting and hostile (Virg. *Aen. 7.351-3*). Ovid, not to be outdone by Virgil in the use of snakes, has Tisiphone throw two snakes at Athamas and Ino, easily explained by the fact that “[she] has two victims and must use twice as much ammunition.”\(^{65}\) However, Tisiphone’s victims do not resist or retaliate, nor do they seem particularly capable of doing so: Athamas and Ino are completely helpless. Although Tisiphone may seem comical to the reader, Athamas and Ino clearly do not share this opinion, and are rightly terrified into submission when confronted by such a horrific creature. They do not attempt to escape Tisiphone, dodge the snakes she throws, or fight back in any way: using two snakes to attack them is not a necessity. Athamas and Ino appear pitiful and pathetic, which only emphasizes that they are “typically unheroic Ovidian victims”\(^{66}\) with neither cunning nor brawn at their disposal. With no means of challenging Tisiphone or Juno they seem undeserving of such a punishment.

Tisiphone, “not content with the destructive results of her own snakes, which were sufficient for Virgil’s Allecto” and seemingly determined to prolong the torment of Athamas and Ino, employs a second method of destruction: poison.\(^{67}\) If using two snakes seemed unnecessary, using two methods of destruction certainly is – this excessive violence and suffering is overkill, included by Ovid in an effort to outdo Allecto’s three separate attacks in a single one. Throughout the account, the description of Tisiphone’s “execution of her task is slow and deliberate, with the poet lavishing his skill on a scene

\(^{65}\) Ibid, 467.
\(^{66}\) Ibid, 466.
\(^{67}\) Ibid, 468.
where he clearly feels no rush to advance his story—Ovid’s pace matches Tisiphone’s as she takes her time, savoring the torture of Athamas and Ino. Here, it is particularly slow, as Ovid takes the opportunity to pause the action completely and provide the reader with the recipe for Tisiphone’s potion—divulging completely unnecessary details, which makes for a humorous and distracting interlude. Tisiphone’s potion contains two different poisons, one from Cerberus and another from Echidna, fresh blood, and a variety of strange ingredients: *erroresque vagos caecaeque oblivia mentis/ et scelus et lacrimas rabiemque et caedis amorem* (*Met.* 4.502-3). The number, danger and oddity of the ingredients used are emphasized by the use of polysyndeton in lines 4.501-3. In fact, everything concerning this potion is bizarre: why would Tisiphone decide to use this potion in conjunction with her snakes, effectively creating more work for herself, when the desired effect could be achieved with just one of the two? Where did she procure the ingredients, particularly the fresh blood, in a realm inhabited by shades: did she murder someone just for this purpose, or did she collect the bloody vomit from her snakes? How did she manage to add crime, a love of murder, and the other ingredients to the potion, and what form would these ingredients take? It would appear, at least, that Tisiphone does do more in the Underworld than just comb out the snakes in her hair, since she managed to find time to brew this rather complicated potion at some point. Athamas and Ino, shaking in fear, allow Tisiphone to pour the concoction over their chests, which further maddens them (*Met.* 4.506-7). It seems, however, another step is necessary, as Tisiphone then waves her torch around in circles to complete her attack: this action, just like the

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68 Fratantuono, 103.
majority of those undertaken by Tisiphone, is excessive and dramatic, making “her onslaught on Athamas and Ino look like a circus act.” There is no explanation as to why she brandishes her torch, or what effect it has, if any: it may be an intimidation tactic; she may actively be trying to set them on fire; or she may simply be showing off, performing some tricks for them. Regardless, her behaviour is absurd and seemingly illogical, although frightening to Athamas and Ino.

With her task completed, Tisiphone returns to the Underworld without delay, and does not remain to witness for herself the destruction of Athamas and Ino. Interestingly, for someone who claims to despise the realm in which she lives, Tisiphone is quick to return: once she returns, in a rather human move, she immediately removes the snake girded around her waist, apparently eager to become more comfortable and relax after a hard day’s work. Allecto, on the other hand, wants to take full advantage of the opportunity of being above ground, and instead of promptly returning home, she proposes to Juno a plan to cause further death and destruction, her desire for it apparently not yet sated. However, Virgil’s Juno is reasonable, controlled, and has limits: having had her fill of terror and deceit, and content to allow events to play themselves out, she rejects Allecto’s proposal. Juno does not allow her desire for vengeance to influence her judgment, unlike Ovid’s Juno who, if offered a similar proposal from Tisiphone, would likely accept. This final interaction between Allecto and Juno also emphasizes further differences between the two sisters: Allecto does not show respect towards Juno as Tisiphone does, speaking to her insolently and too familiarly, and overstepping her

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bounds. She not only uses “rude […] forms of address” but also “treat[s] Juno as a fellow conspirator”:\textsuperscript{70} Allecto has no involvement or personal interest in the destruction of Aeneas and the Trojans, aside from what Juno has asked of her, and should not be suggesting to Juno how to proceed – it is insulting, almost implying that Juno is not capable of handling the matter herself. Juno has to order Allecto to leave, threatening her with the authority of Jupiter, while Tisiphone avoided any such further confrontation with the heavenly gods, seemingly knowing when to take her leave. Both Furies are clearly capable, effective and reliable subordinates, having immediate success in fulfilling their tasks: Allecto incites war between the Latins and Trojans, and Tisiphone drives Athamas and Ino to insanity, resulting in the violent deaths of Ino and her two children. However, the long-term effect is less favourable for Juno, and not at all the outcome she intended: ultimately, Aeneas is the victor of the war, slaying Turnus and winning a bride and a settlement, while Ino manages to live on after death, having been transformed out of pity by Venus and Neptune into a deity. It is amusing that the time and energy Juno committed to her plan seems unwarranted; it would have been more efficient, perhaps, for her to take matters into her own hands.

Allecto is a monster, and although she acts with restraint while carrying out Juno’s tasks, hints of her true nature appear, as revealed to Turnus and Juno (Virg. \textit{Aen.} 7.445ff; 540ff): she is uncontrollable, wrathful, and violent. Tisiphone, however, is not the monster her sister is, but perhaps tries to imitate or even outdo her: she appears as a monster to Athamas and Ino, but almost tries too hard to do so, becoming a caricature

\textsuperscript{70} Amerasinghe, 65.
which has a less terrifying, more ridiculous effect on the reader. It is evident that how Ovid portrays Tisiphone depends on who interacts with her, and their view of her: she is not intimidating to Juno, and so she is portrayed as relaxed, indifferent and humanlike, but to Athamas and Ino she is a terrifying, dangerous monster, and Ovid describes her accordingly. Regardless of whom she interacts with, Allecto, on the other hand, is portrayed as a horrible monster because that is how she is viewed by mankind and other gods, both those who are equally powerful, like her fellow Furies, and those like Pluto who are more powerful. Ovid provides an alternative to Virgil’s interpretation of the Furies, offering a consistently humorous glimpse amongst the horror at two different, perhaps contradictory, aspects of Tisiphone: the goddess hard at work, and the goddess relaxing at home.

In the Juno and Tisiphone episode the Underworld features prominently, both itself as a setting, and because one of its denizens is a main character. Ovid provides a vivid description of the Underworld which leaves a lasting impression on the reader for the remainder of the Metamorphoses, setting the stage not only for the current passage, but also those subsequent, such as the Aeneas episode, where little description is provided. Here, the Underworld is treated like a living and breathing thing, a character whose defined physicality and personality plays a crucial role in the passage. Ovid’s Underworld initially appears to be much like that of many of his predecessors, especially Virgil: it is a dark, depressing place that invokes feelings of hopelessness and misery, and contains many of the same residents, who endure similar tortures and tasks. However, there are aspects that differentiate it from the others: Ovid’s addition of numerous
grotesque and amusing details, seemingly used to purposely undermine and contrast the
dramatic atmosphere he builds up. The depiction of both the Underworld and the Furies
suggests that there is an interest in keeping up appearances, in maintaining a Virgilian
look on the surface, while introducing a new and unusual nature underneath: beyond the
shadows and gloom, the Underworld is not unlike a kingdom on earth, with death
continuing on as life would. While its typically terrifying creatures are ineffectual and
seemingly negligent in their duties – even the Fury herself, under the blood-stained garb
and vomiting snakes she dons before confronting their victims, is surprisingly human and
quite ridiculous. As a result of this dual nature, modern scholars are divided on how to
interpret the episode: some argue that it is “totally un-Homeric and un-Virgilian,” or a
“veritable mockery or parody of Virgil’s narrative,” while others argue that “there is no
mockery [of Virgil], but rather deadly seriousness.” However, Ovid’s consistent use of
ambiguities in language and a combination of tones suggests that he did not intend his
work to be simple and straightforward; perhaps scholars should not attempt to categorize
it so definitively either. To say that the episode does not at all capture the spirit of the
epics of his predecessors would be untrue: it is clear that one of Ovid’s aims is to outdo
Virgil, and this would be impossible to accomplish without connections between the two
works: it would be as comparing the proverbial apples and oranges. While Ovid’s work
can be described as having a “typically light touch” this is not enough to entirely

71 Otis, 143; Galinsky (1975): 29.
73 Fratantuono, 104.
74 Ibid.
disregard any potentially Virgilian aspects: the *Aeneid*, although having a more serious tone overall, is not without its moments of levity and wit, just as Ovid’s account of Juno’s vengeance contains instances of solemnity and sorrow. Perhaps it would be more accurate to accept that the episode does not fit cleanly into any absolute category; rather, scholars should recognize and appreciate all of its facets, both the Virgilian and the un-Virgilian, the seriousness and the mockery.
CHAPTER THREE

Pluto and Proserpina (Met. 5.356-571)

The myth of the rape of Proserpina by Pluto has a deep-rooted and well-established tradition, and features in the works of a number of Ovid’s predecessors (e.g. Hom. Hymn Dem.; Hes. Theog. 912ff; Cic. Verr. 2.4.106-11; Diod. Sic. 5.2.3-5.5.1) and subsequently explored by Ovid himself (Fast. 4.419ff). Surprisingly, Ovid does not abbreviate or exclude the myth from the Metamorphoses, as he did with his treatment of the extensive Aeneid, but instead changes certain details of the plot and the motivations of the characters to alter the reader’s perspective. Ovid’s retelling is complex, marked by layered and possibly unreliable narration: Proserpina’s is but one story within a larger narrative. The stage is set previously (Met. 5.250ff), when Minerva travels to Mount Helicon and visits with the nine Muses, who recount their recent victory in a poetry competition against the Pierides, for which the nymphs served as judges. They relate the songs of both sides, summarizing the story of the battle between Jupiter and the monster Typhoeus as told by the Pierides, and reciting verbatim the account of Proserpina’s rape as told by the Muse Calliope. As a result there are three narrators: Ovid, as the author of the entire work; the unnamed Muse describing to Minerva the events of the competition; and Calliope, who rather cleverly uses the song of the Pierides to segue into her own, effectively providing the conclusion of the Typhoeus story for them. Ovid, before he

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76 Anderson (1972): 533.
even addresses the Proserpina myth, has established his version as distinctive from his predecessors’ and his own work.\footnote{For extensive analysis on the comparison between the Proserpina episodes in the \textit{Fasti} and \textit{Metamorphoses}, see Murgatroyd (2005): 249-52 and Hinds.}

As the \textit{Homeric Hymn to Demeter} opens, so does Ovid’s account, focusing on the victim of the affair, wandering around, going about mundane tasks, innocent and unsuspecting: here, the first victim is Pluto. The story begins with an amusing and unthreatening depiction of Pluto, the ruler of the dark and depressing Underworld himself: he is terrified (\textit{Met.} 5.356). The \textit{rex silentum} (\textit{Met.} 5.356) should not tremble in fear, but instill that reaction in others. His worry is for his realm, that Typhoeus may have caused structural damage to Sicily which would allow light to creep into the Underworld, frightening the shades as a result (\textit{Met.} 5.358). That Pluto wants to protect them from a little daylight is unexpected and unwarranted, considering they should be more frightened living in a place of death and decay, and cohabitating with frightening creatures. This is a humorous “reversal of the usual theme that, as ghosts, the dead terrify the living in the dark”\footnote{Anderson (1997): 535.}: the fear the living have of the dead is only natural, as it is the fear of the unknown, but for these shades, who have now experienced both life and death, there is no real reason to fear the light. Pluto’s desire to protect the shades is also ironic, since he should instead be concerned with protecting himself, the only one who is in immediate danger. This characterization of both Pluto and his subjects as anxious and fearful is not befitting their infernal abode, effectively diminishing the might of Pluto and the Underworld. Indeed, Calliope’s description of Typhoeus (\textit{Met.} 5.346ff) is more terrifying.
than Pluto and emphasizes the stark contrast between the two. It is not until Pluto is satisfied that all is well that he seems to relax, and he takes a leisurely stroll (Met. 5.363) – however this is ironic, since now is the time to be on guard, as he is being watched by an unseen and dangerous opponent, Venus, who is about to take action.

Venus sits on Mount Eryx, looking down on Pluto – this is both sinister, in that she spies on him and plots from afar, but also comical, as surely she has better things to do than watch Pluto while he performs a safety inspection of his realm. Venus decides to play matchmaker, setting Pluto up with Proserpina in a union that is meant to benefit Venus herself. It appears that her motivation is entirely selfish: she has become power-hungry, revealing in a speech to her son Cupid that she is increasingly concerned with the number of goddesses who, by remaining virgins, refuse to fall under her rule, and is desperate to have control over all three realms (Met. 5.365ff). Venus is similar to both Typhoeus and the Pierides in this respect: Typhoeus covets the heavenly realm of Jupiter (Met. 5.348), and the Pierides set territory as the stakes for the contest (Met. 5.311–4), just as Venus desires the infernal realm of Pluto – all seek possession of an area that does not belong to them.79 This speech is overly-dramatic and her claims are exaggerated: for there to be two or three virgin goddesses does not mean that her power has diminished, and instead Venus comes across as irrationally paranoid – she already rules over two of the three realms, over both mortals and immortals. Furthermore, there appears to be little point in having rule over Tartarus, apart from a sense of completionism, since surely her influence would be limited in a realm full of shades and monsters. Venus and Cupid

79 P. Johnson, 145.
already successfully hold sway over Jupiter and the heavenly gods, as well as Neptune and the water gods, as is stressed by the emphatic placement of *tu* in line 369 (*tu superos ipsumque Iovem tu numina ponti*) – set before the other gods, essentially leading and controlling them – so it seems that Pluto stands no chance against Venus’ power and will be overcome also. Indeed, Pluto is no match for Cupid’s arrow, but not just any ordinary arrow can best the mighty god of the Underworld: Cupid is sure to pick out the sharpest and surest, with his mother’s help (*Met.* 5.380-4). However, Venus and Cupid do not have the best track record: their previous meddling between Apollo and Daphne was disastrous (*Met.* 1.452ff); it is risky influencing the gods in this way. Venus does not seem to care what she has to do, or whom she has to use in order to get what she wants, resulting in an “unusually aggressive and politicized portrait of Venus the empire-builder.”80

The inclusion of Venus as the “[instigator] of the rape, [which] is doubtless an Ovidian invention” is perhaps the most notable difference between Ovid’s account and the Homeric Hymn.81 As a result of her interference, blame for the rape is removed from Pluto and Jupiter and placed on Venus herself; instead both Pluto and Proserpina are victims of another god’s machinations, neither now having any ulterior motive or control over the matter.82 Ovid’s initial depiction of Pluto establishes him as harmless, nervous, and a benevolent ruler, which is unexpected for the god of the Underworld, typically viewed as dark, fearsome, and ruthless. Pluto’s perceived weakness makes him an easy target for Venus: indeed, he is essentially conquered by a child. The prelude to the myth

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80 Ibid, 128.
81 Fratantuono, 134.
82 P. Johnson, 139.
is light-hearted, portraying Pluto as a comical and pathetic figure, and sets the tone for the remainder of the account. The tone provides a contrast to the narrative itself, which is dark and upsetting, and to the Hymn, which has already dealt with the myth in a serious manner. That is not to say that Ovid makes light of the rape, rather he treats his account as a tragicomedy, allowing the reader to simultaneously laugh at Pluto’s expense, and be appalled by his actions, while pitying the innocent Proserpina.

Suddenly, and unexpectedly, the setting changes from the surroundings of Mount Eryx to the surroundings of Enna, and the focus of the narrative shifts from Pluto to Proserpina. By excluding the aftermath of Cupid’s attack, Ovid leaves Pluto’s whereabouts and intentions unknown, making his impending appearance more abrupt and unpredictable. The exposition of this interlude remains carefree and peaceful, and the pace leisurely: Ovid spends six-and-a-half lines describing in detail the grove, stressing its beauty and idyllic nature, before introducing Proserpina. The description itself opens with a light-hearted pun: *lacus est* (*Met*. 5.385), which is a play on the “characteristic Latin opening formula […] *locus est.*” This grove is the ideal place to be on a hot day, and a peaceful retreat: trees line the perimeter of the lake, providing privacy from onlookers and shade from the bright rays of the sun; the air is cool, while the ground is humid and fertile, sustaining colourful flowers year-round; and singing swans glide along the water, providing an “extra touch of grace.” The carefree Proserpina plays in this grove, picking flowers with a childlike enthusiasm, competing with her companions to

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83 Murgatroyd (2005): 78 describes the version in the *Fasti* as such, but it also seems an apt description of the *Metamorphoses* version.
84 Hinds, 31-2.
85 Hinds, 25.
pick the most (Met. 5.391ff) – these are the “innocent virginal pleasures” of a young girl, well-suited for such a place.\(^{86}\) The scene that Ovid describes is perfectly serene and provides a sharp contrast to the violence that is about to occur. However, the scene is almost too perfect, which has an unsettling effect, suggesting that there is some hidden threat of which all should be wary. Indeed, Ovid’s cleverly pointed description provides hints of this underlying danger, drawing links to death and the Underworld.

There are several similarities to Ovid’s previous description of the Underworld: the trees that line the lake are reminiscent of those that line the path downward (Met. 4.432), producing thick shadows that make visibility difficult, just as the shade and chill is characteristic of the Underworld (Met. 4.436). The ring of trees may also serve a sinister purpose, with their trunks obstructing the view of the lake from all around, and their leafy branches obstructing the view from above: the area is effectively concealed from those on earth and those above. It is secluded and sheltered, which leaves Proserpina vulnerable, making it an opportune location for Pluto’s assault – no one can see and no one can help. This is reminiscent of the clouds that Jupiter summons to hide his rape of Io from Juno (Met. 1.598-9), as in both cases aspects of nature are used to hide the nefarious activities of the gods from any potential witnesses. It is ironic that the foliage is able to shield Proserpina from the harmless ‘attack’ of the sun’s rays, yet there is nothing that shields her from the violent attack of Pluto, which is what she really needs protection from: the foliage is able to stop the arrows of one archer but not the other, as Cupid,

\(^{86}\) Anderson (1997): 539.
despite being a child, proves to be more powerful than Phoebus.\textsuperscript{87} There is also a sexual connotation to *ictus* (*Met. 5.389*), which is occasionally used to refer to male ejaculation, alluding to the sexual violence that is to follow.\textsuperscript{88} Similarly, the phrase *sinum* […] *implet* (*Met. 5.393-4*) can be construed as sexual.\textsuperscript{89} *Sinus* is a euphemism for the vagina, while *impleo* is often used to describe “insemination by the male animal,” but is also applied to humans and gods.\textsuperscript{90}

Another of Jupiter’s affairs, this time with Leda, is recalled by the mention of swans and it serves as a further reminder of the licentiousness of the gods. There is also a potentially sinister aspect to the swans: that swans sing a mournful song just before they die, and even reside in the Underworld (*Ov. Am. 2.6.49ff*).\textsuperscript{91} The former was an ancient belief, first appearing in Aeschylus (*Aga. 1444-6*: ἡ δὲ τοι κύκνου δίκην τὸν ὑστατον μέλψασα θανάσιο γόον κεῖται), and is now known to be false.\textsuperscript{92} However, Ovid still considered it to be true, based on a later reference to the swan song (*Met. 14.430*: carmina iam moriens canit exequialia cygnus). Perhaps here the swans are not singing to mark their own deaths; instead they signify and mourn the looming symbolic death of Proserpina, represented by her catabasis and residency in the Underworld.\textsuperscript{93} It is amusing that the only witnesses to Proserpina’s abduction from the grove are the swans, completely unaware of the situation and useless in protecting Proserpina, and in assisting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{87} Hinds, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 30-1; Adams, 148-9.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Hinds, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Adams, 90; 207.
\item \textsuperscript{91} TLL 9.571.58ff.
\item \textsuperscript{92} Arnott, 149.
\item \textsuperscript{93} DeBloois, 246.
\end{itemize}
Ceres in her search for information; they likely even mask her cries for help with their loud calls. This thought becomes more disturbing upon consideration of the association between swans and Venus, who was known to have a chariot drawn by swans (Met. 10.717-8; Hor. Carm. 3.28.15).\textsuperscript{94} The presence of the swans signifies Venus’ influence over the area, and perhaps suggests that they were placed there specifically by Venus to act as her spies or ensure the successful abduction of Proserpina.

Proserpina’s ‘death’ is even foreshadowed by her seemingly harmless activity of flower picking, as there is a precedent of the act signifying the imminent rape of unsuspecting individuals.\textsuperscript{95} The flowers that she picks are also sinister, two types which appear to have been deliberately chosen: the violet and the lily, both having connotations with death. Violets were “[one of two] principal flowers used in funeral ritual,”\textsuperscript{96} often “used to deck graves and other memorials of the dead.”\textsuperscript{97} Lilies were similarly placed on tombs (AP 7.485; Virg. Aen. 6.883ff) and even present in the Underworld itself (Virg. Aen. 6.708-9),\textsuperscript{98} and when included in a narrative they often “indicate present or imminent death.”\textsuperscript{99} It is as if Proserpina is picking flowers for her own funeral, to be used by her mother and friends while mourning their loss. In fact, they do serve as a sort of memorial for Proserpina: during her abduction she drops the flowers that were held in her tunic, effectively marking the spot from which ‘death’ took her (Met. 5.399). There is

\textsuperscript{94} TLL 9.571.58ff; Nisbet, 344.
\textsuperscript{95} Europa: Met. 2.833ff; Hermaphroditus (here the female perpetrator picks the flowers): Met. 4.285ff; Dryope: Met. 9.324ff; Proserpina: Fast. 4.419ff; Flora (while she doesn’t pick them, she is the goddess of flowers): Fast. 5.195ff.
\textsuperscript{96} Brenk, 219.
\textsuperscript{97} OLD s.v. viola 1b.
\textsuperscript{98} Horsfall, 606.
\textsuperscript{99} Thomas, 310.
some dark humour in the fact that the reader can see what is about to happen to Proserpina, yet she is completely oblivious and unwary, eagerly plucking the very flowers that spell her doom, just as Pluto is about to eagerly snatch her up and take her away. Her death is further alluded to by the reference to the season (Met. 5.391): spring is perpetual, and so flowers are always blooming in the grove, which adds an eerie, supernatural aspect to the scene, while the Underworld, and so Pluto himself, is associated with winter (Met. 4.436). Winter will soon come to the grove, brought both by the arrival of Pluto and by the actions of Ceres (Met. 5.477ff), resulting in the death of Proserpina as she descends into the Underworld, and the death of the flowers at last.

Then, without warning, Pluto enters and disrupts the calm and pleasant atmosphere. There was no preconceived design to bait and trap Proserpina, as in the Hymn (Hom. Hymn Dem. 8): instead Pluto acts on impulse, making his actions, although heinous, less sinister than his Homeric counterpart. He immediately advances, giving Proserpina no opportunity to react until she is already in his grasp: he snatches her up and carries her off in just one word (Met. 5.395: paene simul visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti). Here, “the rather suggestive language may well be […] a comically disparaging remark of Pluto’s sexual performance,” furthering the pathetic depiction of Pluto, and the reader’s amusement at his expense. The sharp contrast between Proserpina’s leisurely actions and Pluto’s haste is almost comical: it is easy to imagine Pluto as comically pathetic, speeding off with Proserpina so quickly that clouds of dust rise in his wake. The speed of Pluto’s actions also reveals “the automatic, unthinking manner in which he

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100 Hinds, 28.
101 Zissos, 108.
fulfills the goddess’ will”\textsuperscript{102}; he seemingly comes straight to Enna from Mount Eryx, giving no consideration to the abduction, and acting without thought of morality or consequence. Pluto’s desperation is also apparent, not only from his haste, but also from his silence: he acts with a dangerous efficiency, and “wastes no time and brooks no delay with disguises or any dissimulation.”\textsuperscript{103} He is similar to Venus in this way, stopping at nothing to achieve his purpose, allowing for no distractions or interference, as soon becomes even more apparent (\textit{Met.} 5.409ff).

Proserpina is understandably terrified and distraught; she calls to her mother and companions, but her cries for help are futile: Ceres’ whereabouts are unknown, while her friends, even if they could hear her, would be unable to match Pluto’s strength and power, presumably being young girls themselves. The girl’s first, and unfortunately only, thought is to call to those who cannot help her. In a foolish oversight due to her shock, Proserpina neither thinks to appeal to her father Jupiter, who would have some input in the matter, as she does in the Hymn (\textit{Hom. Hymn Dem.} 21), nor to Pluto himself, who is not a stranger to her, but a family member. In fact, there is no communication between Pluto and Proserpina, and Pluto does not even speak at all in the episode, except to urge on his horses (\textit{Met.} 5.402-3) – a humorously bad start to a marriage. Indeed, Pluto has a strange way of displaying his newfound love for Proserpina: while she screams, clearly scared, he appears unconcerned, and makes no attempt to soothe her or to explain the situation, despite having – in his view at least – no ill intent. The abduction is described from the point of view of Proserpina, focusing on her actions leading up to it and her reaction, and

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Zissos, 108.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Fratantuono, 135.
\end{itemize}
emphasizing “Proserpina as passive victim rather than Dis as active agent,” both in the narrative and in voice (Met. 5.395: visa est dilectaque raptaque).\textsuperscript{104} This is likely why Pluto is only referred to as raptor (Met. 5.402): this is all that Proserpina sees him as now, not even giving him the satisfaction of using his name.

One of Ovid’s contributions to the abduction is a dramatic scene where Proserpina’s tunic is accidentally ripped during the tumult – certainly an inopportune moment for her clothes to rip – consequently spilling out the flowers that were stored in its fold. Proserpina is more distraught over her damaged tunic and the loss of the flowers, which is a “calculated symbol for her loss of girlish pleasures and innocence,”\textsuperscript{105} than she is over the assault itself.\textsuperscript{106} Proserpina’s reaction to the loss of the flowers is humorous: her grief is misplaced, and the flowers should not even be a concern to her in such a situation; she should be worrying about the loss of her virginity instead, not about inconsequential and replaceable flowers. However, her grief is also upsetting, since it suggests that Proserpina is “too young to even realize what rape is,”\textsuperscript{107} that she doesn’t understand the situation and instead focuses on something of importance to her that she does understand. This, combined with the use of simplicitas, puerilis and virgineus (Met. 5.400, 401) further emphasizes her youth and naiveté, and elicits pity for Proserpina, an innocent caught amongst the political and romantic endeavors of more powerful gods.

Pluto successfully carries off Proserpina and begins to make his return journey to the Underworld, but it is not long before he is met with resistance – this encounter with

\textsuperscript{104} Anderson (1997): 539.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 540.
\textsuperscript{106} Curran, 227.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
Cyane is another addition by Ovid. Pluto’s chariot passes by the nymph, standing in her
eponymous fountain, described as *inter Sicelidas celeberrima* (*Met. 5.412*).\textsuperscript{108} To describe
Cyane as *celeberrima* would be incorrect, since she is not particularly well-known in
classical literature, both before and after Ovid.\textsuperscript{109} Cyane is not mentioned in the Hymn,
and only the fountain is referenced in association to the Pluto and Proserpina myth (Diod. 5.4.1) until Ovid makes the first reference to her in Latin literature.\textsuperscript{110} Ovid mentions
Cyane in both of his versions of the myth, although it is only in passing in the *Fasti* (Ov. *Fast. 4.469*), and she is not fully developed as in the *Metamorphoses*; nor does the nymph play a significant role in later adaptations of the myth by Ovid’s successors either: she is most notably referenced in Claudian’s version (Claud. *Rapt. Pros.* 2.61, 3.245ff), but does not have a critical part in the narrative.\textsuperscript{111} The importance of Cyane to the version in the
*Metamorphoses* is an example of Calliope’s unreliable narration: she inserts the character of Cyane, bolstering her image and by extension that of the nymphs, in an effort to appeal to the judges of the poetry contest by emphasizing, and perhaps exaggerating, the involvement of nymphs in the myth.\textsuperscript{112}

Upon the approach of Pluto’s chariot, Cyane recognizes Proserpina, and commands the god to go no further (*Met. 5.415*). She then, rather amusingly, begins “lecturing the lord of the Underworld in the etiquette of courtship,” acting like a couples’

\textsuperscript{108} *OLD* s.v. *Cyane*.
\textsuperscript{109} Anderson (1997): 541.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Zissos, 101.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 98.
counselor.\textsuperscript{113} Her scolding also emphasizes the unnecessary and ridiculous nature of Pluto’s actions. His intentions are honourable: eventually it becomes clear that he loves Proserpina and wishes to marry her, making her the revered Queen of the Underworld, but goes about it completely wrong – “all he needed to do was ask for Proserpina’s hand!”\textsuperscript{114} Cyane warns Pluto that it is not possible for him to become Ceres’ son-in-law in this manner; however, in another amusing twist, she is sorely mistaken, since that is exactly what he will do. Cyane even goes so far as to provide an anecdote about her own marriage, suggesting it should be emulated, and effectively “compar[ing] herself with a god, and her trivial love affair with the passion of Dis.”\textsuperscript{115} It is unclear whether Cyane recognizes Pluto, since it is not specified and she does not refer to him by name, but in view of her audacity she is either unaware of the identity of her interlocutor, or she is rather foolish and insolent, and thus her imminent destruction (\textit{Met.} 5.425ff) should come as no surprise. Regardless, Cyane’s plan is to reason with Proserpina’s abductor, and make him see the error of his ways, seemingly in the hope that he apologizes and releases Proserpina, but did Cyane truly think this would be successful? Someone whose first instinct after falling in love is to rape and abduct the object of his affection is unlikely to regret his actions so shortly after. It does not appear that she thoroughly thought out this plan either, since such a volatile situation could quickly deteriorate, and she would be ineffective against Pluto, even more than she is currently, if he turned to violence.\textsuperscript{116} The final straw is when Cyane outstretches her arms in a foolish and futile attempt to

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 99.
\textsuperscript{114} Anderson (1997): 541.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 542.
physically block the chariot, and Pluto, here referred to as *Saturnius* (*Met.* 5.420), loses his patience.\(^{117}\) The use of the epithet is a reminder of Pluto’s influential parentage and powerful position in the cosmos, and is reminiscent of *Saturnia Juno* (*Met.* 4.448): indeed, Pluto’s uncontrollable rage is comparable to that of his sister, Juno, again indicating that this confrontation will not end well for Cyane.\(^{118}\)

Ultimately, and as expected, Pluto is not convinced by Cyane’s words; instead he ignores her criticism and continues his journey into the Underworld, spiting Cyane in the process (*Met.* 5.423-4). Despite her lack of success, Cyane is overall depicted favorably: she courageously and selflessly endeavors to be the hero of the story and thwart Pluto’s plan by making a “heroic but ultimately disastrous attempt […] to save Proserpina.”\(^{119}\) She is the only character to intervene on Proserpina’s behalf,\(^{120}\) doing what Proserpina’s mother and friends failed to do, although she is ultimately unsuccessful and is punished for her interference. All that Cyane manages to do is anger Pluto, expediting his return to the Underworld with Proserpina by taking a shortcut through her fountain, which damages it: Cyane, and perhaps Proserpina, would have been better off if she had kept quiet. Cyane’s distress over Proserpina and the violation of her fountain leads to her complete physical breakdown and dissolution in its waters (*Met.* 5.425ff), which effectively “removes one more witness of the rape.”\(^{121}\) Pluto’s violent actions

\(^{117}\) Ibid, 541.
\(^{118}\) Ibid.
\(^{119}\) Zissos, 99.
\(^{120}\) Ibid.
\(^{121}\) Otis, 57.
demonstrate his intransigency and indifference to others, allowing no one to be an impediment to his desires, especially now, seemingly overcome with lust.

Ceres’ desperate and fruitless search for her daughter continues for eighty lines, until she encounters the nymph Arethusa, who reveals all as a reliable informant, having seen for herself Proserpina in the Underworld (Met. 5.504ff). Like Cyane, Arethusa has no previous association with the myth of Proserpina’s abduction: she does not appear in the Hymn, and is only referenced in the Fasti, before the action has begun (Ov. Fast. 4.423). Arethusa is, however, more established in literary tradition than Cyane, appearing prior to Ovid in Virgil (Virg. Georg. 4.344ff; Aen. 3.694ff). This is the second instance of Calliope inserting a character, specifically a nymph, into her story; however, unlike Cyane who was not filling a previously-established role, Arethusa is: she replaces Helios as informer (Hom. Hymn Dem. 74ff). The displacement of a god by a nymph, and not even the celeberrima one, suggests that nymphs are equally worthy of such a critical role, and comparable to the gods in relation to their power and significance: this “clear act of mythological revisionism […] is another flattering gesture to the contest judges.”

The additions and revisions by Calliope are amusing, and reflect poorly on her: she is one of the Muses, embodying art and poetry, yet she does not win on her own merit, relying instead on manipulating the judges, rather than on her rhetorical skill. Arethusa only divulges Proserpina’s present condition and, unlike Helios (Hom. Hymn Dem. 77ff), does not comment on the abduction itself, or assign blame for the affair, perhaps because she is unaware of the circumstances and does not want to speculate, or simply has the tact not to

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122 Hinds, 87.
123 Zissos, 103.
mention to Ceres the potentially upsetting details of her daughter’s rape. However, she does reveal that Proserpina is suffering, still miserable and terrified, not yet accustomed to or pleased by her new life in the Underworld – not exactly comforting words for a grieving mother. For Arethusa, Proserpina’s emotional state is almost unimportant in comparison to her newly acquired queenly status, believing that “Proserpina has done rather well for herself.” While Cyane disapproved of the marriage of Pluto and Proserpina, or at least his violent method of courtship, Arethusa certainly approves of the result. Indeed, Proserpina’s position as queen and co-ruler of the Underworld makes her more powerful than even her own mother: powerful and influential in her own right as the wife of the king of an entire realm, Proserpina is now more like Juno than Ceres, and she is even referred to as *matrona* (*Met.* 5.508), which is used as a title of Juno. The word order in lines 507 and 508 is significant, and revealing of the actuality of Proserpina’s situation: *maxima* is surrounded by *opaci mundi*, and *matrona* is surrounded by *infernī tyrannī*. Despite her status, Proserpina is defined and controlled by outside forces: she is an equal to Pluto only in title, as she is still very much the fearful, vulnerable and naïve girl she was at the beginning of the story.

However, this is soon to change when Proserpina makes her first conscious decision of the episode: choosing to eat the pomegranate seeds (*Met.* 5.535-8). Proserpina is not manipulated or forced by another, rather she is completely unaided as she, entirely

\[125\] Ibid.
\[126\] *OLD* s.v. *matrona* 1b.
\[127\] *Met.* 5.507-8: *sed regina tamen, sed opaci maxima mundi/ sed tamen inferni pollens matrona tyrannī*. 
of her own accord, picks the pomegranate, splits it open, and eats seven seeds. This is unlike the Hymn, where Pluto sneaks her a pomegranate seed, sinisterly plotting to keep her in the Underworld against her will (Hom. Hymn Dem. 371ff). Although Pluto is not mentioned at this point in the narrative, Ovid manages to further develop the unusual depiction presented earlier (Met. 5.356ff) with reference to the culti horti (Met. 5.535): the dark ruler of the Underworld does not seem likely to be the “owner of a palace or villa beautified by cultivated gardens” — how refined and house-proud he is! Proserpina’s choice is a significant moment of development for her, and results in “the transformation of Proserpina from the passive victim […] to a more active protagonist.” While Proserpina decided to eat the seeds, she did not decide to remain in the Underworld, and surely would not have partaken, if she were aware of the consequence: Ovid’s use of the verb errare is therefore fitting (Met. 5.535), since it has the meaning of both “to wander” and “to make a mistake”. Proserpina seems just as foolish as she was back in the grove, unaware that someone watches her with ill-intent (Met. 5.538ff), and of the potential dangers of her actions – to see her make the same mistake again is both entertaining and frustrating. It is difficult to reconcile that this young girl will become the fearsome queen of the Underworld, ἔπαινη Περσεφόνεια (e.g. Hom. Od. 10.491; Hes. Theog. 768): Ovid’s light-hearted and irreverent depiction of the reckless, vulnerable, and fearful young goddess is amusing, especially since she will soon be inspiring fear in others. It is

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129 Zissos, 109.
130 As noted by Murgatroyd (2005): 79, in reference to Ovid’s use of the same verb in Fast. 4.426.
131 Anderson (1997): 553; Hinds, 89.
not until Proserpina punishes, by means of transformation, the spying and snitching Ascalaphus – an unnecessary action, since the damage is already done – that she completes her own transformation (*Met.* 5.543ff). She takes charge, no longer tolerating the dictation of her circumstances by the actions of another, effectively transforming herself “from simple (and hungry) to vengeful queen of the dead.”

Just as Proserpina has seemingly embraced the great power she now holds in the Underworld, Jupiter grants her the ability to return to the upper world for six months of the year; however, the effects of her time in the Underworld remain. Contrast the word order of lines 507 and 508 with that of lines 566-7: where Proserpina was once overwhelmed by her surroundings and described as the wife of Pluto, she is now referred to as *dea*, which is placed near the beginning of the line, separated from both Ceres and Pluto (*mater* and *coniunx*), relationships by which she was previously defined, and neither is mentioned by name but are described in terms of their relationship with Proserpina. Jupiter’s agreement between brother and sister, husband and mother – essentially a custody battle – further transforms Proserpina from sad and scared to joyful, both mentally and physically (*Met.* 5.568-70). She is once more the cheerful and carefree girl she was before her abduction, but is no longer as innocent or foolish. It seems that her suffering in the Underworld was not unnoticed, as even Pluto made the astonishingly acute observation of Proserpina’s sadness, which is amusing as he was entirely responsible for it yet did nothing to comfort her: the selfish, stubborn and insensitive

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132 Fratantuono, 138.
133 Anderson (1997): 557, understands the unnamed goddess to be Ceres, while Hinds, 93, understands it to be Proserpina. This analysis will follow Hinds’ reading.
Pluto seems to make for an unsatisfying husband. Ultimately, Venus accomplishes her goal of invading the Underworld by means of a union between Pluto and Proserpina, but the outcome was likely not what she had anticipated: her meddling “[ended] in a Jovian-sanctioned legal marriage.”\textsuperscript{134} This time there were no violent deaths, divine punishments, or transformations into flowers, which so often accompany Cupid’s arrows and divine rape, rather there was a happy ending for all those involved. Venus was not only successful, but her interference appears to have been completely unnoticed: she gets away with manipulating the gods, and they are none the wiser.

In conclusion, Ovid’s account of the rape of Proserpina is his introduction to the “underworld royal family” and how it came to be,\textsuperscript{135} and so each character involved – specifically Pluto, Proserpina, and Venus – is deliberately and cleverly characterized either to create a specific first impression, as is the case with Pluto and Proserpina, or to display a different side to the character, as is the case with Venus. Venus’ unprecedented involvement in the abduction reflects both well and poorly on her: she is portrayed as clever and formidable by influencing the gods to carry out her will – she is the unseen puppeteer pulling the strings behind-the-scenes. She takes over Jupiter’s role in the Hymn of mastermind, in what may be interpreted as an example of “female empowerment.”\textsuperscript{136} However, Venus’ actions also show her lack of concern for the well-being of her fellow gods, and disrespect for their autonomy as a whole. To exploit them and cause them suffering is inconsequential to her – it is merely a necessary evil in her quest for complete

\textsuperscript{134} Fratantuono, 138.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 136.
\textsuperscript{136} Zissos, 108.
domination of the three realms. Venus is not unlike Pluto in this manner: she is obstinate, callous, and covetous, yet more devious and manipulative. In his account Ovid portrays Venus, and by extension Cupid, “not so much as the inspirers of love, but as Empress and Commander in Chief of an empire” – a unique, but unflattering depiction.\(^{137}\) Whereas Pluto, who most readers would expect to be frightening or intimidating, falls short of this expectation. Instead, Ovid introduces a ruler and god who does not embody the characteristics associated with his realm: he ensures that Pluto does not evoke the fear, death and revulsion of the Underworld, but instead laughter and mockery. While Pluto’s main role in the narrative is as the undignified perpetrator of Proserpina’s rape, he also serves as a sort of comic relief, lightening the mood of a traditionally somber and melancholic myth. However, Pluto is hardly the focus of the story of his own marriage: the reader “can barely conceive of him as a ‘character’ in the usual sense.”\(^{138}\) He is a silent character, never revealing his thoughts or intentions, appearing as nothing more than a “mere utensil in Venus’ hands,” working to accomplish her goals.\(^{139}\) It is clear that this is not the story of the fearsome Pluto, rather the story of the transformation of Proserpina, and so she is fittingly given the focus and portrayed predominantly positively, in pointed contrast with the diminished portrayal of Pluto. As a young girl, Proserpina is not without her weaknesses: she is naïve, emotional, and foolish, but emerges from her experience as a different person. Initially she allows her situation to affect her, succumbing to sadness and fear, but in the end she is all the better for it, as her suffering

\(^{137}\) P. Johnson, 125-6.
\(^{138}\) Zissos, 108.
\(^{139}\) Ibid.
shapes her character. Proserpina is no longer defined by her relationships with others, but becomes her own person, one with agency. She becomes stronger, more assertive, and not only more powerful, but more accepting of that power, as represented by her needless and vindictive transformation of Ascalaphus. This final depiction of Proserpina suggests that the Queen of the Underworld is just as formidable and fearsome as its King and a force to be reckoned with: Venus certainly never considered that her intervention would have such a positive effect on her victim.
CHAPTER FOUR

Orpheus (Met. 10.1-11.66)

Before examining Ovid’s retelling of Orpheus’ descent into the Underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice (Met. 10.1ff), it is necessary to first discuss Virgil’s account (Virg. Georg. 4.454ff), which has become the authority for the Orpheus myth, with subsequent authors adopting Virgil’s version of events.\footnote{Anderson (1982): 26.} Ovid is no exception, following and responding to Virgil’s work within his own while, in his usual manner, changing details to suit his purpose. Virgil’s Orpheus episode is narrated by the seer Proteus, as a part of his explanation to Aristaeus of the reason for the bad luck with his bees (Virg. Georg. 4.315ff): it is his punishment for his involvement in the death of Eurydice, who died while trying to escape his advances. In Virgil, the story is not Orpheus’ alone: it is presented as an aside to Aristaeus’ story, chosen specifically to give the outer narrative greater depth and to establish Orpheus as a foil to Aristaeus.\footnote{Ibid, 39. See Anderson, 25-50, for further details on the relationship between the Aristaeus and Orpheus episodes.} Throughout the episode emotions are consistently high, all motivated by the loss of Eurydice. Virgil stresses the pervasive sorrow felt after her death, and the widespread effect it had: not only do Eurydice’s nymph companions and her husband mourn her, but the landscape itself is affected (Virg. Georg. 4.461-3). Even after Orpheus has lost Eurydice for the second time, and wept over her for seven months, he never comes to terms with his loss: he continues to mourn and lament, calling out to her even with his last breath (Virg. Georg. 4.523-7). In death, Orpheus no longer mourns Eurydice, since he is now reunited with
her; instead he is furious on her behalf, never forgetting the initial reason for their misfortune. The immense grief, inevitable guilt, and most of all the intense love Orpheus has for Eurydice is palpable. Indeed, there are two aspects to Orpheus: the lover and the poet, and it seems to be Virgil’s intent to emphasize and explore Orpheus the lover, rather than the poet.\footnote{Anderson (1982): 47.} Fittingly then, Virgil does not disclose the contents of Orpheus’ speech, only revealing that it profoundly moves the inhabitants of the Underworld. The song is more mysterious and effective this way; its details are unknown, and so the reader cannot argue whether Orpheus is a gifted poet or a lackluster one – what is clear is that he loves his wife dearly. Virgil builds up Orpheus’ task to be a formidable one, stressed by the unpleasant descriptions of the Underworld (Virg. \textit{Georg.} 4.467-80) and the creatures that inhabit it (Virg. \textit{Georg.} 4.481-484), but particularly by introducing Proserpina and Pluto as \textit{regemque tremendum/ nesciaque humanis precibus mansuescere corda} (Virg. \textit{Georg.} 4.469-70). Thus, Orpheus’ success in travelling to the Underworld and in swaying its rulers seems to be well earned, and a true accomplishment. Overall, Virgil conveys a tragic, highly emotional story that explores the resilience and madness of love, and the unfairness and indiscrimination of death.

Ovid, however, is not one to wholly accept the work of his predecessor, especially in a tale so serious and touching; instead he adopts the basic outline of the myth, altering it as he sees fit, “challeng[ing] Virgil on his own ground, with his own material.”\footnote{Segal, 55.} Ovid has no desire to emulate the tone of Virgil’s account, of reproducing a tragic and emotional version in his own words: this is parody, inserting humor and wit where Virgil
neglected to, or found it inappropriate to, and subverting the moments of pathos stressed
by Virgil. However, that is not to say that the account is entirely devoid of pathos:
surely only the most unfeeling of readers would have no pity for a bride who dies on her
wedding day, and the groom, who becomes both a husband and a widower in the same
day. But Ovid’s goal is different from Virgil’s and he achieves a light-hearted, even
mocking tone not only by working in humorous touches, but also by making several
significant changes from Virgil’s account: namely, a lack of focus on Eurydice, an
emphasis on Orpheus the poet, and the unemotional and impersonal nature of his song.
Virgil’s Eurydice speaks five moving and damning lines to Orpheus before she is swept
back into the Underworld (Virg. Georg. 4.494-8), while her Ovidian counterpart says
only one word (Met. 10.62) – her words seemingly less important to include than
Orpcheus’ lengthy song, since Ovid sees fit to exclude the one but include the other.
There is not only a lack of connection between husband and wife, but between Eurydice
and the reader, which appears to be Ovid’s intention: attention is given to Orpheus
instead, so that the reader neither feels an emotional attachment to Eurydice’s character
nor considers her death a tragedy. Unlike Virgil, Ovid’s interest is in Orpheus the poet,
not the lover, and so he relates the entirety of Orpheus’ song to Pluto and Proserpina.
However, the infamous song is representative of neither his supposed great skill nor his
love for his wife: it is “a pompous, unconvincing speech, full of witty sophistication,

144 Otis, 184.
145 Fratantuono, 176.
146 Anderson (1982): 42.
147 Anderson (1972): 476 480.
devoid of true emotion."¹⁴⁹ While Virgil’s Orpheus seemingly deserved to be awarded the return of Eurydice, Ovid’s Orpheus is not justified in his success. As there is nothing in his song that suggests he is worthy of being granted this kindness, what makes him so special? As Virgil remarks, there are not only grown men and women in the Underworld, but *pueri innuptaeque puellae,/ impositique rogis iuvenes ante ora parentum* (Virg. *Georg.* 5.476-7), as well as infants (Virg. *Aen.* 6.426-30) – all young and innocent, robbed of the remaining years of their life, just like Eurydice. Yet, the infernal gods make an exception for Orpheus, despite his song not being particularly remarkable, nor proving that he loves his wife more than any other man. There is no mention of his *dulcis coniunx* (Virg. *Georg.* 4.465) or any similar endearment in his speech or elsewhere, nor any desperate invocations (Virg. *Georg.* 4.525-6) – indeed, he does not appear to “express any sincere feelings for Eurydice.”¹⁵⁰ Ovid includes no Proteus, no Aristaeus, and limited exposure for Eurydice, and the episode begins book 10, while Virgil placed his account at the end of book 4, closing the *Georgics* with Aristaeus’ story. All of this is done to give focus entirely to Orpheus,¹⁵¹ who is depicted in a manner fitting for this parody, as a mocking inversion of his Virgilian counterpart.

Ovid’s account does not immediately begin with Eurydice’s death, but with a description of Orpheus’ and Eurydice’s wedding day, offering a part of their story that the reader would not know from previous accounts.¹⁵² Here, Ovid is filling in the gaps of

¹⁴⁹ Anderson (1972): 475.
¹⁵¹ Segal, 58.
¹⁵² This is, of course, an assumption based on the content of the surviving accounts of the myth. It is unknown whether such information was presented in any lost accounts.
Virgil’s narrative, providing Orpheus with a “fuller private life” both before and after (Met. 10.78-85) Eurydice’s death, and the reader with a more intimate glimpse at the doomed couple.\footnote{Segal, 56.} This happy occasion will soon be interrupted by death and misery, as opposed to a terrible situation introducing an even worse one: the very nature of the situation inspires pathos, perhaps more than in Virgil.\footnote{Anderson (1982): 39.} For Ovid to change the circumstances of Eurydice’s death to her wedding day is “in the true Hellenistic taste, which liked to dwell on the pathos of death in the newly wedded,” perhaps drawing inspiration from earlier versions of the myth.\footnote{Bowra, 114.} The resulting pathos also serves to mislead the reader: the tone that Ovid sets in the first few lines is not indicative of the episode in its entirety, and wit is soon to follow. It is the very presence of Hymen, a god of marriage, that ruins the wedding, and he makes for a humorously horrible wedding guest: he has a gloomy look on his face the entire time and fails to do what is expected, providing neither favourable omens nor the wedding-song (Met. 10.4-5). The failure to properly light the torch is one such unfavourable omen, prefiguring danger and disaster – the wedding guests shed tears due to the smoke, just as they will soon shed tears over Eurydice – but it even reveals in what form this danger will come: the flame sputters, or more aptly, hisses, just as the snake which will cause their tears (Met. 10.6). Rather foolishly, there is no indication that Orpheus and Eurydice take heed of these numerous omens – perhaps the incident could have been avoided, if only they were more cautious.
Further foreshadowing Eurydice’s death is the use of *exitus* (*Met.* 10.8), here meaning “result”, it is also used to signify death or the end of life.156

Only two lines later, the danger foretold by the omens occurs, and Eurydice dies in just one word, *occidit* (*Met.* 10.10). The brevity most obviously represents the speed of her death and the inability of anyone to react or to do anything to help, but is also suggestive of the short and fleeting span of her life and the amount of time Orpheus had with her, particularly as her husband. While the pathos is clear, so is the humour in such a ridiculous death: there is no spectacle or emotion surrounding her death, making it almost insignificant. It is merely a necessary event to cover as quickly as possibly before addressing the core of the episode. Consistent with this view, Ovid “refuses to qualify the event with a word of pathos”157 – any pity or sorrow comes from the reality of the situation, rather than the words. It is amusing that this is first of two times within the episode where Orpheus’ voice brings immediate but only temporary success: he summons Hymen, but it leads to Eurydice’s death, perhaps foreshadowing his retrieval of Eurydice, only to lose her again. There is no mention of the effects of the sudden loss of Eurydice on the wedding guests or on her nymph companions – it is only Orpheus who mourns, and Ovid omits the description of his actual mourning, continuing from his decision to descend into the Underworld.158 Ovid’s Eurydice does not seem to have touched the lives of as many as her Virgilian counterpart, nor does the environment feel a profound loss at

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156 *OLD* s.v. *exitus*.
her demise, and in this respect she appears less remarkable and beloved than Virgil’s Eurydice.

There is humour in lines 10.11-3, particularly in the word choice: Orpheus ceases his mourning on earth once it is deemed to be enough (*Met.* 10.11), but enough for whom?\(^{159}\) Has Orpheus had enough, or has the upper air simply had enough of being witness to his self-pity, and so he descends to try his luck elsewhere, or perhaps to seek further attention and sympathy.\(^{160}\) Here, *temptare* (*Met.* 10.12) likely refers to attempting to sway the dead, but other clever meanings include “to harass”\(^{161}\) – which could understandably be the opinion of Pluto and Proserpina towards Orpheus’ actions, entering their realm unbidden and disrupting its inhabitants – or “to feel the pulse”,\(^{162}\) something he will find neither in the Underworld, nor on Eurydice any longer. Although it is not of Ovid’s own invention, Orpheus’ mere decision to travel to the Underworld to bemoan the loss of a loved one and the unfairness of death is also ridiculous. While Proserpina and Pluto are the gods with the authority to return the dead among the living, why would they who know the realities of death better than any other truly care about the grief of one man, or any man for that matter? Surrounded by death and witness to the varying ages and circumstances of the individuals that join the ranks of the dead, the gods surely must remain unmoved by the unfair lots assigned by fate. Ovid states that Orpheus *est ausus descendere* (*Met.* 10.13), which suggests that the task is dangerous or formidable, and thus requires some measure of bravery or mental preparation; this is not, however,

\(^{159}\) Ibid, 40.
\(^{160}\) Anderson (1972): 476.
\(^{161}\) *OLD* s.v. *tempto* 10c.
\(^{162}\) *OLD* s.v. *tempto* 1b.
represented in the description of the Underworld. Orpheus’ descent is rather underwhelming: there is no mention of Charon, Cerberus, or any other potential obstacle, and instead he is able to wander through the Underworld freely, approaching its king and queen without difficulty.

Orpheus, who has thus far been silent in his journey, rather disrespectfully addresses the rulers of the Underworld without introduction or permission, by means of song. By demonstrating his intense love for Eurydice, the unfairness of her death, and the triviality of her restoration in the grand scheme of things, Orpheus’ song is meant to showcase his creativity and rhetorical skill. While the song successfully persuades the king and queen, it is largely unconvincing in other respects: while Anderson’s assertion that Orpheus “makes no emotional appeal whatsoever, but works with cheap, flashy, and specious rhetoric,”¹¹⁶³ is insightful, it may be more accurate to say that Orpheus makes no effective emotional appeal. Orpheus begins by beseeching the infernal gods, stating that all mortals eventually pass into their realm (Met. 10.17-8). What is meant as to ingratiate only serves to draw greater attention to the fact that Orpheus, a mortal, has passed into the Underworld, although not in the traditional, lawful sense. He then attempts to portray himself as sincere and courteous, assuring Pluto and Proserpina that he has no ulterior motive for coming to the Underworld; that his motivation is unlike any of those who have descended before him. To prove his point, Orpheus, rather humorously, makes light of the previous visits of Aeneas and Hercules, incorrectly reducing Aeneas’ emotional and enlightening journey into a leisurely sight-seeing trip (Met. 10.20-2). Orpheus infers that

his own motivation is more honourable or justified, and seems to think that he is somehow better than them, although he himself is certainly not a hero of equal measure. However, if he did have other, less honourable intentions it is unlikely that he would reveal them and it would be foolish for Pluto and Proserpina to blindly believe him, considering the number of trespassers and troublemakers they have encountered. Orpheus reveals his wife to be the reason for his descent (*Met.* 10.23-4), and describes her death in a manner that is “far below the tone of high seriousness,” due to “the indirect description of death and particularly the relative phrase.” As the subject, emphasis is placed on the snake, rather than Eurydice, while the inclusion of *calcata* (*Met.* 10.23) effectively places blame on Eurydice: her actions, although unintentional, provoked the snake to attack – an understandable reaction to being trod upon – and a detail that is omitted from the actual scene of her death (*Met.* 10.8-10). That Orpheus would include this detail in his song is curious, as it would evoke more sympathy for Eurydice if it were excluded; yet he saw fit to neglect to mention the tragic, piteous circumstances of Eurydice’s death – that she died on her wedding day, unable to grow old with her husband.

Orpheus then gives his one and only declaration of love for Eurydice, stating *vicit Amor* (*Met.* 10.26), and this “rather abstract way of defining his love […] lacks emotional conviction,” particularly due to the fact that he refers to Eurydice only indirectly, and still has not named her. It is important to remember that this is not some poetry contest that Orpheus is involved in: Eurydice’s fate is at stake and his words need to be meaningful and compelling, not just ostentatious. It would be most pertinent to include

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164 Segal, 83.
deep pathos in his song, which would surely be effective in persuading Pluto and Proserpina, but he does not take advantage of this. He cannot rely on rhetorical devices alone, yet Orpheus continues on to make the misguided comparison between his and Eurydice’s love to Pluto’s and Proserpina’s, since vos quoque iunxit Amor (Met. 10.29). Pluto and Proserpina were indeed brought together by Amor, but by the personification, not by the abstract concept as Orpheus and Eurydice presumably were. The gods’ love was artificial and initially entirely one-sided, and did not evolve naturally as love usually does. Even worse than this comparison is Orpheus’ decision to recall the circumstances of the gods’ union, mentioning outright Proserpina’s abduction and rape by her husband (Met. 10.28). This inappropriate and tactless comment, which uses Proserpina’s traumatic experience as evidence of Amor’s presence in the Underworld, reflects “the shallowness of Orpheus’ love and the awkwardness of his rhetoric.”\footnote{166} Orpheus’ reference to loca plena timoris (Met. 10.29) is also questionable, particularly because “Ovid has made no effort to sketch the Underworld as fearsome.”\footnote{167} While Virgil establishes the Underworld as menacing and grim from the first moment of Orpheus’ descent (Virg. Georg. 4.467-70), Ovid provides only a word, inamoena (Met. 10.15): any other description comes from Orpheus himself (Met. 20-3, 30). This is certainly a deliberate decision on Ovid’s part: the lack of previous description causes the reader to doubt the reliability of the information that Orpheus provides – not only concerning the frightfulness of the Underworld, but in his speech as a whole – and to assume that he exaggerates throughout his speech for emotional and rhetorical effect. As with Calliope’s manipulative tactics

\footnote{166}{Anderson (1982): 40.}
\footnote{167}{Anderson (1972): 477.}
(Met. 5.341ff), it is amusing and surprising that such a traditionally talented and renowned poet should deem it necessary to distort the details of his song in an effort to influence its listeners: all Orpheus needs to succeed is to speak truthfully about his love for his wife, which should not be a challenging task.

Orpheus proceeds to argue why Eurydice’s return would be an inconsequential matter for Pluto and Proserpina, since every mortal ends up in their realm one way or another sooner or later (Met. 10.32-3), she would return to the Underworld eventually (Met. 10.36-37). In a humorous twist, Eurydice happens to return sooner rather than later, mere moments after her revival, considerably earlier than Orpheus expected. However, there is a inconsistency between Orpheus’ claim and his actions, which suggests that his arguments may not be as carefully constructed as they should be: Orpheus recognizes that it is fated for some mortals to die before others (Met. 10.33: serius aut citius), yet he does not think that Eurydice’s death is justified, since she was so young and with many years ahead of her. Orpheus refuses to accept that Eurydice was simply one of those unfortunates fated to die young, yet he has no other legitimate argument, thus rendering untenable his position that her death was unfair. Orpheus then finishes his song by vowing to remain in the Underworld by dying himself if he is not able to return to the upper air with Eurydice (Met. 10.38-9), a promise soon to be revealed as empty (Met. 10.72ff). It is not clear exactly what Orpheus hopes to achieve with this statement, whether it is a threat meant to manipulate Pluto and Proserpina, or a lover’s last desperate pledge meant to elicit their pity. Regardless, whether he lives or dies is no concern to them – the loss or gain of one mere soul to the Underworld is inconsequential. The word
choice in line 10.39 is particularly ironic (*leto gaudete duorum*), since the gods are granted two deaths, just not from two individuals as Orpheus implies, rather two from the same individual, Eurydice.

Orpheus’ song as a whole is rather underwhelming and comically inept: the sound of the song may have been beautiful but the words themselves are meaningless and mediocre,\(^{168}\) and as a result it portrays Orpheus as a “third-rate poet-orator who […] can only mouth commonplaces or try to devise clever but lifeless points and so win applause.”\(^{169}\) The focus of Orpheus’ song should be Eurydice, emphasizing the love they have for each other, the cruelty and injustice of her death, and her deservedness above all others to be restored to life. However, based on the glaring absence of these points it is clear that the song is not meant to rouse sympathy for Eurydice, but for Orpheus. Eurydice, therefore, is referred to by name only once (*Met.* 10.31), or indirectly (*Met.* 10.23-4, 26), while her own suffering is barely mentioned or implied to be at least partially her own fault (*Met.* 10.23-4): it should be remembered that Eurydice is the victim of the situation, not Orpheus, although he may portray himself to be. Indeed, the song serves to demonstrate Orpheus’ apparent self-centeredness: there is less concern for what Eurydice’s desire than for Orpheus’ own.

There is a clear discrepancy between the content of Orpheus’ song, and its effects on the inhabitants of the Underworld: for such a lackluster song to cause such overwhelming reactions is absurd, unwarranted, and “of course comically

\(^{168}\) Fratantuono, 277.
exaggerated."¹⁷⁰ The first to be described are the common shades, the least powerful of the inhabitants, and perhaps the easiest to move: they simply cry (Met. 10.41), "as if [Orpheus] vitalized them by his warm human passion."¹⁷¹ For mortals to cry it is normal, but when this detail is applied to the shades it is unreasonable and rather distracting: can ghosts cry, and if so, how? While they certainly cry out of pity for Orpheus, there may be some underlying dark humour behind their tears: perhaps they also pity their own circumstances, that they have no one who seemingly loves them enough to descend to the Underworld and beg for their life back. The next group that Ovid describes is the sinners, although technically—mortal shades, these rapists and murderers are less likely to be sympathetic to the plight of others. The sinners are so affected by Orpheus’ song, however, that their torture ceases, and Ovid describes the effect on each one, flippantly outdoing Virgil who mentioned only Ixion specifically (Virg. Georg. 4.484). The cessation of torture is a ridiculous and infuriating detail: if the sinners had the ability to stop their own punishments seemingly at will, why would they not have done it earlier, particularly Sisyphus and the Belides, who are under to influence of no outside sources? It is interesting to note that the effects of Orpheus’ song on the sinners all foreshadow Orpheus’ future, although not in chronological order, and perhaps some more convincingly than others: the use of carpo in line 10.43 in reference to Tityus foreshadows its use, although in a different sense, at line 10.53; while Tantalus ceases to reach out in vain to the water that escapes him (Met. 10.42), Orpheus will reach out to Eurydice, only to have her be snatched away (Met. 10.59); just as Ixion’s wheel is

¹⁷⁰ Otis, 184.
rendered powerless (*Met.* 10.42), Orpheus will be as well when he loses Eurydice, using the same verb (*Met.* 10.63); as Sisyphus sits on his rock (*Met.* 10.44), so too will Orpheus sit on the river banks, grieving (*Met.* 10.74); finally, just as the Belides abandon their water jugs (*Met.* 10.44), Orpheus will abandon relations with women entirely (*Met.* 10.79-80).

Ovid next describes the Furies: here they are not merely stunned, as Virgil describes them (*Met.* 10.481-3), but reduced to tears for the first time: this is another ridiculous, over-the-top detail created by Ovid.\(^{172}\) The Furies are more distressed than the sinners, and have the same reaction as the mortal shades – who knew that they were such romantics? Cerberus is noticeably absent at this point in the story, unlike in Virgil (*Georg.* 4.483), almost “as if the poet were saving Cerberus for a later, more significant moment.”\(^{173}\) Instead, Ovid moves directly on to the final group that is affected by Orpheus’ song, the gods. These most powerful inhabitants of the Underworld are unable to resist his song and cannot deny his request, summoning Eurydice for him to take home. Its shades, its creatures, and its rulers all influenced by his song, Orpheus has, in this moment complete control over the Underworld. Virgil chose to focus on the reaction of the common shades (Virg. *Georg.* 4.471-7), a group of individuals to whom the reader could best relate: mortals realistically affected by the suffering of other mortals, demonstrating that even those who felt loss themselves or had died young sorrowed for Orpheus and Eurydice. Ovid, on the other hand, focuses on the reactions of criminals,

\(^{172}\) Segal, 61.
\(^{173}\) Heath, 363.
monsters, and gods, demonstrating the impressive effects of Orpheus’ song on powerful beings: the feat appears more amazing, but also more fantastical and less realistic.\textsuperscript{174} With Eurydice’s freedom granted, she slowly hobbles over to join Orpheus: she has retained the wound in her ankle which caused her death, and is therefore unable to walk properly (\textit{Met.} 10.49). Humour is the result of such realism, humour that “would spoil an epic scene,” but fortunately this account “[is not] meant to have the decorum of epic.”\textsuperscript{175} There is no glimpse of a reunion between Orpheus and Eurydice, no moment of happiness or relief; instead Ovid spends three lines carefully and clearly outlining to both Orpheus and the reader the conditions of Eurydice’s revival, and the consequence if he should disobey: \textit{hanc simul et legem Rhodopeius accipit heros, ne flectat retro sua lumina, donec Avernas/ exierit valles; aut inrita dona futura} (\textit{Met.} 10.50-2).\textsuperscript{176} It is stressed that this is what Orpheus should be focusing his attention on at the moment, not Eurydice, and so it is all the more maddening when Orpheus does disregard the rule, despite having been made well aware of it (\textit{Met.} 10.57). Without another word to Pluto or Proserpina, Orpheus and Eurydice depart up the path, which is described as being silent and \textit{arduus, obscurus, caligine densus opaca} (\textit{Met.} 10.53-4), and appears more unsettling than the whole of the Underworld was. Such a description may have been expected to appear at the beginning of the episode to introduce the Underworld, similar to that in Virgil (\textit{Georg.} 4.467-8), but here Ovid is once again misleading the audience. The insertion of a gloomy description could be interpreted as building up the atmosphere,

\textsuperscript{174} Anderson (1982): 41.
\textsuperscript{175} Anderson (1972): 479.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
indicating that pathos is sure to follow; Ovid, however, undercuts this with the humorous and frustrating nature of Orpheus’ continuously poor decisions.

Orpheus suddenly becomes fearful that Eurydice has grown weak and fallen behind, a fear that would not be unfounded were Eurydice alive – considering her injury and the nature of the path – but she is a ghost: can a ghost even tire? He is also simply eager to gaze upon her, despite having just seen her in the Underworld proper and about to see her again momentarily, since they are almost at the earth’s surface, and so he turns around. Orpheus is impatient, self-centered, and disobedient: he acts without considering the consequences of his action. All his work has been for naught, and he ruins this gift in an instant, both for himself and for Eurydice. It is ironic that he seemed to be willing to do anything to get Eurydice back, including walking into the Underworld itself, but is unable to fulfill the one crucial yet uncomplicated requirement. Orpheus is entirely responsible for Eurydice’s second death: he damns her the moment that he makes the conscious, misguided decision to turn around, and does not have subita dementia as an excuse (Virg. Georg. 4.488). For Virgil’s Orpheus, there is no explicit reason for his madness: “Virgil does not know why Orpheus turned around and nor does his Eurydice,” which only makes the mistake more tragic. Orpheus was overcome and unable to control his own actions, and would understandably be confused, devastated, and guilt-ridden over his unwitting role in the loss of Eurydice. Ovid, on the other hand, provides two reasons as to why Orpheus turns around, correcting Virgil’s version of events. Despite his mistake, Orpheus refuses to take any responsibility, and does not appear to

177 Fratantuono, 277.
feel guilty over his actions. Ovid even goes so far as to describe Orpheus as *infelix* (*Met.* 10.59), seemingly intending for the reader to “give their sympathies more directly and unambiguously to Orpheus.” This is absurd: luck is not a factor in this situation, it is simply imprudence, and the misfortune Orpheus suffers he brought upon himself – again, Orpheus is wrongfully portrayed as the victim, rather than Eurydice.

Eurydice’s reaction is unbefitting the magnitude of Orpheus’ mistake: she is surprisingly calm and acquiescent. Eurydice neither calls out to Orpheus nor stretches out her arms; she simply says *vale*, and then she is gone (*Met.* 10.62). She does not appear to be particularly devastated by this unexpected turn of events, perhaps suggesting that she never had high hopes for its success to begin with. Eurydice does not complain about the cruelty of the gods as her husband does (*Met.* 10.76), or chide Orpheus’ carelessness as her Virgilian counterpart does (Virg. *Georg.* 4.494ff), although it would be understandable for her to do so, since this punishment arguably has a greater effect on her than him. Ovid’s reasoning for her non-reaction is that there is nothing Eurydice could complain about, except that she is loved (*Met.* 10.60-1): this is rather comical, for on the contrary, there are plenty of things. The speech of Virgil’s Eurydice would be fitting here, and perhaps if Eurydice had spoken out against her husband, he would have recognized his guilt and the irreparable damage he caused. Instead, Ovid’s Eurydice remains mum, and comes across as weak, timid and submissive – the opposite of Virgil. More favorably, perhaps she is so disillusioned with Orpheus that she does not give him the closure of saying anything more than a simple goodbye before she disappears, leaving

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179 Segal, 65.
180 Anderson (1972): 480.
him to mourn, not to meet again until his death. However, Eurydice’s reaction is more plausible than her Virgilian counterpart’s, as there hardly would have been time for a lengthy speech: here there is a sense of urgency, with no opportunity to say anything more than farewell. Orpheus’ reaction is similarly unsuitable and humorous: he is shocked, unable to move or speak, the latter being particularly ironic and potentially even welcomed, given Orpheus’ “unusually loquacious” nature.\textsuperscript{181} This, however, leads to the question: what did Orpheus expect to happen, especially since he was made aware of the rules and of the consequences of defiance? Could he have been so oblivious, witless and self-assured as to have ignored or doubted the warning of the gods? Ovid makes no comment, but instead inserts two similes comparing Orpheus’ stupor to being turned into stone, breaking the narrative, which “deflat[es] the pathos of the tale just at the moment of its emotional climax.”\textsuperscript{182}

The first simile compares Orpheus to an individual having encountered Cerberus during Hercules’ quest to retrieve him, while the second simile compares Orpheus to Olenos, who volunteered to take his wife Lethaea’s punishment, but instead the two were punished together. The Cerberus simile places Orpheus in the role of the unnamed victim, not the hero: while Hercules succeeded in retrieving Cerberus from the Underworld, and bringing him to the earth’s surface, Orpheus failed in the second part of his quest.\textsuperscript{183} He is “portrayed as distinctly un-Herculean,” confirming what he himself admitted to Pluto and

\textsuperscript{181} Anderson (1982): 43.  
\textsuperscript{182} Heath, 354.  
\textsuperscript{183} Heath, 356.
Proserpina (*Met.* 10.21-2). The simile serves to highlight Orpheus’ shortcomings and ultimate failure in his quest, as opposed to Hercules, whose quest Orpheus rather cheekily made light of previously: although Orpheus is referred to as a hero (*Met.* 10.50) it is painfully obvious that he is no equal of Hercules. The Olenos and Lethaea simile places Orpheus in the role of Olenos, and therefore Eurydice in that of Lethaea, making it a rather unflattering comparison as well. Unlike Olenos, Orpheus never offered to take his wife’s place in her ‘punishment’, to sacrifice his life in exchange for hers, nor is he ultimately willing to join her in death, which only further demonstrates Orpheus’ self-centeredness. Orpheus does not have the same compassion and love for his wife as Olenos, to be willing to grant his young wife a full life at the expense of his own; instead Orpheus wants to remain alive on earth, but with Eurydice by his side. If Orpheus was truly committed to his belief that he could not live without Eurydice, they could have easily stayed together, if only “he had possessed the courage to follow through on his offer to die.” Lethaea’s punishment, which her husband selflessly tried to excuse her from, was the result of her vanity and overconfidence: she alone was responsible for the misfortune of both herself and her husband. This then suggests that Eurydice was somehow to blame for her own death, or at least is considered to be, either by Ovid or Orpheus himself, furthering the absurd emphasis on Orpheus as the victim, and on Eurydice as the guilty party. In actuality, Eurydice should not be considered comparable to Lethaea, nor should Orpheus to Olenus. These two similes are not only

184 Heath, 359.  
185 Heath, 354.  
long, but also obscure,\textsuperscript{187} which distances the reader from Orpheus and a potentially emotional climax, as they attempt to recollect the stories and connect them to Orpheus, whereas Virgil posits a number of hypothetical questions relating to Orpheus that encourages the reader to consider what they would have done were they in his position.

After Charon denies Orpheus passage across the Styx, either because he is unable or unwilling to transport him again, Orpheus sits on the banks of the river and mourns. He grows filthy and does not eat, subsisting only off of his anxiety, grief and tears – which is, of course, impossible – perhaps hoping that one of the gods sees him and takes pity on how far he has fallen. While Ovid’s depiction of Orpheus’ period of mourning is more realistic than Virgil’s,\textsuperscript{188} it is less convincing of Orpheus’ love for Eurydice: Virgil’s Orpheus is consumed by his love and loss for at least seven months (Virg. \textit{Georg.} 4.507ff), but Ovid’s seems to have had enough (\textit{Met.} 10.11) rather quickly. He remains there for seven days, seemingly without purpose, before he abandons his efforts and returns home. It is at this point, as he moves on and leaves behind the Underworld, that he also leaves behind Eurydice, never to mention her again until they are reunited in death (\textit{Met.} 11.61ff). Orpheus chooses not to follow through with his promise to kill himself, proving that it was a “mere rhetorical bluff,” just as was his assertion that he tried and failed to live without Eurydice, since he manages to do so successfully for years.\textsuperscript{189} It is after Orpheus accepts the loss of Eurydice that he truly reveals himself to be immature,\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{188} Segal, 66-7.
\textsuperscript{189} Heath, 365.
\textsuperscript{190} Hill (1992b): 130.
hypocritical, “shallow, self-satisfied, [and] self-indulgent.” First, he has the audacity to complain about the infernal gods, accusing them of being cruel and heartless, as if he had been slighted in some way: the fact that Pluto and Proserpina even granted Orpheus the return of Eurydice proves that they are not, although perhaps they should be more circumspect after this display of ingratitude. The gods provided Orpheus with every opportunity to succeed, and were never deceptive or manipulative: Orpheus simply refuses to accept any blame for Eurydice’s loss. Second, Orpheus swears off all women, either because he is wary after having such a bad experience or because he pledged his devotion to Eurydice (Met. 10.78-82), similar to his motive in Virgil (Virg. Georg. 4.516). This in itself is an understandable reaction, although the latter is perhaps slightly misogynistic, as if “[women] aren’t worth the inconvenience.” Ovid cleverly demotes Virgil’s reasoning by adding a new motive for Orpheus’ actions and emphasizing it as the first, albeit less tasteful option, suggesting to the reader that it is more truthful. Virgil’s Orpheus similarly scorns the idea of loving and marrying another woman (Virg. Georg. 4.516), but Ovid’s Orpheus takes it farther and, in a comical twist, decides to turn to pederasty instead (Met. 10.83-5), as if he was maintaining the fidelity of his marriage provided that his lover was male. If the reader did not question his devotion to his wife before, they certainly should now. Ovid emphasizes the youth of the boys, which is rather comical: barring tragedy, they will have long, full lives ahead of them, and Orpheus will not have to endure a situation similar to Eurydice’s again.

192 Makowski, 36.
194 Makowski, 29.
At this point in Virgil’s narrative, Orpheus settles down beneath a high cliff, where he remains mourning for seven months (Virg. *Georg.* 4.507ff). During this time he sings of his misfortune, and his tale manages to soothe tigers and attract oak trees. The scene, although unrealistic, is moving: wild, vicious animals and inanimate vegetation are affected by his skill and sorrow, and Orpheus himself is compared to the nightingale and her persistent and pervasive laments over the loss of her loved ones (Virg. *Georg.* 4.511-5). In Ovid, however, Orpheus, having seemingly finished with mourning, climbs up a hill which provides no shade: to solve this problem, Orpheus sings, drawing over twenty types of trees and plants to cover the area in shade (*Met.* 10.86ff) – if Virgil’s scene of taming nature is unrealistic, then Ovid’s is absurd. Content with his new “cheery pastoral environment”¹⁹⁵ – a far cry from the cold desolation of the mountains and caves of Virgil – Orpheus begins to sing on the theme of “boys loved by gods and girls driven wild by illicit passions,” focusing on the suffering and punishment that such loves bring (*Met.* 10.152-4).¹⁹⁶ However, he does not sing of Eurydice, relating instead the stories of Ganymede and Jupiter (*Met.* 10.155ff), Hyacinthus and Apollo (*Met.* 10.161ff), the Cerastae (*Met.* 10.220ff), the Propoetides (*Met.* 10.238ff), Pygmalion (*Met.* 10.243ff), Myrrha and Cinyras (*Met.* 10.298ff), Venus and Adonis (*Met.* 10.519ff), and Atalanta and Hippomenes (*Met.* 10.560ff). The stories which Orpheus chooses to sing further expand on his misogyny and pederasty, as he attempts to show that heterosexual love is marked by the woman’s “illicit lusts” and subsequent punishment, while homosexual love results

¹⁹⁶ Anderson (1972): 487.
in happiness.\textsuperscript{197} Although Orpheus does not mention Eurydice, he indirectly condemns her by means of his song and the generalizations he makes: in his mind, he also suffers because of his love for a woman and is a victim of her actions – just as the unfortunate and innocent men he sings of suffer – again suggesting that Eurydice was responsible for her own death, and that it is her due punishment. However, his chosen stories serve only to undermine his arguments: “boy-love ends in lamentation, not happiness; girl-love refuses to be reduced to a simple formula of libido and punishment.”\textsuperscript{198} The tone of his song is also inappropriately light-hearted and humorous at points, particularly during the story of Pygmalion. Pygmalion sculpts a statue of his perfect woman out of ivory and falls in love with it, even going so far as to present it with extravagant gifts that are useless to a statue (\textit{Met.} 10.259ff), and gently laying it down on the bed, sure to rest its stony head on soft pillows (\textit{Met.} 10.267ff). Although ridiculous, his actions demonstrate a devotion and care greater than Orpheus’ for Eurydice. There is a pointed contrast between the tone of Orpheus’ song in Virgil and in Ovid: in Virgil, Orpheus is distraught, crying and singing only of \textit{raptam Eurydicen atque inrita Ditis/ dona} (\textit{Virg. Georg.} 4.519-20), and thus it is a scene of deep pathos. In Ovid, on the other hand, Orpheus does not even mention his wife, instead singing about other, unrelated mythological figures in a light-hearted manner that does not demonstrate at all that he loves his wife or that he is struggling to cope with her death. Indeed, he seems content to sit on his shady hill and impress his captivated audience with interesting tales, unbothered by his widowhood.

\textsuperscript{197} Makowski, 36.
\textsuperscript{198} Anderson (1982): 46.
Orpheus’ song only manages to prove him to be “weirdly incompetent,”¹⁹⁹ and to demonstrate that for both men and women, love causes suffering in its presence as well as its absence, as Orpheus will soon realize – only for it to be too late (*Met. 11.1ff*).

The story of Orpheus continues some six hundred lines later, having sufficiently built up the reader’s anticipation, and picks up where the previous book left off, with Orpheus singing to the flora and fauna – somehow even having attracted rocks – that accompany him. Orpheus, oblivious to the fact that he has been spotted by the Ciconian women, and to the slaughter that awaits him, carries on singing. The women are motivated similarly to their Virgilian counterparts, frantic to destroy the man who scorned them, although here they are perhaps more justified: Virgil’s Orpheus forsakes love and marriage completely, whether with a man or woman, while Ovid’s Orpheus only abandons relations with women specifically, which results in less pathos in the situation which he brought upon himself. However, Ovid’s Orpheus has proven himself to be selfish, fickle, and a fairly unremarkable poet – he is hardly so desirable that women would be driven to madness after suffering his rejection. The subsequent attack of the Maenads – more aptly described as a massacre – is expressed in detail, and is particularly violent and gruesome, as opposed to Virgil’s account, which summarizes the act, revealing only that *discerptum latos iuvenum sparsere per agros* (*Virg. Georg. 4.522*).

Ovid’s thirty-five line description (*Met. 11.5ff*) is overkill, resulting not in increased pathos and sympathy for Orpheus, but the opposite, supported by the humorous nature of Orpheus’ folly and failure. Ovid’s Maenads are ruthless, feral, and bloodthirsty, and are

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.
portrayed in such a ridiculous manner to once again outdo Virgil. The first Maenad attacks Orpheus with a spear, directing it at his mouth, in what is perhaps a drastic attempt for the women, unimpressed and unaffected by his singing, to silence him. When the spear, enchanted by his song, fails to wound Orpheus, merely leaving a mark, he continues to sing – a rather odd and comical choice on his part, having been struck in the face by a projectile. The stone that is thrown next also submits to Orpheus’ power, falling before his feet, and all restraint is lost as the women are overcome with fury at the futility of their attacks (*Met.* 11.13-4). This is a humorous point to raise, since the women clearly had no restraint to begin with, or they would not have deemed it necessary to seek retribution. The Maenads raise a cacophony of various musical instruments, claps, and shouts, drowning out Orpheus’ song and rendering it completely useless against their weapons (*Met.* 11.15-9): he is inexplicably not able to influence the women, even prior to their commotion.

Now the massacre begins: the Ciconian women first unleash their wrath upon the animals captivated by Orpheus’ music, forcing Orpheus to witness their bloody demise. This is needless and excessive violence, as the animals pose no threat and are unrelated to Orpheus’ offence; or, if the women are simply interested in destroying anything that is under Orpheus’ influence, then the gods of the Underworld would also have to be counted among that number. The women then advance on Orpheus, attacking him with clods of earth – perhaps the least effective of their chosen weapons – as well as tree branches and stones, both of which Orpheus himself had attracted with his song. The Maenads essentially use Orpheus’ own audience against him, forcing them to partake in the
destruction of their beloved poet. Ovid then abruptly abandons the Maenads’ seemingly effective attacks to spend seven lines describing their discovery and collection of farm tools in the nearby fields (*Met.* 11.30ff), quelling the tension and anticipation that has been building as the narrative leads to Orpheus’ inevitable demise. This unnecessary interlude diminishes the pathos and draws focus away from Orpheus, further emotionally distancings the audience from the character: since Ovid does not provide any indication at all as to Orpheus’ thoughts or emotions throughout the entirety of the attack, it is difficult to relate and sympathize with him any more than one would witnessing the death of an innocent two-dimensional character. Although Orpheus’ innocence is debatable, with some arguing that he merely “receives his comeuppance,”\(^{200}\) he is distinctly less developed as a character in this second half of the episode, largely due to the fact that the two halves are separated by hundreds of lines and multiple stories of the suffering, loss and punishment of other, perhaps more sympathetic characters, and considering Orpheus’ questionable actions after the loss of Eurydice (*Met.* 10.78ff).\(^{201}\) This interlude also emphasizes the inappropriate and erroneous nature of Orpheus’ reaction to the Maenads. The farmers, who are strong, muscular men, act accordingly and flee when they see the women approach (*Met.* 11.33-4), and thus they survive: these countrymen, stereotypically looked down upon as “naïve” and “simple-minded”\(^{202}\) are more intelligent that Orpheus in this situation. Meanwhile, Orpheus remains on the hill and continues to sing in a misguided effort to pacify the Ciconians and their weapons, again displaying his comical

\(^{200}\) Makowski, 36.
\(^{201}\) Anderson (1982): 44.
\(^{202}\) OLD *s.v. rusticus* 6.
ineptitude. An instance of dark humour in line 11.35 foreshadows exactly what will be the
cost of Orpheus’ incompetence: just as the farmers abandoned their tools, leaving them
scattered across the fields (Met. 11.35), so will Orpheus’ limbs be scattered, his corpse
abandoned after his brutal and gory demise at the hands of the vengeful women (Met.
11.50).

Not about to refuse an opportunity to tear more innocent creatures into pieces, the
Maenads first slaughter the farmers’ oxen, taking their murderous rampage beyond just
Orpheus’ rejection before turning their attention back to their main target, eight lines later
(Met. 11.38). Orpheus is still determined to overcome the women with merely his words,
but here they fail him, and not for the first time: having been previously stunned into
silence after the loss of Eurydice (Met. 11.64ff), it appears that his skill has waned
following his success in the Underworld, and he has since been unable to perform
properly when it matters most. In this situation, Orpheus, who has enchanted shades,
monsters, inanimate objects, living creatures, and even gods, is completely powerless
against mortal women. While Virgil never offered Orpheus the opportunity to flee or
defend himself against the Maenads, Ovid gives him plenty, thus his Orpheus appears as
an inadequate poet, a self-assured fool, and a failure. And so he dies, without further
postponement or hype, murdered swiftly in just one word (perimunt: Met. 11.41), just as
Eurydice was. Unlike Eurydice, however, Orpheus is mourned extensively and
profoundly, exactly that which Ovid denied her. Birds, wild animals, trees, rocks, rivers,
and even the nymphs – Eurydice’s own friends, who did not grieve for her! – lament the
loss of Orpheus. Virgil’s account of nature’s mourning of Eurydice (Virg. Georg. 4.461ff)
is transferred to Orpheus and embellished by Ovid. Virgil does not describe anyone or anything mourning Orpheus, and so Ovid’s description is dramatic, excessive and ridiculous in comparison: with some imagination, it is possible to envision most aspects of nature mourning and weeping, usually symbolically, but the sorrow of rocks is unfathomable. The logistics of the description distracts and undermines any pathos of the scene, as does the use of wit in the description of nature mourning: the trees pull out their leaves, akin to tearing out their hair,\(^{203}\) and the rivers flood themselves with their own tears (\textit{Met.} 11.46-8).

The following scene is similarly absurd, but it is one that Ovid adopts from Virgil: Orpheus’ decapitated head travels down the River Hebrus, and continues to speak even after his death (Virg. \textit{Georg.} 4.523-7; Ov. \textit{Met.} 11.50-3). However, Ovid decides to outdo Virgil by having Orpheus’ lyre accompany his head, and even having it play by itself—Ovid’s ironic aside of \textit{mirum!} (\textit{Met.} 11.51) indicates that he also knows this entire scene is ridiculous, but goes along anyway. In Virgil, Orpheus’ head continues to cry out for Eurydice (Virg. \textit{Georg.} 4.525-7), thinking of and sorrowing for her right until the very end, demonstrating his devotion and passion, while in Ovid all that Orpheus, he who was “once so flashily rhetorical and never before at a loss for clever words,” can muster is \textit{flebile nescio quid}.\(^{204}\) Orpheus’ words have failed him before, and now, when faced with his last opportunity to sing on earth, it seems he crumbles once more under the pressure to make it memorable and significant. Ovid conveniently neglects to specify whether Orpheus laments for himself or Eurydice, although based on Orpheus’ characterization

\(^{203}\) Hill (1999): 186.
\(^{204}\) Anderson (1982): 46.
throughout the episode thus far, especially since it seems he “has long ago forgotten
Eurydice,” the former is more likely. At this point in the narrative Virgil’s account has
already finished, concluding on an emotional high with Orpheus’ cries to Eurydice. Ovid,
however, decides to continue with the adventures of Orpheus’ decapitated head. When his
head, surely waterlogged and pruney from its watery journey – a humorously disgusting
touch – reaches the end of its travels and washes up at Methymna on the island of Lesbos,
he encounters danger in the form of a snake (Met. 11.56ff). This detail recalls Eurydice’s
fatal encounter, although this time it cannot end in death: the snake poses no real threat to
Orpheus, already dead and decapitated, which makes Apollo’s intervention humorous and
entirely needless. Apollo arrives tandem (Met. 11.58), although he is much too late to do
anything helpful if he truly wanted to protect Orpheus he should have prevented his
death, or even the death of Eurydice, avoiding this unfortunate situation altogether. The
place where Orpheus’ head comes to rest is also significant, as it recalls another poet: the
renowned and successful Arion of Methymna (Ov. Fast. 2.79ff). Arion was also
capable of charming nature, wild animals, and even gods. When faced with certain death
at sea at the hands of pirates, Arion convinced them to allow him to play his lyre, and
then took the opportunity to use his skill to escape on the back of a dolphin. On the other
hand, Orpheus could not move the Maenads with any of his words, was unsuccessful in
his attempt to avoid death, and required the assistance of Apollo to save him from the
very same creature he previously could enchant with his music, failing to accomplish

205 Ibid.
207 OLD s.v. Arion 1.
what a comparably powerful poet could without divine intervention. The comparison between the two poets is not flattering to Orpheus, and only serves to emphasize his shortcomings.

After Orpheus is rescued from the snake by Apollo, he passes beneath the earth to his final resting place in the Underworld, shortly to be reunited with his wife. Orpheus previously claimed he was not visiting the Underworld to sightsee, making light of such an idea (Met. 10.20-1), but, rather amusingly, this is precisely what he does now (Met. 11.61-2), “acting like a tourist revisiting familiar haunts.” Orpheus doesn’t delay, but goes straight to Elysium (arva piorum: Met. 11.62), where he finds Eurydice: Orpheus is eager to see her, holding her in a loving embrace, and Ovid even names her twice within six lines (Met. 11.61-6). However, once again an emotional moment is undercut by peculiar details: it is impossible for a mortal and a shade to embrace (e.g. Hom. Ody. 11.206ff; Virg. Aen. 6.700-2), yet two shades are capable? The two are happily reunited, and can walk one before the other, with Orpheus safely looking back toward his wife, represented by Eurydicen and Orpheus placed on opposite ends of line 11.66 (Eurydicenque suam iam tuto respicit Orpheus) – and hopefully there is no lingering resentment over Orpheus’ mistake, or this is just rubbing salt in the wound. However, if all of this is an attempt to demonstrate Orpheus’ love for Eurydice, it is not convincing enough, and it is too late. Orpheus appears to want to act as if nothing occurred during their time apart, and resume where they left off, but his current actions do not negate his previous ones, whether Eurydice is aware of their extent or not. Indeed, the reader surely

208 Makowski, 37.
wonders “what the wife might say to the husband who broke his every promise to her”\textsuperscript{209} – apparently nothing, since the two do not even speak at this climactic moment, although they surely have much to discuss.\textsuperscript{210} Although Ovid provides closure for Orpheus and Eurydice, as well as the audience, once again attempting to correct Virgil’s omission, this ending seems out of place here, and perhaps would have been better suited to Virgil’s version of the story: Ovid’s Orpheus did not suffer extensively in Eurydice’s absence, and did not convincingly demonstrate his love and devotion to her while he was alive; therefore it does not feel as if he has earned this reunion. Virgil’s Orpheus, on the other hand, suffered and mourned from the time of Eurydice’s death and found no reprieve even after his own demise. He never forgot his wife, constantly singing of her loss to the flora and fauna as he wandered, and his commitment and affection for her are clear, yet he is not explicitly given a happy ending.

In conclusion, Ovid offers the reader a view contrary to Virgil of Orpheus’ descent into the Underworld. Virgil’s account presents the story of a man who, devastated by the untimely demise of his wife, endures the difficult and unpleasant trip to the Underworld to beg for her release. He is victorious, swaying the gods by means of his impressive and emotional song. When he loses his wife a second time after an unconscious mistake, he is inconsolable and he wanders aimlessly, shunning all forms of love, mourning his wife until his dying breath. It is a tale of sorrow and suffering that elicits the pity of its audience. Ovid, on the other hand, relates the story of man who, having lost his wife under unfortunate circumstances, decides to descend in the hopes that

\textsuperscript{209} Makowski, 38.
\textsuperscript{210} Segal, 84.
his laments will prove more fruitful than in the upper air. By means of his song he successfully convinces the powers of the Underworld to return his wife, even though he displays neither extraordinary rhetorical skill nor a convincing love and commitment to his wife. When he loses his wife a second time due to his own foolish decision, he is distraught, but his grief is finite and his devotion to his wife is conditional: he shortly abandons love involving women, transferring his affections to boys, forgetting his wife in the process. He continues his life with a semblance of normality, never takes responsibility for the loss of his wife, and does not again remember her until they are reunited in death. In the end he is rewarded, regardless of his numerous follies and flaws, and – despite residing in the Underworld – happy, which is unusual for any of its inhabitants. Ovid’s account is a parody, albeit a rather clever and erudite one requiring a knowledge of Virgil to fully and properly appreciate it. Ovid engages closely with Virgil’s account, but is intent on omitting traditional instances of pathos and diminishing any present instances of it, emphasizing humorous and absurd details, and portraying the main character as selfish, insincere, foolish, and unremarkable.

This disparaging portrayal of Orpheus is not without effect on the larger narrative, as it also colours the depiction of the Underworld and its inhabitants. The Underworld itself appears unimpressive and unintimidating: there is no initial mention of the grime, gloom and decay that is described elsewhere (e.g. Virg. Georg. 4.467ff; Met. 4.432ff) to establish the atmosphere, and when any description is provided, it is either issued from an unreliable narrator (Met. 10.17ff) or is used to mislead the reader (Met. 10.53ff). Nor is there mention of the threatening denizens that act as gatekeepers to the realm (e.g. Virg.
Aen. 6.298; Met. 4.450ff); instead, Orpheus is able to gain access easily, both entering and wandering about with neither restriction nor permission. The Underworld is diminished as a result of this understated description, which in turn diminishes Orpheus’ quest, making it appear less formidable and the reward less deserved. The mere fact that Orpheus manages to move anyone, let alone all of the inhabitants of the Underworld, with his lackluster song is ridiculous and reflects poorly on his audience: dangerous criminals and monstrous creatures are revealed to be sentimental and compassionate – their victims notwithstanding – while the ordinary shades pity a fellow mortal whose circumstances are likely no worse than many of their own. All of the inhabitants are weakened, portrayed as vulnerable, emotional, and gullible, and are decidedly not figures of terror, but of amusement – most notably, perhaps, Pluto and Proserpina. Here, the fearsome and powerful rulers of the Underworld – described as being unyielding and cold-hearted by Virgil (Georg. 4.470) – are essentially duped by Orpheus’ flowery language and rhetorical flourishes, easily impressed when they perhaps “should have burst into laughter” at the content of Orpheus’ song.\footnote{Anderson (1982): 41.} Instead, Pluto and Proserpina act like indulgent parents with Orpheus: like an impatient child, he begs for something to which he is not entitled, making manipulative threats or promises, and although undeserving, he is granted his wish. When he is subsequently punished for his disobedience, he becomes ungrateful and indignant, making his ‘parents’ surely regret having agreed to his request in the first place. Pluto and Proserpina not only appear unfavourably, but have also now set a precedent: a mortal who makes the rather painless journey into the Underworld and
impresses the rulers with mediocre talent, should likewise be rewarded. Since the Aeneas
episode describes neither in detail, this episode offers the last proper look in the
Metamorphoses at the Underworld and its inhabitants. It shows the entire Underworld
captivated and deeply moved by the passionless and hollow words of an unexceptional
poet in a moment of submission and weakness. That the episode should conclude on a
humorous note is fitting, as it is representative of the overall tone of the episode, which
describes a comical and absurd Underworld that is not meant to be taken seriously.
Ultimately, the Underworld which Ovid portrays is incongruous with the traditionally
fearsome realm of the dead and its powerful denizens.
CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of these five episodes (Aeneas and the Sibyl; Cerberus and Medea; Juno and Tisiphone; Pluto and Proserpina; Orpheus) Ovid develops his Underworld, and a clear picture of it emerges. The Underworld can be accessed by means of a cave in Scythia, Avernus, or Taenarus, while the ruler himself appears to be able to create an entrance wherever he pleases. A sloping path leads from the earth’s surface into the Underworld proper – a journey that is without difficulty – and the yew trees that line the path are the first hint of life within this realm of death. This particular path leads past the river Styx, where Charon ferries the dead across, towards the numerous gates of the city that lies in the heart of the Underworld, as do countless other paths which likely originate from the additional entrances. Here at the threshold, Cerberus, the triple-headed beast, is posted and guards the realm. The infernal city appears to function similarly to a normal mortal city, containing a forum, palace, and prison. Shades frequent the forum, milling about or practicing their former trades, and they also loiter around the palace, the home of the infernal king and queen, Pluto and Proserpina, and notable for its beautiful, well-tended gardens containing pomegranate trees. The prison contains the worst criminals and sinners, namely Tantalus, Tityus, Ixion, Sisyphus, and the Danaids, who suffer eternal punishment, guarded by the Furies that sit before its adamant gates. Just as there is a designated area for the sinners, so too is there one for the blessed in the form of fields which these particular shades frequent. Finally, the exit to the earth’s surface is by way of the same path, a journey that is arduous and wearisome for even the great hero Aeneas.
The Underworld and its inhabitants appear consistently throughout the poem, in books 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, and 14. These accounts reference the catabases of two goddesses (Juno and Proserpina), and of two mortals (Orpheus and Aeneas), and the anabases of two creatures (Tisiphone and Cerberus). Ovid uses both direct and indirect characterization to present his Underworld to the reader, using mainly direct characterization for the Underworld itself, as in the Juno and Tisiphone episode, and indirect for its denizens, as in the Orpheus and the Pluto and Proserpina episodes. The first of the five episodes is the most thorough, offering the greatest amount of detail concerning the Underworld, and introducing the majority of its inhabitants; to overlook it would render Ovid’s Underworld undeveloped, confusing and vague, as it contains details that are not mentioned elsewhere, such as the presence and workings of the infernal city. Subsequent episodes provide additional details that contribute to the development of the Underworld, but do not alter the reader’s previous understanding of it. As the poem progresses the episodes offer increasingly fewer details of the Underworld, with the exception of the Orpheus episode, which is more revealing than the preceding Cerberus episode and as revealing as the Pluto and Proserpina episode, perhaps because it is the first account in the poem of a mortal’s catabasis.\footnote{In order from most to least detailed episode regarding the Underworld: Juno and Tisiphone (\textit{Met.} 4.432ff); Pluto and Proserpina (\textit{Met.} 5.356ff); Orpheus (\textit{Met.} 10.1ff); Cerberus (\textit{Met.} 7.408ff); and Aeneas (\textit{Met.} 14.101ff).} The Juno and Tisiphone account provides the foundation of Ovid’s Underworld – which is fitting since Juno’s descent is unprecedented, and so Juno and the reader embark on this journey together – in that it not only describes its geography and standard figures and features, but also sets the atmosphere and the tone:
this is not insignificant. Despite the relatively ordinary design of the city and mortal inclinations of the shades, the Underworld itself is a rather unsettling and inhospitable place to visit and certainly to reside: the realm is eerily silent, permeated by cold and pallor, intimidating and confusing in its vastness, shrouded in darkness, and pervaded by a feeling of death and decay. This is the first glimpse of the Underworld that Ovid offers, establishing a gloomy, bleak atmosphere, that the reader may reasonably assume is indicative of the tone of the episodes to follow. However, the atmosphere of Ovid’s Underworld does not match its tone, and this establishing description is cleverly used to mislead the reader. In actuality, the serious atmosphere that Ovid presents is continually undercut, both in this and subsequent episodes, by ridiculous, humorous and witty details, resulting in a light-hearted and flippant tone. Ovid does not include any details in later accounts which contradict the dark, funereal atmosphere he establishes in the Juno and Tisiphone episode: the Underworld is never described as a warm, bright, joyous and welcoming place. However, he does contradict the initial and traditional characterization of the inhabitants: Ovid emphasizes the dual nature of each character, both the terrible and the absurd, and the powerful and the pathetic, exhibited both within episodes and across them. As a result, instances of levity in these episodes are often concerning or at the expense of the inhabitants of the Underworld, demonstrating that while the Underworld itself may be a consistently formidable, frightening place, its denizens are less so: all are diminished and do not accurately represent the place they inhabit.

The Furies are introduced as *grave et inplacabile numen* (*Met.* 4.452), and are tasked with guarding the worst of the shades, those who are segregated from the general
population, yet in the next line Ovid depicts the Furies as sitting idly by, leisurely combing snakes from their hair, neglecting their duties instead of cracking the whip and torturing their prisoners (Virg. Aen. 6.555ff). While Tisiphone proves herself to be \textit{inplacabile} by ruthlessly destroying the innocent Athamas and Ino at the whim of Juno – her actions full of pomp and spectacle as she appears to take pleasure in their torture – she and her sisters are later moved to tears by the desperate lover’s plea of Orpheus, who is certainly less deserving of their pity than Athamas and Ino. The fact that this is also the first time that they cry is a bizarre instance of character development that can only be construed as negative: as murderous, menacing and merciless creatures they have lost credibility, weakened by such a human emotion. Unlike the Furies, Cerberus is shown performing his duty – and rather effectively, one could argue: he barks immediately upon Juno’s arrival, which would serve to alert others to her presence, but does not move to attack, likely knowing she is a goddess and that it would be both unwise and unnecessary. However, when a mortal, who should be considered an unwelcome intruder, does enter the Underworld, Cerberus is nowhere to be found, clearly having failed in his one important task. Indeed, it appears that Pluto should consider assigning a guard for his guard-dog, as the Echidnean and Medusean beast (\textit{Met.} 7.408, 10.22) is rather easily dragged off by Hercules, despite the fact that Cerberus is not compliant, but enraged, barking fiercely, frothing grotesquely at the mouth, and desperately twisting away from his captor. It is this latter detail which is most telling and damning for Cerberus, that he tries to escape from Hercules and his chains, not to attack him. Hercules is in complete control of the situation, while Cerberus is helpless and frightened: he is a monster that is
capable of petrifying mortals who look upon him (*Met.* 10.65-7), yet here it is the other way around. Cerberus, although he appears threatening and violent, is all bark and no bite, and appears ill-equipped and unsuited for the crucial task of guarding an entire realm.

Cerberus’ master fares no better in his portrayal in Ovid’s Underworld. Pluto is only referred to in passing in the initial depiction of the Underworld, but is described as *niger* (*Met.* 4.438) and while the connotations with darkness and death may suggest that he is well-suited to rule the Underworld, the similarities between the two seem to end there. When Pluto is properly introduced to the audience in the account of his rape of Proserpina, he is not at all as expected, and becomes Ovid’s main source of humour in the episode, never portrayed particularly positively. Although Pluto is shown to be powerful and threatening, preying on an innocent girl and taking by force what he wants, his actions are not driven by vengeance or wrath but by love, a softer and more vulnerable emotion. In succumbing to love he unknowingly fulfills the wishes of another, having been overpowered by a mere child who proves himself to be more powerful than the god of the Underworld. Pluto certainly acts in the entitled, relentless, and impulsive nature befitting a god, by abducting his own niece without so much as a word to her or her mother, so concerned with his own desires that he ignores her obvious distress and desperate pleas for help. Here, Pluto is truly shown to be the callous god with the unyielding heart that Virgil describes (*Virg. Georg.* 4.470). Later, however, he is rather easily swayed by Orpheus’ empty and unconvincing plea for compassion: Pluto is moved by the entreaties of an unknown and insignificant mortal, yet not by the sincere pleas of
his supposed love. Perhaps love and marriage have softened him in the end, something which would only cause problems for someone in his position, who deals with such a delicate matter as death. Like her husband, Proserpina also appears changed by their marriage and her new position as co-ruler and queen of the Underworld. Proserpina is the only denizen of the Underworld to play a significant role in the poem who is not introduced in the Juno and Tisiphone episode, being instead mentioned for the first time in her own episode in which she is the pitiable victim. She is not portrayed negatively in the same manner as the other denizens, as she is not yet one of them and is only a young girl, but Ovid stresses her naïveté and personal agency, which reflects poorly on her as she repeatedly makes foolish decisions with no one to blame but herself. Regardless, the episode ends with Proserpina embracing her newly gained power and position, providing a glimpse of the queen she will become, vengeful and wrathful much like her fellow gods. However, the audience never sees the ἔπαινη Περσεφόνεια (Hes. Theog. 768; Hom. Od. 11.47) who is mentioned in the works of Ovid’s predecessors. Instead, when the reader next encounters Proserpina she rules alongside her husband, but appears to have regressed, once again making naïve and foolish decisions: she too is wrongly influenced by Orpheus’ song and grants him his wish. As this is Proserpina’s second and final appearance in the poem, Ovid never affords her the opportunity to redeem herself for her poor choices, or for the reader to witness Proserpina as a fully-fledged, fearsome goddess.

Ovid’s intention in including the Underworld in the Metamorphoses is not merely to poke fun at its inhabitants (although he certainly does): doing so also provides an opportunity for the poet to explore the rather somber and often upsetting topic of death, a
shared experience for all mortals, with a touch of levity and irreverence. The Underworld is a significant part of ancient cosmology, accounting for one-third of the universe, and Ovid would be remiss to exclude it from his poem, which already focuses heavily on the other two-thirds. However, the Underworld is not afforded the same level of importance in each episode: sometimes it is depicted almost as its own character, having a significant impact on the episode, and on other occasions it is used merely as a setting. The Juno and Tisiphone, Pluto and Proserpina, and Orpheus episodes are all closely related to the Underworld, using it as a setting, and using its denizens as main characters. However, the Underworld is not merely a backdrop in these episodes: it is used as a means of comparison and contrast with the characters, either building up their portrayal or undermining it. The nature of the Underworld itself, for example, is sharply contrasted with the relaxed, human behaviour of Tisiphone (Met. 4.453ff) and the vulnerable and fearful behaviour of Pluto (Met. 5.356ff), while it is also likened to the cruelty and wrath of Juno, making her appear as if she belongs there (Met. 4.447ff). On the other hand, the Cerberus and Aeneas episodes engage the Underworld in a more unique and subtle manner. In the Cerberus episode, the Underworld itself is not featured; Cerberus, as an inhabitant of the Underworld, is used in its place: here, although Cerberus is mentioned only in a digression, and is not given full focus in the context of the passage, he still serves a purpose. The digression serves as a reflection of the larger narrative of Medea’s story, wherein Medea is likened to Cerberus, and so the largely negative portrayal of Cerberus adds another element to her characterization. In the Aeneas episode, the Underworld is used merely as a setting, briefly referenced and barely described, but this
too contributes to the story: diminishing Aeneas’ journey in the Underworld thereby diminishes both Aeneas and the greatness of his task and allows Ovid to bolster his depiction of the Sibyl instead – it would simply not be consistent with Ovid’s intention for the episode to discuss the Underworld extensively. If, however, Ovid excluded the Underworld completely, the episode would be changed, as the underlying current of death that runs throughout the passage would be missing, and a fitting backdrop for the Sibyl’s tragic tale would be lost. However, the inclusion of the Underworld in the Metamorphoses is neither perfunctory nor irrelevant: Ovid’s portrayal of the Underworld is both intentional and significant, as it is also in keeping with the poem’s main theme of transformation in a number of ways. In the Pluto and Proserpina episode, Ovid depicts the transformation of a goddess, as Proserpina moves from a naïve, passive, and vulnerable girl to an independent, threatening, and powerful goddess and queen. In addition, Ovid depicts the transformations of the inhabitants of the Underworld, both within and between episodes, showing the other side of gods and monsters, however unflattering it may be.

While Ovid’s Underworld is more revealing than many of his predecessors’, particularly Homer, Bacchylides, and Lucretius, it is by no means comprehensive and is certainly not comparable to Virgil in terms of detail. As a result, Ovid relies on the reader’s knowledge of the literary tradition to fill out those aspects of the Underworld which he under-represents or excludes: Elysium, for example, is only described as arva piorum (Met. 11.62), and so information could be supplemented from the accounts of Tibullus or Virgil to produce a fuller picture. In addition, Ovid’s Underworld is rather literary, as he includes references and jokes concerning the works of his predecessors –
particularly Virgil – that the reader would not fully understand or appreciate without previous knowledge.²¹³ It is in this way that Ovid embraces his literary models: he is not interested in making his Underworld entirely unique and unrecognizable from the traditional Underworld; rather he engages closely with the works but if he chooses to adopt a particular aspect, he is sure to embellish or otherwise alter it, making it his own. However, the major difference between Ovid’s Underworld and previous depictions is tone: each author has a different goal for their work and the tone reflects that. Homer’s account (Hom. Od. 11.13-640), which is slightly different from other accounts of the Underworld as Odysseus does not descend but summons the dead to ascend to earth, has the lofty and dignified tone that is standard for epic, and is rather solemn due to the emotional nature of the journey. While Homer does not emphasize the horror and torment of the Underworld, and provides very little physical description, he instead focuses on the emotional reunions and conversations between Odysseus and his loved ones, emphasizing the bleakness and isolation of the Underworld and the depressing nature of death. Hesiod’s depiction (Hes. Theog. 721-819) is not a personal or second-hand account as are the majority; rather it is a general one. He provides a rather direct survey of Tartarus in a didactic tone, as it “plays an important role both in the narrative of the rise of Zeus and Hesiod’s description of the negative powers […] mortals still have to face”: it is necessary to understand his Underworld to understand his cosmology.²¹⁴ Bacchylides’ account (Bacchyl. 5.56-175) is more depressing than it is frightening or sinister, as the encounter between Meleager and Heracles is upsetting and emotional. Here it is the

²¹³ Galinsky, (1975), 15; 19.
²¹⁴ D. Johnson, 8.
conversation that is gloomy and bleak, rather than the Underworld itself, resulting in a
tone that is overwhelmingly pessimistic and melancholic. Aristophanes’ account is the
outlier (Ar. Ran.): it is comedy, but it relies on blatant humour that is vulgar and obscene,
as opposed to the subtle and often dark humour and wit of Ovid. However, Aristophanes
also depicts the journey to the Underworld as unpleasant and unappealing, and the
Underworld itself as an ominous and threatening place with dangers lurking in every
corner. The tone of his Underworld may be humorous, but the atmosphere remains dark
and terrifying. Tibullus’ Underworld (Tib. 1.3.57-80) maintains an elegiac tone which
conveys strong emotions: he depicts the two extremes of the Underworld, Elysium and
Tartarus. Elysium is depicted as idyllic and eroticized, while Tartarus is overwhelmed
by darkness, torment and suffering. This dramatic contrast between the two is fitting with
Tibullus’ goal to “illustrate the fate of the enemies of true love,” by emphasizing the
presence and power of love in Elysium and the sheer terror and chaos in Tartarus.
Lucretius, similar to Hesiod, describes the Underworld generally (Lucr. 3.978-1023), and
provides a negative and sinister depiction, with a focus on punishment, torture, and
suffering. Lucretius’ focus, as an Epicurean, is philosophy, and his goal is to “dispel
men’s superstitious fears [of death]” by using “the stories of the mythical sinners […]
as allegorical interpretations of terrifying events in the world around us.” Finally,
Virgil’s depictions of the Underworld (Virg. Georg. 4.467-506; Aen. 6.9-899) are closest

215 Stern, 36; 41.
216 Houghton, 155.
217 Henderson, 649.
218 Ibid.
219 Reinhardt, 27.
to Ovid’s both in content and in tone, and so it is understandable Ovid so often looks to Virgil as a literary model. The tone of Virgil’s accounts is serious, but not overwhelmingly so, as they are not without scattered instances of humour. However, given the narrative context of the descriptions, the solemnity and pathos is fitting: both Orpheus and Aeneas accomplish impressive feats, and are on emotional quests which prove to be significant experiences for them, and so the serious tone suggests reverence towards the characters.

Ultimately, the Underworld of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is considerably detailed, dark and melancholic in atmosphere, and its tone a clever mixture of pathos and humour. Instances of humour are most often achieved at the expense of the Underworld’s inhabitants, as Ovid demonstrates not only the dangerous and fearsome side to characters, but also the ineffectual and absurd. He presents a realistic inconsistency in characters’ behaviour within and between episodes, and diverging from the works of previous authors. It would appear that Ovid’s goal is to diminish the Underworld, either literally or figuratively, by giving it little prominence in the Aeneas episode, or by presenting ridiculous, undermining portrayals of its inhabitants in the Juno and Tisiphone, Pluto and Proserpina, Cerberus, and Orpheus episodes. The Underworld as a whole undergoes a transformation, not just within the poem but from the established tradition itself, to its Ovidian incarnation. The Underworld, traditionally a place of death and stagnation, undergoes a metamorphosis – an appropriately literal embodiment of the *Metamorphoses*. 
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