ON THE NUMBER OF BOOKS IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*: A POSTSCRIPT

I have no doubt that Elena Merli is right to argue that Ovid's choice of a fifteen-book structure for the *Metamorphoses* was intended to signal, to those equipped to take the hint, 'its proper distance from the traditional epic which is instead characterized by a number corresponding to a multiple of six' (*CQ* 54 [2004], 306). But that, I suggest, is only half the story. The *Metamorphoses* forms half of a literary diptych, as Philip Hardie has pointed out: 'taken together the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses* represent Ovid's typically indirect answer to the challenge of Virgil's epic, on the other hand a Callimachean elegy on the central subject of the *Aeneid* and on the other a hexameter epic on themes for the most part not Roman' (*MD* 26 [1991], 47). To that elegiac epic in fifteen books an epicizing elegy in twelve (as planned) is clearly complementary in both scale and structure. The number of books in the *Fasti* is dictated by the calendrical scheme: were scheme and subject suggested to Ovid by the fact that there were twelve months in the Roman year and twelve books in the *Aeneid*? As to that, one can only speculate; it was at least a happy accident, enabling a poet writing for readers alert to generic nuance to invest his monumental combined *chef d'oeuvre* in a form which signalled to the *doctus lector* its highly original—I am tempted to say subversive—character.

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AENEID 1.647–55

G. N. Knauer's great *Die Aeneis und Homer*[1] has such vast sweep and profound depth, detecting and elucidating not merely the obvious Homeric ties to the *Aeneid* but also the most subtle instances of influence, that one is almost incredulous if one thinks that he has found an example of Homeric influence on the *Aeneid* that has eluded Knauer (and, it goes without saying, all the commentators). With due incredulity, I note the following.

Aeneas dispatches Achates to bring gifts for Queen Dido. Servius already commented on the peculiar nature of the gifts: *quamuis apta nupturae reginae sint munera, tamen futurorum malorum continere omen uidentur* (1.653); *uide iam omen infelicitatis futurae, cum adulterae Dido suscipit munera.* Modern commentators follow suit, e.g. Conway, 'The origin of these gifts . . . of course carried an evil omen (especially those from Helen's wardrobe)' (at 1.650),[2] and Austin, 'The sinister character of the gift is further underlined in *inconcessos hymenaeos*' (at 1.650); 'Aeneas' gifts to Dido could scarcely have been charged with more ominous associations' (at 653).[3] Let us look at the first set of gifts: *pallam signis auroque rigentem/et circumtextum croceo uelamen acantho,/ornatus Argiuae Helenae, quos illa Mycenis,/Pergama cum peteret inconcessosque hymenaeos,/extulerat*. What do we have here? A gift of garments for a woman, at some level conceived of as wedding presents from groom to bride (as Servius observed), and deriving from none other than the paradigmatic adulteress herself, Helen. This already occurs in the *Odyssey* (15.104ff.). When Telemachus visits Menelaus in Sparta, Helen selects a lovely garment of her own

[1] Göttingen, 1964.
[2] R. S. Conway, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus* (Cambridge, 1935), 112.
[3] R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus* (Oxford, 1971), 198.

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