

Virgil's Danaid Ekphrasis

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There are six ekphraseis of works of art in the *Aeneid*.¹ They are scattered throughout the epic and are varied in their presentation. The longest is the depiction of the shield of Aeneas in Book 8 and we also have the extensive survey of Dido's temple murals in the first book and of the temple doors crafted by Daedalus which open Book 6. Far shorter are the tale of Ganymede, woven on the victor's cloak in Book 5, and the glimpse of the metamorphosis of Io on the shield of Turnus near the end of the seventh. But the briefest is the last. It occurs in Book 10, where the narrator, in a line and a half, depicts the contents of the sword-belt of the dead Pallas which Turnus strips from his body and at some point assumes. I would like to analyze this ekphrasis, for its contents and context, for its poetic inheritance and, finally, for the light it sheds on the poem as a whole and on a larger problem of Augustan intellectual history.²

¹ I use the term "ekphrasis" not because it was approved, or perhaps even known, by Virgil but because it is regularly applied to such descriptions in the commentaries. The standard discussion of the term is by P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius* (Leipzig 1912) 1–103. Though it occurs twice in the works of Virgil's contemporary Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De Imitatione* fr. 6. 3. 2 and *Ars Rhetorica* 10. 17), it is not in common usage until the Second Sophistic. The late Republican writers on rhetoric would have used *descriptio*, *evidentia* or the borrowed *enargeia* to describe the phenomenon of bringing an art object (or numerous other types of figures) before the mind's eye. The most recent general discussion of the term is by M. Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore 1992). Among important recent discussions of particular occurrences of the figure should be noted G. Zanker, "Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," *RhM* 124 (1981) 297–311; S. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel* (Princeton 1989) 7–9; D. Fowler, "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis," *JRS* 81 (1991) 25–35; A. Vasaly, *Representations: Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (Berkeley 1993) 20 and 90–91 nn. 3–4.

² I have learned much from the recent, sensitive treatment of Virgil's Danaids by Sarah Spence ("Cinching the Text: The Danaids and the End of the *Aeneid*," *Vergilius* 37 [1991] 11–19). Other valuable commentary on the ekphrasis and the tangential problems it raises can be found in G. B. Conte, "Il balteo di Pallante," *RFIC* 98 (1970) 292–300, repr. in *Il genere e i suoi confini* (Turin 1980) 96–108 and trans. in *The Rhetoric of Imitation* (Ithaca 1986) 185–95. Conte sees the sons of Aegyptus as primarily emblematic of youths who die unmarried. (He is followed in essence by R. O. A. M. Lyne, *Words and the Poet* [Oxford 1989] 158.) See also A. Barchiesi, *La Traccia del Modello* (Pisa 1984) 33–34 and especially 71–72 on the iconographic content of the *balteus*. P. Hardie (*The Epic Successors of Virgil* [Cambridge 1993] 33) sees in the belt "the symbolism of the ephebe cut down on his wedding night," which Turnus transfers to himself. The following essays also have much of value for a student of the Danaid

First the content and context. Turnus has met and killed in single combat the young protégé of Aeneas. We pick up the narrative after the victor has stood over the corpse, announcing to the followers of Evander that the defeated had gotten what he deserved and that he is sending the body back for burial (10. 495–505):

et laevo pressit pede talia fatus	495
exanimem rapiens immania pondera baltei	
impressumque nefas: una sub nocte iugali	
caesa manus iuvenum foede thalamique cruenti,	
quae Clonus Eurytides multo caelaverat auro;	
quo nunc Turnus ovat spolio gaudetque potitus.	500
nescia mens hominum fati sortisque futurae	
et servare modum rebus sublata secundis!	
Turno tempus erit magno cum optaverit emptum	
intactum Pallanta, et cum spolia ista diemque	
oderit.	505

And after he had spoken such words he pressed the lifeless (man) with his left foot, snatching the huge weight of the baldric and the imprinted crime: on their single night of marriage the band of youths foully slaughtered and the bloodied wedding chambers, which Clonus son of Eurytus had incised with much gold. In these spoils Turnus now rejoices and takes delight in their possession. Mind of men, ignorant of fate and of future lot, and of holding a moderate course when buoyed by favorable circumstances! The time will come for Turnus when he will wish Pallas ransomed untouched for a great price and when he will hate these spoils and day.

The ekphrasis proper, which the narrator introduces with the phrase *impressum nefas*—we are to learn of a crime given visible shape by engraving—lasts only one and a half lines but demands of the reader an unusual exercise of imagination. The belt tells of the slaughter of forty-nine of the fifty sons of Aegyptus, all at once, by the daughters of Danaus on their wedding-night. We witness one of the most graphic events in Greek myth, whose feverish intensity is visualized as compressed, presumably in a series of vignettes equivalent to the number of murders, in the restricted space of a sword-belt. The limited deployment of words metaphorically reflects the confined enclosure of the tangible object of which it tells.

The ekphrastic mode defines a moment when on-going narrative stops for a period of vivid description, usually of a work of art but often of a landscape or a person or even an animal. It aims for the impossible: to stop the passage of time (as narrative flows, and as we read) and impart to and through words the apparent fixity of space. Virgil here comes close to

ekphrasis: C. C. Breen, "The Shield of Turnus, the Swordbelt of Pallas and the Wolf," *Vergilius* 32 (1986) 63–71; D. Fowler, "Vergil on Killing Virgins," in *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble* (Bristol 1987) 185–98; R. N. Mitchell, "The Violence of Virginity in the *Aeneid*," *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 219–37.

accomplishing this goal. From absorbing the intent of a total of ten words stretched over an hexameter and a half we are made to imagine the repetition of forty-nine events happening contemporaneously. The simultaneity of action and the nearly instantaneous depiction of it in words complement each other. Brevity of time and brevity of space are captured in the concision of words which in a flash conjure up for us this exceptional object and its strange tale.

The words themselves are also a form of figuration for what they tell. As we begin an initial reading, with the phrase *una sub nocte iugali* which ends line 497, ignorant of what follows, we expect a happy vision of marriage based on the brisk suggestion of unity which both *una* and *iugali* suggest. Hence as we turn to the next, full line of the ekphrasis and its first word *caesa*, the enjambment becomes particularly telling. From conjoining (and marriage) we turn abruptly to cutting (and murder), and the break between the lines, and the shock it arouses, signals both the violence of the deeds depicted and their sudden, unexpected quality. And because, verbally, cutting reflects the brutality of which it tells, the ekphrasis also subtly partakes in a form of iconicity which we see fully fledged in the figured poems we know most readily from the work of George Herbert but which are exemplified from the Hellenistic period on. Once more poetry and the art and action of which art tells tend succinctly to merge.

Enjambment helps illustrate meaning, but the key word for understanding the moral thrust of the ekphrasis is *foede*.³ We know that what we are going to see is a *nefas*, but *foede* gives the action of murder its ethical slant.⁴ It is the pivotal element of line 498, caught appropriately between two caesurae, with seven syllables on either side. We must therefore attend to the poet's intentions here with particular care. Virgil puts his only other use of the adverb on the lips of Venus who, as part of her indictment of Juno to Neptune in Book 5, speaks of Juno's continuing *ira*, *odium* and *furor* against the Trojans and in particular of how the goddess had burned the Trojan ships, *foede*, after the mothers had been criminally (*per scelus* 5. 794) driven to action. The implication is that such a course is both sly and dishonorable because it played on the infuriate emotions of women to perform a deed unthinkable were they in their right mind.⁵

³ Both Conte, *Rhetoric* (previous note) 187 and Fowler (previous note) 192 give special emphasis to Virgil's use of *foede* here. Conte quotes Servius ad *Aen.* 2. 55, where he equates *turpe* with *crudele*. Livy has a pertinent instance (6. 22. 4) where *turpe* comes close to being an antonym to *civiliter* (*foede . . . in captis exercere victoriam*). Here, too, in victory no leniency is offered the defeated. The connection with the Iphigeneia-passage in Lucr. 1. 85 (and cf. 1. 62) is clear. See P. Hardie, "The Sacrifice of Iphigeneia," *CQ* 34 (1984) 406-12.

⁴ The language describing the *baltus* and Turnus's assumption of it is close to the words Virgil uses to describe sinners in the Underworld (*Aen.* 6. 624): *ausi omnes immane nefas ausoque potiti*.

⁵ Iulus describes the action in terms of *furor* at 5. 670.

But both the adjective *foedus* and the verb *foedo* appear in contexts that also help us to comprehend the force of *foede* in Book 10.⁶ Most germane is the phrase *foeda ministeria* (7. 619) to describe the task of opening the twin Gates of War which Juno arrogates to herself when Latinus avoids it. The passage takes us in a sweeping bit of etymology from Virgil's imagination of early Italian *mores* down to Augustan Rome. When Rome makes war now, says the narrator speaking of Virgil's present time, it is against the Getae or to demand back the standards from the Parthi. The all too recent past had evinced a more ugly form of martial activity, when brother fought brother in civil conflict.⁷ It is to avoid setting this gruesome precedent that Latinus now yields to Juno the "horrible functions" of releasing such antagonism into the world and into future Rome.⁸ Jupiter in Book 1 may dream of a time in which *impius Furor*, military madness based on impiety, is enchained behind War's iron doors. The inescapable reality of the *Aeneid's* second half is of civil fury on the loose, and even Latinus, at the beginning of the last book, can exclaim that he took up *impia arma* when he allowed Turnus to make war against Aeneas.⁹

Virgil's use of *foede* at the center of the Danaid ekphrasis implies, then, that the action which the (unnamed) sons of Aegyptus suffered was treacherous and reprehensible (because the victims were unprepared), merciless and ruthless (because they were defenseless) and has a particularly sinister, immoral slant, verging on an allegory of civil war, because potential wife killed potential husband and cousin killed cousin.¹⁰

⁶ The verb *foedo*, as used by Virgil, means to make black and blue from scratches or blows (*Aen.* 4. 673 = 12. 871, 11. 86) or to blacken or deface, literally, with blood from wounds or filth or dust (2. 286, 502; 3. 227; 7. 575; cf. 2. 55 on the "wounding" of the wooden horse). It also means metaphorically to darken with the sight of death (2. 539). In many of these instances a sense of moral repugnance hangs over the context. The same holds true for Virgil's use of the adjective *foedus*. It twice characterizes the filth of the Harpies (3. 216, 244) and Turnus applies it in the superlative to his antagonist Drances, in allusion more to the underhanded craft of his rhetoric than to any disfigurement of body. Fama in Book 4, one of the *Aeneid's* less attractive beings, is styled *dea foeda* (4. 195). She is an evil (*mala*) who pursues her dismal work at night, engendered out of anger and sharing traits with Homer's personified strife (4. 174, 178 and 176-77, with which cf. *Il.* 4. 442-43).

⁷ One of the ancient etymologies of the noun *foedus* ("treaty") connected it with *foede*. See, e.g., Festus 84: *foedus appellatum ab eo, quod in paciscendo foede hostia necaretur*. (For other examples, see R. Malby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*, Arca 25 [Leeds 1991], s.v. *foedus*.) If Virgil means any resonance here it is possibly to suggest the difference between the divisive horror of human murder and victimization and the demand of animal sacrifice as accompaniment to the forging of a treaty which would bring enmity to an end (in the *Aeneid*, cf. 8. 641, 12. 170-71 and 213-15, where the violence is graphically described).

⁸ It requires no great leap of the imagination to connect the Gates of Sleep, whose description concludes Book 6, with the Gates of War, one of the most prominent symbols of the subsequent book, or to link Aeneas's escape out of the Underworld (and into the text of the second half of the epic) through the gate of false dreams with the advent of civil war which Juno's opening of the *Belli portae* betokens.

⁹ 12. 31, and cf. 6. 612-13, of those tortured in the Underworld who *arma secuti / impia*, as well as *G.* 1. 511 (*Mars impius*).

¹⁰ It is well to remember the many occasions in the poem when night abets scenes of cruelty and violence. Among them we could count the Rhesus episode in the Dido murals (1. 469-73;

But before probing further the pertinence of the ekphrasis to the *Aeneid's* final books I would like to turn back to Virgil's primary source, which is to say Homer, in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

The scene of which the ekphrasis forms part is a condensed version of action spread over several hundred lines at the end of *Iliad* 16 and the beginning of the subsequent book. Before the actual clash between Pallas and Turnus Virgil, through Jupiter's mention of Sarpedon, reminds us of the tears of blood which the king of the gods sheds for his son in anticipation of his slaying by Hector.¹¹ From there the parallels leap to the end of the book, where the lengthy dialogue between Hector and the dying Patroclus is replaced by Turnus's speech offering the body of Pallas to the Arcadians. Virgil has Turnus imitate Hector's gesture of putting his foot on the corpse.¹² We then jump to *Iliad* 17, 125, where Hector strips the armor from the body (over which in Homer both sides fight) and thence to lines 186–94 where he dons the armor. This is immediately followed by a soliloquy of Zeus apostrophizing Hector, warning of his imminent death and remarking that he had seized the armor οὐ κατὰ κόσμον (17, 205), a phrase meaning something like "inappropriately."

Zeus's words serve as spark for one of Homer's rare moments of editorializing. Replacing the Olympian himself, the narrator speaks directly to his audience as if he were projecting the inner workings of the author's mind, his deeply felt beliefs voiced as general commentary on human action. Zeus remarks on the unseemly aspect of Hector's behavior not because he despoiled his victim but because of the particular weaponry which he took, called by Zeus ἄμβροτα τεύχεα. In putting on the armor Patroclus had worn Hector aims not only to become the greatest of heroes but to absorb his divine side as well. It will prove to be a fatal form of overreaching. By contrast with Homer, Virgil puts emphasis on the deed of despoliation itself and on the excess of pride such an action exhibits. And with this lack of moderation Turnus acquires not any symbolic parallelism with Pallas, such as Hector might have sought with Achilles, but rather the emblematic essence of the baldric itself. Homer tells of no decoration on the arms of Achilles which Hector wears. The details of Virgil's ekphrasis are therefore pointed when the episode is compared to its Homeric source. The narrator's words chiding Turnus, unlike Zeus's monologue, speak of arrogance followed by retribution. We are familiar with this ethical axis more from tragedy than from epic. It is therefore appropriate that Turnus be associated with a scene used in tragedy. Hector may foolishly strive to

n.b. the phrase *multa . . . caede cruentus* at 471), the descent of night over doomed Troy (2, 250), Palinurus and the lethal combination of *Nox* and *Somnus* at his death, night and Helen's treachery to Deiphobus (6, 513), the murderous nocturnal adventure of Nisus and Euryalus in Book 9. When Aeneas arrives on the scene in Book 10 the gleaming of his shield is compared to the sinister red glow of "bloody comets" (*cometae / sanguinei* 272–73).

¹¹ *Il.* 16, 459–60; *Aen.* 10, 469–71.

¹² With 10, 495, cf. *Il.* 16, 863.

emulate the half-divine Achilles. Pallas's baldric brings to Turnus, as it had to its earlier wearer, a less obvious signification. He is now in the position of a Danaid (Virgil had given Pallas, too, before his death an *aristeia* with some ugly moments). He will soon take the more passive role of victim, which is the description's primary subject.

Virgil gives Turnus a special relationship to the baldric and its art by repeating, within the space of two lines, the verb *pressit* through the participle of its compound, *impressum*. We are not allowed to leave unacknowledged the relationship between Turnus's gesture of hauteur and the *nefas* inscribed on Pallas's shoulder-belt. To kill Pallas or, better, to tear his armor from him after death and presumably to put it on,¹³ is parallel to the act of crafting itself, of preparing the visible insignia of a *nefas* which Turnus himself remakes. But before we probe further the meaning and effect of the ekphrasis we must turn back to Homer, this time to the *Odyssey* and to what would have been Virgil's model for the baldric itself—the only instance in classical literature before Virgil where a sword-belt is described ekphrastically. The occasion is Odysseus's meeting in the Underworld with the wraith of Heracles, which comes upon him like black night, with bow stretched as if he were about to shoot (*Od.* 11. 609–14):

σμερδαλέος δέ οἱ ἀμφὶ περὶ στήθεσσι ἀορτῆρ
 χρύσεος ἦν τελαμών, ἵνα θέσκελα ἔργα τέτυκτο, 610
 ἄρκτοι τ' ἀργότεροί τε σύες χαροποί τε λέοντες,
 ὕσμῖναι τε μάχαι τε φόνοι τ' ἀνδροκτασίαι τε.
 μὴ τεχνησάμενος μηδ' ἄλλο τι τεχνήσαιτο,
 ὃς κείνον τελαμῶνα ἐπὶ ἐγκάθητο τέχνη.

And around his chest was a terrifying belt, a golden baldric, on which marvelous deeds were fashioned, bears and wild boars and lions with gleaming eyes, and fights and battles and killings and man-slayings. Now that he has crafted it may he never craft another, he who stored up in his craft that baldric!

The appropriateness of the baldric to Heracles is clear enough. It serves as metonymy for the hero himself, for, in Homer's punning, the belt is σμερδαλέος (609) like the λέοντες (611) which it contains. Heracles cinches himself with the battlings (two types) and the killings (two forms) that typify the life of the warrior as well as with the wild animals whose characteristics a hero so often absorbs and displays as, in simile, he pursues his epic course.

In their way these two lines have as much energy as Virgil's line and a half, and we can be certain that the Latin poet, in creating them, is deliberately accepting the challenge that Homer puts into the mouth of his wandering hero. May he never create another such belt, says Odysseus at

¹³ We learn from 11. 91–92 that Turnus has in his possession all the armor of Pallas except spear and helmet. He seems actually to use, that is to wear, only the sword-belt.

its sight, but this is exactly what Virgil, rivaling Homer, or his artist, confronting Homer's unnamed artisan, has accomplished. The changes are noteworthy. We move from an object that is dreadful and whose contents merely magnify the terror its wearer instills to something subjective, the ugliness of a crime whose allegorical association with its possessors only gradually becomes clear. We turn from a plurality of animals and generalized combats to one specific mythic moment which itself concentrates a specific number of ghastly events, a single tale of a singular night harboring a multitude of murders.

Unlike Homer, Virgil gives a name to his artisan, Clonus the son of Eurytus, and this exactitude is also a form of rivalry on Virgil's part because he takes the appellation from Homer and from the din of battle that resounds through the *Iliad*.¹⁴ It is fitting that noise of battle be understood to engender its own emblem. But here also lies Virgil's greatest alteration to his model. What "Battle-Din" creates in the *Aeneid* is not further Herculean conflicts, as obvious compliment to the hero who wears the product of his artistry, but a moment from tragedy. In the person of Clonus and as one epicist rivaling another Virgil offers here a metaphor *in parvo* for one of his major accomplishments—the combination of epic with tragedy or, better, a metaphorical demonstration of the tragic dimension of all epic endeavors, especially those catalogued in the *Aeneid*. Virgil has remade Homer by means of a concentrated look at a particular tragic moment whose repetition within itself is constantly repeated as the epic's tragedy continues to unfold. Before watching this development more closely we must look at the tragedy itself.

The scene on the baldric comes from an event portrayed, or implied, in the trilogy which Aeschylus composed on the myth of the Danaids. We possess the first of the three plays, *Supplices*. Of the next two, plausibly entitled *Aegyptii* and *Danaides*, we have preserved only one assignable fragment, in which Aphrodite proclaims the universal power of *eros*, but their plot can be suggested in outline.¹⁵ In the second play the women, at

¹⁴ Virgil leaves unexplained the patronymic Eurytides. Two candidates for the Eurytus or Eurytion in question seem feasible. First is Eurytus, king of Oechalia and father of Iole, beloved of Heracles. The second, which I consider more apt because of the theme of violence on a wedding night common to his tale and to that of the Danaids, is Eurytion (or Eurytus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), the centaur who, according to Homer (*Od.* 21. 285), gets drunk at the wedding feast of Hippodameia and Piriithous. For references to him in Latin literature, see Prop. 2. 33. 31 (and cf. 2. 2. 9–10), Ovid, *Ars* 1. 593 and *Met.* 12. 220–28, where the centaur seizes the bride herself and is slain by Piriithous. For variations on the occasion of Eurytion's (Eurytus's) behavior and his fate, see D.S. 4. 70, Hyg. *Fab.* 33, Apollod. *Bibl.* 2. 5. 6.

¹⁵ The evidence is set forth with sobriety by A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplices: Play and Trilogy* (Cambridge 1969) 163–233. See also the more concise summary by R. P. Winnington-Ingram, in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature: Greek* (Cambridge 1985) 284–86. For the speech of Aphrodite, see Aesch. fr. 44 Radt. It comes from Athenaeus (13. 600a–b), who tells us that the speaker is Aphrodite. Aeschylus's treatment of the myth is the subject of two valuable recent essays by Froma Zeitlin: "Patterns of Gender in Aeschylean Drama: *Seven Against Thebes* and the Danaid Trilogy," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays in honor of T. Rosenmeyer*, ed. by M. Griffith and D. Mastronarde (Atlanta 1990) 103–15, especially 105–06

the instigation of their father, agreed to marriage only as a means for the treacherous murder of their grooms. Whether the second play showed the actual killings or only some preamble to them we can only conjecture. At some point, whether the incident was seen on stage or implied, Hypermestra spared her husband Lynceus. The last play we can assume to have contained the trial of the Danaids and defense of Hypermestra. The fragment remaining of Aphrodite's speech suggests that Hypermestra's saving disobedience found acceptance and that her sisters, for all their initial repugnance, were ultimately reconciled to the idea of marriage.

In this tale of helpless victims become murderous victimizers, of hatred for and reconciliation to marriage, of the power of *eros* triumphant over *eris*, it is important to notice what Virgil has chosen to emphasize and what to suppress. The belt that the beautiful young Pallas, whose name implies both femininity and virginity, has worn into battle, that the handsome, prideful (and equally virginal) Turnus assumes after he has killed Pallas and the sight of which arouses Aeneas to kill Turnus in a furious rage at the epic's end, has depicted on it one of the most violent scenes in Greek tragedy, the treacherous mass murder of forty-nine (here) nameless husbands by their equally nameless wives inspired by a vendetta of their father against his brother or by their own hatred or by both emotions.¹⁶ Much, even about the deed itself, is left to our imagination.

Equally vital to an understanding of the role of the ekphrasis for the denouement of the epic is what Virgil omits. The story of the Danaids is noteworthy not only for the ferocity at its center but for the two acts of supplication and sparing which frame this focal action. In the first Pelasgus, king of Argos, receives the petitioning maidens into his custody; in the second Hypermestra spares her husband Lynceus (the descendants arising from the consummation of their marriage include among others Heracles himself).¹⁷

Thus whether the Danaids became resigned to marriage, as Aeschylus may have had it, or suffered among the damned in the Underworld the torture of carrying water in perpetually leaking vessels, as Plato and the Latin tradition generally maintained, Virgil foregoes mention of the two acts

and 113 n. 8 for further bibliography, and "The Politics of Eros in the Danaid Trilogy of Aeschylus," in *Innovations of Antiquity*, ed. by R. Hexter and D. Selden (New York 1992) 203-53.

¹⁶ The connection of Turnus with Io and hence with her descendants, the Danaids, deserves separate treatment. See Breen (above, note 2) *passim*; Kellum (below, note 29) 174; D. O. Ross, *Virgil's Elements* (Princeton 1987) 160-63; J. J. O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton 1990) 78-81.

¹⁷ The sparing act of Hypermestra and the ancestry of Heracles form the climax of the Danaid myth as described by Prometheus in Aesch. *PV* 846-73. Pausanias (2. 20. 7) informs us that Hypermestra was brought to judgment by Danaus and (2. 21. 1) that she won the trial. We are also told by Pausanias (2. 19. 3-7) that, to celebrate her victory, Hypermestra dedicated a statue of Aphrodite in the sanctuary of Apollo Lycius and (2. 16. 1) that Lynceus succeeded to the throne of Argos on the death of Danaus.

of supplication followed by what the Romans would have called manifestations of *clementia* which figure so prominently in their tale.¹⁸

There are two areas of exception to this regular picture of the Danaids undergoing eternal torture. The first centers on the figure of Hypermestra. We find her in *C.* 3. 11 of Horace portrayed at the moment when she disobeys her father's command and saves Lynceus, anticipating in her thoughts the chains Danaus will load her down with "because in clemency I spared my poor husband" (*quod viro clemens misero peperci* 46). She is also imagined, imprisoned and helpless, at some length by Ovid.

Before turning to the second exceptional aspect in the way the Danaids are treated in Latin poetry, we should note the anomalousness in Virgil's handling of the myth in relation to his contemporaries. Among those tortured in Tartarus, as the Sibyl in the epic's sixth book describes to Aeneas this location of the most offending sinners, we find such regular denizens as Tityus and Ixion.¹⁹ But, though the Danaids figure in such lists, as found in all his other coeval poets, they are absent from *Aeneid* 6. Virgil, as we have been seeing, reserves them for a symbolic, on-going role in the epic proper, for his development of a parallel between their lived experience and events in his epic story, not for relegation to a torture-house of the damned where they might serve as object-lessons for the suitability of punishment to crime.

To have them listed in Book 6, acting out the final, eternal segment of their notorious career, would detract from the immediate power of their presence behind the scene crafted on the baldrick. Nor does Virgil make any mention of Hypermestra, Lynceus and the possibilities of *clementia* which serve as moral compensating factor to the myth's central horror, though the fact that Horace explicitly and Ovid by implication build poems around its force shows that this aspect of the myth was in the Augustan intellectual air, as an allegory for leniency toward the defeated or helpless.

Virgil leaves such construction of the myth to his fellow poets. Through the final underworld scene, where *pietas* finds fruition as son meets

¹⁸ The main reference by Plato is at *Gorg.* 493a (cf. also *Rep.* 363d). The first surviving mention of Danaus in Latin is apparently in fr. 1 (Morel 93) of Varro Atacinus's translation of the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius (cf. 1. 133), followed by *Cic. Par.* 44, where Danaus is mentioned with his daughters. Lucretius (3. 935-37, 1008-11), who leaves them unnamed, finds in them an analogy to those who for whatever reason have not allowed themselves to enjoy their earthly existence to the full and who therefore suffer in life what superstition claims that the Danaids endure in death. The sisters figure in standard lists which Horace (*C.* 2. 14. 18-19, 3. 11. 21-29), Tibullus (1. 3. 80-81) and Propertius (2. 1. 67, 4. 11. 27-28) offer of those who pay for sublunar crimes with perpetual punishment in the afterlife. (At 4. 7. 63-68 Propertius places Hypermestra in the Elysian Fields.) Once in the *Ibis* (177-78) and twice in the *Metamorphoses* (4. 364-65, 10. 43-44) Ovid mentions them, on the second occasion momentarily relieved of their suffering by the song of Orpheus just as they are in Horace, *C.* 3. 11 by the sounds of Mercury's lyre. Cf. also ps.-*Ver. Culex* 245-47 and, in Neronian literature, Seneca, *Med.* 748-49 and *HF* 498-500 and 757 (with the comments of Fitch on 750-59).

¹⁹ On eccentricities in Virgil's treatment of the damned, see M. C. J. Putnam, "Virgil's Lapiths," *CQ* 40 (1990) 562-66.

father, Anchises, of course, offers his own definition of *clementia*, which Virgil means to stay with the reader as ethical touchstone. Father addresses son as *Romane* and therefore grants him authority as standard for Roman behavior now and in the future. His son must remember to impose a custom for peace, which is to say to confirm the permanence of civil tranquillity by making its regularity a force in life. To this he adds his famous concluding demand, *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*, "to spare the subjected and war down the proud." The power of these words reverberates through the epic's second half and especially in the final battle books. Virgil may deliberately suppress any mention of the double manifestations of supplication and clemency that figure in the Danaid myth, just as Aeneas finally squelches any instinct to spare the suppliant Turnus as the epic reaches its violent conclusion. Aeneas does hesitate for a moment, but is moved to kill by sight of the belt of Pallas. As he acts the hero assumes many roles as does his humbled antagonist, but the one most directly etched before us is of Turnus as a youth basely slaughtered and of Aeneas as a type of Danaid enforcing the vendetta of her father. Evander had, in Book 11, stated to Aeneas *in absentia* that the hero's right hand "owed" (*debere*) Turnus to father and dead son (11. 178-79). It is the final role of the ekphrasis to make clear the dubious morality of this suggestion and its implementation. Meanwhile the reader remembers the more reasoned, ethical demands of a different father, demands which the appearance of the baldric have helped expunge from his son's memory. Aeneas sees the baldric as metonymy for Pallas, but the reader has been made to concentrate on the meaning of its figurations as well.

The second area of exception to the general picture in the Augustan poets of the Danaids as water-carrying sinners is one which brings into play a unique aspect of this particular ekphrasis. It is the only one of the six Virgilian ekphrasises that reflects an actual work of art, in this case one of the major monuments of the Augustan era. We know a great deal about the temple to Apollo that Octavian dedicated on October 9, 28 B.C.E., and archaeology is gradually clarifying more for us, especially about its intimate connection with the emperor's own *domus*. Prose sources tell us also that adjacent to the temple was a portico, but only the poets reveal in any detail what its decoration was.²⁰ Propertius, in a poem published certainly within a few years of the dedication, speaks of the opening of the portico by Caesar and of its throng of women belonging to the old man Danaus set among Phoenician columns (*Poenis columnis*), which is to say made of *giallo antico*.²¹ Ovid gives us a still closer look. In *Amores* 2. 2 he mentions the *porticus* with its *Danaï agmen*, where he saw a girl walking.²² In *Ar s*

²⁰ The references to the portico in prose are Aug. *RG* 19; Vell. Pat. 2. 81; Suet. *Aug.* 29. 3; D.C. 53. 1. 3.

²¹ Prop. 2. 31. 3-4.

²² *Am.* 2. 2. 4.

Amatoria, in one of his more blatant diminutions of Augustan aesthetic (and propagandistic) pretension, he visits the *porticus* of Livia,

quaque parere necem miseris patruelibus ausae
Belides et stricto stat ferus ense pater.²³

and the one where the Danaids dared to prepare death for their poor cousins and their father stands fierce with drawn sword.

This is a perfect place to go hunting for girls. Finally, in the *Tristia*, he combines Propertius with his own characterization when he speaks of the place

siqua peregrinis ubi sunt alterna columnis,
Belides et stricto barbarus ense pater.²⁴

where the statues alternate with columns of foreign (marble), the Danaids and their barbarous father with drawn sword.

Students of Roman art and architecture, as well as those interested in Augustan intellectual history and especially in the emperor's own ideology and its presentation in the tangible monuments of his reign, have long speculated on reasons for Augustus's choice of subject here.²⁵ Though there is general agreement that the portico, given its proximity to the Apollo temple, is connected with the battle of Actium and therefore with the warring it brought to an end, nevertheless two distinct schools of interpretation remain. One view, proposed most recently by Paul Zanker, argues for the Danaids as exemplifications of sin and repentance.²⁶ It sees the murderous sisters as equivalent to Romans paying expiation for the guilt that nearly a century of war has brought upon them. The other interpretative approach explains the monument as suggestive of the final

²³ *Ars* 1. 73–74.

²⁴ *Tr.* 3. 1. 61–62.

²⁵ For the Danaids in art, see the detailed article by Eva Keuls in *LIMC* III.1 (1986) s.v. "Danaiides," 337–43. Her survey offers only one sure example of the Danaids portrayed as murderers before the Palatine statuary, namely on an Apulian bell crater of the fourth century B.C.E. (p. 338). It is important also to note that in late Republican wall painting and on stone reliefs the Danaids are uniformly shown as water-carriers. See also eadem, *The Water Carriers in Hades: A Study of Catharsis through Toil in Antiquity* (Amsterdam 1974) 117–58. A late scholium to Persius (on 2. 56) mentions that there were equestrian statues of the sons of Aegyptus opposite those of the Danaids but the logic of such a portrayal, given the circumstances of the myth, the exigencies of space and the silence of the literary sources, tells against such a possibility.

²⁶ Zanker's views are set forth in greatest detail in "Der Apollontempel auf dem Palatin: Ausstattung und politische Sinnbezüge nach der Schlacht von Actium," *ARID*, Suppl. 10 (1983) 21–40, especially 27–30 and addendum 2, p. 40 n. 2. They are summarized most recently in *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (Munich 1987) 91 = *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 1988) 85–86 ("guilt and expiation"). His interpretation develops from that of J. Carcopino, *La Basilique pythagoricienne de la Porte Majeure* (Paris 1943), esp. 280–85, and J. Gagé, *Apollon romain* (Paris 1955) 529, on the Danaids as non-initiates.

phase of the fighting that Actium and the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra at Alexandria a year later brought to an end.

Beyond this critics diverge. Some perceive the Danaids as emblematic of the Romans triumphing over the Egyptian queen, with Greeks standing in for Augustus and his colleagues repulsing an eastern moral and political threat.²⁷ This is also the core of the reading of David Quint in his recent fine chapter on the *Aeneid*: The Romans would have seen the portico and statuary as appropriate memorialization of revenge against foreign enemies.²⁸ Barbara Kellum, by contrast, sees the monument as emblematic of the evils of civil war, a constant reminder of the horrors that Romans had experienced and of what, by implication, the new regime had to put to rest in its final victory.²⁹

This interpretation has much to commend it. The literary evidence, in particular that supplied by Ovid, leaves little doubt that the Danaids led by their father are meant to be visualized in a posture of killing, which is to say carrying out the revenge which he asks of them. But the poets are also unanimous in their condemnation of all concerned. For Ovid Danaus is both *ferus* and *barbarus*, heady words to apply to a Roman leading his followers into action unless used in irony (something we should not disallow in Ovid).³⁰ As for the Danaids themselves, Horace styles them in one poem an *infame genus* and in the Hypermetra ode calls their deed a *scelus* and themselves *impiae*, implying that their duty to marriage and to their husbands-to-be was greater than that to their father.³¹ Ovid, in the *Ibis*, labels the group a *turba cruenta* (178), while the passage from *Ars Amatoria* leaves little doubt that his sympathy lies with the victims (*miseris patruelibus* 1. 73), not with the perpetrators of the crime. There is also no hint from any source of the saving presence of Hypermetra, which is to say of evidence for an emblem of *clementia* in the portico and its statuary.

²⁷ Two exponents of this view are E. Lefèvre, *Das Bild-Programm des Apollo-Tempels auf dem Palatin*, *Xenia* 24 (Konstanz 1989) 12–16 and E. Simon, *Augustus: Kunst und Leben in Rom am die Zeitenwende* (Munich 1986) 21–24.

²⁸ D. Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton 1993), chapter 2, “Repetition and Ideology in the *Aeneid*,” 50–96, *passim*. On p. 78 he distinguishes between revenge that posits further vengeance and revenge that brings vendetta to a stop. Perhaps Augustus meant to create the image of revenge mastered by monumentalizing it, but the cyclicity of the *Aeneid* tells another tale.

²⁹ B. Kellum, “The Temple of Apollo on the Palatine,” in *The Age of Augustus*, ed. by R. Winkes, *Archaeologia Transatlantica* 5 (Louvain and Providence 1985) 169–76, and in particular 173–76.

³⁰ Cf. Virgil’s use of *impius* and *barbarus* to describe a Roman soldier at *Ecl.* 1. 70–71.

³¹ *C.* 2. 14. 18–19; 3. 11. 25, 30–31. Horace’s judgment is an important aid to interpreting the morality of Aeneas’s action at the poem’s end. The *pietas* of vendetta (i.e. that which Aeneas may be construed to owe Evander) must not be allowed to take ethical precedence over the *pietas* of *clementia* (i.e. what Aeneas experienced in the words of his father). The point deserves further development in relation to the end of the *Aeneid*. Because the *pietas* (if such it be) of vengeance rules the poem’s conclusion, no reconciliations are possible nor any type of higher “marriage.”

The elegy of Propertius offers us two further details. The area contained a statue of Apollo playing the lyre, further reminder of the god's temple nearby and of how Apollo is leader of the Muses (and appropriate inspirer of those using the adjacent libraries) as well as god of war. Propertius also tells us of an altar around which were four statues of bulls by the sculptor Myron. The portico therefore suggested that Apollo also gains permanence, at least here, as a god of music and song, and that animal sacrifice, which is to say proper religious offerings, plays as important a role in the enclosure's total iconography as does the human victimization which is prominent in the Danaid myth. As for the Danaid statuary, whatever Augustus may have meant the viewer to experience as he entered the colonnade, the literary evidence sees this critical event in their myth represented by the statuary in unrelievedly bleak moral terms. The criminal vendetta they are carrying out, even at the command of a father, leaves them impious, while the father himself is behaving in a way more bestial than human, more uncivilized than enlightened.

Augustus may have meant the viewer to see the Danaids in positive terms: The Romans were defeating a foreign enemy, Augustus and his supporters pursuing a necessary civil war in order to achieve a moment of future revenge (whether it be against his father's murderers or against Antony and his consort or both) that from its horror would preclude further war and continued need for vengeance. If so, the ethical consensus of his poets is at odds with his intentions. If he means us to imagine what his poets saw, then he is indicting himself and his public image. We lack the visual evidence, which other aspects of the Danaid myth could have equally well exhibited, of the famous *clementia* of which he boasts in the *Res Gestae* and which, along with *virtus, iustitia* and *pietas*, was engraved on his famous *clupeus aureus*. This was awarded him by the senate and people and set up in the Curia Iulia probably in 27 B.C.E. and therefore nearly contemporaneous with the opening of the portico.³²

Horace's ode was published in 23 and the *Aeneid* issued after Virgil's death in 19, so that their implicit criticism of what the Danaid monument said, and did not say, came soon after the opening of the portico. But there is one aspect which Virgil's ekphrasis and the Danaid statuary unquestionably share and which the poet's genius may want us deliberately to contemplate. The brevity of Virgil's line and a half, in which our mind's eye is allowed to contemplate forty-nine slaughtered youths and an equal number of bloodied marriage chambers, is parallel to what must have been the shocking briskness with which a viewer experienced the impact of the portico for the first time. This effect exemplifies what I suggested before was the goal of the ideal ekphrasis, namely to stop time. The direct linkage

³² RG 3. 1-2 for the boast; 34. 2 for the shield.

in this instance between verbal description and tangible artifact underscores the point and further cements the connection between poem and monument.

If the description itself nearly succeeds in achieving atemporality, the baldric and its message, as utilized by Virgil, take advantage of another means by which ekphrasis aims at suspending time, namely repetition, which claims that any given moment in art or life, by reflecting another moment, prevents those acts of differentiation which time's progression causes. I would like to follow out this notion of repetition from two angles, one particular, the other more general. The first looks to moments where the words of the ekphrasis themselves look backward into the text. Several examples, such as certain details in Dido's preparations for the burning of her pyre³³ or our first look at the wounds of war in Latium, could be adduced where Virgil uses language similar to that which forms the ekphrasis. In the space of two lines, as the battle commences, we hear of those who have been slaughtered (*caesos*) and in particular of the "features of befouled Galaesus" (*foedati . . . ora Galaesi*), where the primary sense of *foedati*, disfigured by blood, is supplemented by the secondary meaning of "treat disgracefully." Galaesus, known for his sense of justice, had been killed while interposing himself between the initial warring factions in the search for peace.³⁴

I would like to quote one instance of parallelism in somewhat greater detail. It occurs in Aeneas's presentation to Dido of Troy's fall. He advertises his presence as onlooker at the height of the horror in Priam's palace (2. 499–503):

vidi ipse furentem
 caede Neoptoleum geminosque in limine Atridas, 500
 vidi Hecubam centumque nurus Priamumque per aras
 sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacraverat ignis.
 quinquaginta illi thalami, spes tanta nepotum, . . .

I myself saw Neoptolemus raging in slaughter and the twin sons of Atreus on the threshold. I saw Hecuba and the hundred (daughters and) daughters-in-law and Priam amid the altars, befouling with blood the fires he had himself consecrated. Fifty were the wedding chambers, so great the hope of descendants, . . .

We see through Aeneas's eye the murdering son of Achilles (*caede*) and his soon-to-be victim at the spot where he had been priest. (Once more *foedo* both denotes and connotes, with the stain of blood adumbrating a deeper defilement through perversion of sacrifice.) Then there are the marriage chambers (*thalami*) whose number gives an explicit reason to connect this passage with the tale of the slaughtered husbands of the Danaids. If *clementia* is an option in the Danaid myth, it does not figure in Virgil's

³³ *Aen.* 4. 495–97, on which see Spence (above, note 2) 18.

³⁴ *Aen.* 7. 574–75, 535–36. We note the connection of *foedo* with incipient civil war.

ekphrasis any more than in his portrayal of the end of Priam, of his family and of Troy.

The chief difference between the demise of Troy's royal house and the description on the baldric only serves to underscore their similarity. The one sets forth a series of simultaneous, instantaneous, indiscriminated events. The other leaves us to recollect a history of sadness as the children of Priam are either brutally killed or exiled while Troy comes to an end. But, of course, we do watch Priam closely, the second human sacrifice in the *Aeneid's* chronological narrative, offering pitiful resistance as he is killed at his altars, slipping in the blood of his son Polites.³⁵ Before the death-blow the aged king shouts to his youthful killer "you have befouled the features of a father with death" (*patrios foedasti funere vultus* 2. 539). Priam has been made to see the death of his son, but the reader thinks once again of the sons of Aegyptus, bloodied wedding-chambers and treacherous, unsparing killings.

I quote this episode at length because it helps return our thoughts to the final books and to a different form of repetition toward which the ekphrasis points. The "history" of the *balteus* takes us from Pallas, Turnus and Aeneas in Book 10 to the same trio at the epic's end, with Pallas vicariously present in the dramatic reappearance of the baldric and in Aeneas's final words.³⁶ But Aeneas is playing many roles at the poem's conclusion, as both the plot lines and Virgil's allusions make clear. As such he is repeating a series of past events that we know from within and without the epic. He is reincarnating Achilles killing Hector in the guise of Turnus, but Turnus is also an image of Priam before Achilles save that the conquering hero now shows no mercy to his petitioner. More germane still, as we continue to draw out the Hector-Priam parallel, he is also Pyrrhus-Neoptolemus, killing now both father and son, first Polites, then Priam himself. Virgil's Priam, at the moment before his death, can remind Pyrrhus that (Homer's) Achilles "blushed before the rights and faith of a suppliant" (*iura fidemque / supplicis erubuit* 2. 541-42). During the epic's last scene Aeneas grants his *supplex* Turnus no quarter (12. 930).

The ending looks also to the reiteration of a nearer pattern of violence on Aeneas's part. Virgil, we recall, puts into Aeneas's mouth the verb *immolo* to describe how he, and Pallas vicariously, kill their victim (12. 949). He is to be a form of human sacrifice, body for body, blood for blood. Both the verb, and the subsequent action it describes, are reiterated from Book 10, where the narrator twice has recourse to *immolo* in describing the rampage Aeneas embarks upon after learning of Pallas's death. We find it

³⁵ Virgil uses *ara* or *altaria* five further times after 501 as the passage unfolds (513, 514, 515, 523, 550). The first human victim is Laocoön, who dies in the stead of the false sacrifice, Sinon.

³⁶ In one particularity here Virgil may also be following Homer. We are twice reminded during Achilles's killing of Hector that the latter is wearing Patroclus's armor, once by the narrator (*Il.* 22. 323) and once by Achilles (331).

first at 519 in connection with the eight human victims whose blood he will pour on Pallas's pyre. It recurs shortly later in the account of the death of the duly-named priest Haemonides, who is already dressed to suit his double role as sacrificer-sacrifice (10. 541).

These two killings, and the one which intervenes, have something in common which will help us further understand the poem's ending and the continued power of the Danaid ekphrasis throughout the last three books. Haemonides is entitled *Phoebi Triviaeque sacerdos* (10. 537). The only other figure in the epic so characterized is the Sibyl, likewise priest of Apollo and Diana (6. 35). Virgil has also carefully reminded us of Aeneas and the Sibyl as the hero prepares to kill Magus, his preceding victim, who is shown first escaping Aeneas's spear (10. 523-25):

et genua amplectens effatur talia supplex:
 "per patrios manis et spes surgentis Iuli
 te precor, hanc animam serves gnatoque patrique."

and embracing his knees, a suppliant, he speaks thus: "Through the spirit of your father and the hope of growing Iulus I pray you, may you preserve this life for a father and a son."

The language is deliberately parallel to that which Virgil allots to Aeneas in Book 6 as he turns to the Sibyl for aid. She has already specified his future posture as *supplex* as he goes searching for aid in Italy (6. 91). It then becomes his turn to so style himself (6. 115-17):

quin, ut te supplex peterem et tua limina adirem,
 idem orans mandata dabat. gnatique patrisque,
 alma, precor, miserere.

Indeed [Anchises] himself in prayer gave me orders that as a suppliant I seek you out and approach your threshold. Kindly one, I pray you, take pity on both father and son.

The reversals in fortune as well as in tone that have occurred between these two episodes, and which the parallels highlight, are astonishing. In his rage at Pallas's death Aeneas not only seizes eight human victims for gruesome sacrifice, he symbolically kills both the Sibyl, who receives and abets him as a suppliant, and himself in this very posture, praying for guidance to visit his father. He thus in Book 10 twice over eliminates access to Anchises and his ennobling morality and brings to a violent, abrupt end a posture which had distinguished him until the arrival of his omnipotent weaponry in Book 8. Before that he had been helpless in the face of Juno's storm and at the mercy of Dido. He had had to appeal to the Sibyl, to Latinus and to Evander for aid. But with the advent of Vulcan's arms and especially with the killing of Pallas all is changed. From the first he gains power over his destiny. At the second all thought of what it means

to suffer the role of suppliant or to offer *clementia* in return seems to disappear and remain absent even to the epic's end.

We have seen how the language of the baldric connects Books 2 and 12, as Aeneas's final conduct forces the reader to circle back to Book 2 and to the earliest chronological events of the epic. Aeneas's Danaidic behavior at the end raises another topic which in turn serves to enforce further the notion of repetition and to complete a grander circle, namely the violence of women, which permeates the epic and its connection, finally, with Aeneas himself. For when Aeneas, after he has seen the baldric, has the memory of his *saevus dolor* rearoused and becomes "set aflame by furies and terrible in his wrath" (*furiis accensus et ira / terribilis* 12. 946-47), his conduct finds analogy not with model male figures such as his father with his ethical prescription combining force and leniency. Rather someone *furiis accensus* is parallel to Amata and her mothers, made *furiis accensas* by Juno and her minion Fury, Allecto (7. 392), to Dido, in her own words *furiis incensa* (4. 376) and above all to Juno herself at the epic's opening, *accensa* by a very similar combination of *irae* and *saevi dolores* to that by which Aeneas is possessed at the poem's conclusion.³⁷

Therefore both in theory and in practice, in the topos of ekphrasis and in the tale it tells, the description of the baldric is in certain key senses a synecdoche for the poem as a whole. In the compressed simultaneity with which it feigns the stoppage of time, it echoes those larger poetic tools, repetition and circularity, which, as Murray Krieger has recently taught us, also help poetry mimic the stasis of art and which allow the poem itself, from one angle of vision, to assume the semblance of a large continuous ekphrasis. As for the tale itself, we can also see how it represents the poem as a whole.

The *Aeneid* has two distinct sides, which it is Virgil's genius to have melded together. There is what we might call the historical narrative from Aeneas and Troy to Virgil's contemporary Rome. It couches in idealizing, almost impersonal terms a teleology which leads with apparent inevitability to a golden age of glorious *imperium* under Augustus, with *impius Furor* at last suppressed. And in the story line of the poem there implicitly lies ahead the marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia with all its potential for wide-ranging reconciliations. In counterpoint to this end-directed orientation is what we might call the poem's lyric or tragic dimension. By contrast to the perfectibility which linearity suggests, it postulates a wholeness based on negative intensity. Art freezes time at a moment when victims become victimizers who do not spare. It monumentalizes vengeance and suggests that, when its narrative fully turns to the business of war and pious heroes suffer the empowerment of force, epic, at least in Virgil's hands, takes on the semblance of concentrated tragic action where *eros* and *eris* merge to

³⁷ 1. 25-29. Cf. also *saeva* and *ira* (4) and *dolens* (9).

tragic stage.³⁸ Her fury is paradigmatic for repeated exemplifications, indeed reenactments, of victimizations by the Furies, who hold the simile in their embrace. Virgil would see no escaping from them. Orestes goes mad at the end of the *Choephoroi*, pursued by Furies who would avenge his mother. At the beginning of the *Eumenides* he is a suppliant while the play itself, we recall, shows the Furies themselves evolve from vengeful to benign spirits.³⁹ No such progression happens in the life of Dido, *furiis incensa*, and preparing for suicide.

The same holds true at the conclusion of the epic. No third drama brings resolution or any larger sense of concord. No calming Eumenides arrive to take control of Aeneas and the poem. There is no epiphany of Aphrodite, preaching the power of *eros*, applauding the *clementia* of Hypermestra and turning her sisters toward appreciation of marriage.⁴⁰ (Turnus does cede Lavinia to Aeneas as wife in virtually the last words he speaks, but his offer has no final effect.) The only appearance—*apparuit* is Virgil's graphic word—is that of the baldric, which brings with it another uncompleted, uncompletable tragic plot, stopped yet again, like the poem itself, at a moment of violent, unforgiving action. In this respect, too, poem and ekphrasis share common ground. Ekphrasis breaks the forward thrust of epic and reminds us that, in Virgil's brilliant hands, the plot of Rome has a repetitively tragic dimension. It warns that, even as we advance idealistically toward Augustus's putative golden age, human nature doesn't change.⁴¹

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³⁸ Virgil could have chosen a figure representing female fury, Agave, for instance, to serve as analogy for Dido, but he did not. Dido, even in her wildness, is deliberately compared to a male figure as if the masculine emblemization of political order, which Virgil regularly adopts, were still hers, but now hopelessly transformed by emotion.

³⁹ It is possible that Virgil was also thinking of the ugly criminality of the figure of Orestes as conceived by Euripides, but the presence of the Furies makes Aeschylus the paramount model for Virgil.

⁴⁰ Another possible allusion to tragedy may lie in the figure of Io, suffering metamorphosis into a cow, as emblem on the shield of Turnus (7. 789–92). We know that Accius wrote a tragedy devoted to her (*SRF* I, pp. 252–53 Klotz). It is a reasonable assumption that the metamorphosis came early in the dramatization, before any acts of forgiveness, return to human shape or apotheosis took place.

⁴¹ The speech that Aeschylus gives to Aphrodite has something in common with many of the utterances of Athena at the end of *Eumenides* (cf., e.g., 903–08), proclaiming the bounteousness of nature. We may likewise be meant to think of the alteration of Furies into Eumenides when we contemplate Juno's apparent renunciation of anger in her speech to Jupiter at 12. 808–28. But it is *furiae*, not Eumenides, who hold Aeneas in their grip at the poem's end.