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Loca luminis haurit: Ovid's Hecuba Beyond Virgilian Tradition

At *Metamorphoses* 13.408-575, Ovid inserts the account of the destruction of Troy, Hecuba's bereavement of children and Polymestor's loss of sight (Otis, Due, Néraudau). The present study examines Hecuba's portrayal and the emphasis placed on empty space, as well as the heroine's final transformation in the epic narrative. I discuss how Ovid carefully structures the scene around the problematics of anger (*ira*) and its punitive results, as by means of allusions Hecuba reenacts the end of the *Aeneid*. Hecuba's gradual transformation from human into dog is constructed by the poet as an introduction to his *Little Aeneid*. As the heroine gives in to the power of blind anger and digs out Polymestor's eyes, a reminiscence and foreshadowing of the end of the Aeneadic part of the poem, Ovid metapoetically alludes to his own manipulation of tradition by mining the *Aeneid*, even as he changes it.

Ovid frames the scene with images of emptiness, as the reader is invited to visualize the vacant tombs of Hector and Hecuba. The poet emphasizes Hecuba's role as mother: *unius hausit / inque sinu cineres secum tulit Hectoris haustos* (425-26). The emptying of Hector's tomb is reenacted at the end of the Thracian episode when Hecuba performs the abominable act of Polymestor's blinding (*loca luminis haurit*, 564). Just as Hecuba removes Hector's remains and thus leaves a cenotaph behind, nothing has been left in Polymestor's empty eye-sockets (*neque enim superest*, 564). Furthermore, the astonishingly frequent use of the verb *haurio* (six occurrences in *Metamorphoses* 13) points to a metapoetic aspect: Ovid comments on his own stance within the literary tradition. By reworking well-known episodes of *Aeneid* 3 and by alluding to the last lines of *Aeneid* 12 (*oculis postquam saevi monimenta doloris/ exuviasque hausit*, 945-46), Ovid creates his own reading of Virgil's epic.

Ovid's retelling of the myth underscores the problematics of *ira*, not only in the context of Hecuba's revenge but also in the framework of the *Little Aeneid*, in which Aeneas is chiefly conspicuous by his absence. Aeneas' discovery of Polydorus' body is now ascribed to Hecuba (533-37), while the suppression of the details of Turnus' death in *Metamorphoses* 14 (*Turnusque cadit*, 573) is reorganized and recentered around Polymestor's blinding, an act of avenge for Polydorus' demise. By reconfiguring the end of the *Aeneid*, Ovid stresses Hecuba's vulnerability after having been exposed to a magnified *ira* (*ira*: 544, 549, 559, 562; *poenae in imagine tota est*, 546), reminiscent of Aeneas' in *Aeneid* 12 (*furiis accensus et ira*, 12.946; *poenam sumit*, 12.949). Furthermore, Ovid ponders over the issue of clear vision and blinding. By focusing on a blinded vision of the Trojans' mission, the poet emphasizes throughout the *Little Aeneid* the idea that the doomed heroes will repeatedly reproduce the fall of Troy. After all, the destruction of Ilion is counterbalanced by the obliteration of Ardea in *Metamorphoses* 14 (573-80). Thus, by prefacing Ovid's most daring account of the Trojans *en route* to Rome, the Hecuba episode constitutes an integral piece for the framework of the *Metamorphoses*.