As paradigmatic emblems of fantasy and imagination, creative freedom and poetic license, hybrid monsters in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* preside over the author’s playful engagement with traditional aesthetic, moral, and societal values, and gendered ideals. This article aims at a subversive reading of one monstrous creature in the final pentad of Ovid’s epic: Scylla (*Met*. 13.730-14.74). As a monster, Scylla incorporates several misogynistic stereotypes (“doggishness”, *puella dura*, self-laceration, *vagina dentata*), but she eventually escapes the objectifying male gaze and finds rest in a stable, permanent shape that is no longer the feminine-gendered battlefield for male heroism. Breaking away from the conventional epic plot structure “male hero wins over feminized beasts and/or beautiful girls”, Ovid considers the Roman national hero Aeneas with but a minimum of attention, while nymphs and women take center stage: Scylla’s transformation from a girl into a monster and, finally, into a geological rock formation, is intertwined with tales about female solidarity and intimacy and about women’s sexual desire, rage, and revenge. While Scylla’s canine bloodlust and Circe’s vengeful magic certainly reproduce typically patriarchal anxieties projected onto women, they are also traces of unruly, recalcitrant femininity within the canonical, male-dominated world of heroic epic.

**Fact or Fiction: Ovid’s Feminized Monsters and the Roman Canon**

As the *Metamorphoses* approach the onset of Roman history, Ovid, the *enfant terrible* of Augustan literature, enjoys privileging a monster, Scylla, over a legendary hero who happens to be considered very important in Rome: Aeneas. In his “little *Aeneid*”, as the passage in focus is commonly referred to, Ovid refuses to reprise what his grand predecessors have already told, but he demonstrates his predilection for poetic novelty. Aeneas is remarkably absent for over 300 lines although his voyage from Troy to Italy (*Aen*. 3-6) provides the framework for Ovid’s series of metamorphic entanglements, “grotesque love affairs and pathetic heroines” (Lowe 2011: 263). The marvellous, amorous, and monstrous elements that do exist in Virgil, yet in a “fragmented, scattered, unresolved” form, become Ovid’s raw material:

1 Musgrove suggests that Ovid, by leaving Aeneas aside, emphasizes the detachment from the world that also characterizes the Virgilian hero (1998b: 102).

2 Ellsworth (1986: 27) cites several judgments from the 1960s and 1970s that criticize Ovid’s insertion of frivolous elements into the sublime *Aeneid*-plot, and shows subsequently that Ovid’s allusions and creative reinterpretations, far from being indecent, represent a clever reworking of the standard motifs of the post-Trojan war period.
“Rather than construct himself as an epigonal reader of the *Aeneid*, Ovid is constructing Virgil as a hesitant precursor of the *Metamorphoses*. There is a *Metamorphoses* latent in the *Aeneid*, Ovid’s treatment tells us: in Circe and in the biform Scylla…” (Hinds 1998: 106). Ovid exchanges well-known episodes for variants taken from other authors, traditions, and genres (Myers 1994: 99-102; Fantham 2004: 128-130). The hybrid monster Scylla is embedded in an extensive etiological digression with multiple internal narrators, self-referential vignettes, and etiological explanations. The episode’s structure has been compared to a set of nested “Chinese” boxes (Tissol 1997: 113; Hopman 2012: 241) and to the “brackets of an algebraic formula” (Griffin 1983: 191): a geographical remark about the Trojan fleet passing Sicily with its notorious local hazards, the narrow strait between Scylla and Charybdis (13.728-731), introduces Scylla’s story which in turn contains two inset tales and various reported speeches.

A skeptical insertion à la “if that’s not a lie” (13.733-734: *si non omnia uates / ficta reliquerunt*) pays tribute to poetic authorities on the subject matter while simultaneously questioning their reliability in a playful manner. Ovid “concedes that some or even a great deal of poetry is unquestionably *ficta*, while leaving open the possibility that at least some may not be” (Nagle 1988: 90). Yet this feigned “pretense of skepticism” (Galinsky 1975: 176) is not just a typically Ovidian sacrilegious introduction of “inappropriate wit into our memory of Vergil” (Tissol 1997: 112), but a reference to Scylla’s topical status as an emblem of fictionality and creative imagination in Augustan poetry. “[B]y the time of the *Metamorphoses* she had become a touchstone for poetic fictiveness” (Hardie 2009: 63). Ovid himself contributed decisively to the consolidation of this semantic process: in his elegiac complaints about the “naïve *credulitas* of his readers who believe in the literal truth of what he has written about his *puella*” (2009: 61), Scylla is the first example of fantastic creations which only poets can create (*Amores* 3.12.21-22). By presenting various hybrid monsters “comme fabriqués par les poètes” (Jouteur 2009: 47), the elegy is both a satire on gullibility and a case for poetic license (*Am. 3.12.41: fecunda licentia uatum*). In *Trist. 4.7.11-20*, Ovid uses the unbelievability of monsters in a rhetorical adynaton that “denotes the impossibility of an action or fact by comparing it to a natural absurdity” (Hopman 2012: 225): he would sooner believe in Medusa, Scylla (4.7.14), or other composite creatures than that his addressee had abandoned him. Hence, the hybrids “exemplify the very idea of fiction” (2012: 226). In the *Metamorphoses*, the issue of believability (*credulitas*), is also staged within the metamorphic world itself: several text-internal characters reflect upon the probability of supernatural events (Hardie 2009: 62-63).

The monster Scylla had become “maidenized” (Lowe 2015: 70-72) in Hellenistic and Augustan poetry: the archaic Scylla was scarcely feminine, but either an abstract menace or a sea-monster with six heads, dogs’ *protomai*, and a fish- or snake-tail. Homer does not give any explanations for Scylla’s hostility towards men (Tissol 1997: 209). Rationalizing interpretations equate Scylla to a dangerous cliff that poetic imagination took for a petrified monster (Lowe 2015: 78-80). Etymologically, Scylla is connected to *σκύλαξ*, the Greek word for puppy, and to the verbs *σκυλέω*/*σκύλαι* and *σκύλλω*, all signifying acts of rapacious spoliation (Michalopoulos 2001: 157-158). Scylla comprises symbolically the concepts sea, dog, and femininity – three seemingly calm, docile, and amicable forces which can unpredictably turn into doom and peril for men (Hopman 2012: 8-14). Successively understood as an

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4 Lowe points out that marine and canine femininity were standardized metaphors for “feminine duplicity” already by the 6th century BC: Semonides, in his misogynist iamb on unpleasant stereotypes of women, mentions both the dog-woman and the sea-woman as undesirable, aggressive females (2015: 76).
embodiment of misogynist cultural fantasies, Scylla has been associated with an immoderately voracious, oversexualized, untamed *femme fatale*. Heraclitus refers to Scylla as “polymorphous shamelessness” (*Alleg. Hom.* 70.11) and stresses her “rapacity, recklessness, and greediness” (Hopman 2012: 186). Roman authors are first to attach the dogs’ body parts explicitly to her pelvic and inguinal area while preserving her erotically alluring face and torso. With a multi-jawed canine crotch, she becomes a personified *vagina dentata*, the cross-cultural and cross-epochal concept of a female genital equipped with sharp teeth that represents male anxieties about castration and deprivation of patriarchal power through female sexuality (2012: 131-141; Lowe 2015: 74-75; Miller 2012: 316-319 and 326-328).

**Reflections in the Beauty Salon**

Yet Ovid portrays Scylla in a sympathetic way that might have been inspired by the iambic poet Aeschrion of Samos and the poetess Hedyle of Attica who composed an elegiac poem *Scylla* in the 3rd century BC of which only one fragment remains (Lowe 2011: 261-263). Both these Greek sources for Scylla the nymph reflect the “Hellenistic taste for humanizing and sentimentalizing fearsome monsters” (2011: 263) that Ovid must have been fond of. While the heroic combat motif is central to Homer’s and Virgil’s accounts, Ovid departs from the epic pattern “in favor of a maiden story” (Hopman 2012: 234). He is the first to make Scylla a vulnerable “damsel in distress” (Lowe 2015: 81) by combining extreme emotional states and feminine beauty. Her actions become understandable and evoke “a glimmer of fellow-feeling with [one] of the worst monsters of traditional mythology” (Tissot 1997: 209; cf. Jouteur 2009: 51). Before she acquired her monstrous form – her “uncanny waist girt with ravening dogs” (*Met.* 13.732), she was a coy and beautiful girl (733-734) at home in a world of female experience, care, and solidarity: annoyed by unwanted suitors (735), Scylla seeks refuge with her friends, the sea-nymphs; while combing each other’s hair, the girls talk about their experiences with men (737). The thematic shift from Aeneas’ heroic adventures to the gossiping girlfriends seems incoherent only *prima facie*: in fact, Ovid seizes the opportunity to elaborate on his favorite theme from the *Aeneid* – the disruptive forces of unrequited love and rejected advances, the core concern of Virgil’s Dido-books (*Aen.* 1 and 4). Carving out what has been labelled a “thematic affinity” (Galinsky 1975: 221), Ovid uses the episode “to anticipate and reflect the situation of Aeneas” (Ellsworth 1986: 31). In addition, the ensuing “trio of love-triangles”\(^5\) conjures not only the Virgilian triangle between Aeneas-Lavinia-Turnus (Nagle 1988: 93), but also two iconic episodes from Homer’s *Odyssey* – the intertextual model of Virgil’s *Aen.* 1-6 (Nagle 1988: 83).\(^6\) Relics of a Homeric past, the one-eyed giant Polyphemus (*Od.* 9) and the sorceress Circe (*Od.* 10) haunt Ovid’s “*Aeneid*” as they interfere in the Ovidian nymphs’ (love) lives and provide a contextual background for Scylla’s monstrous identity.

\(^5\) Such is the title of B. R. Nagle’s article on the intertwining love stories in *Met.* 13 and 14 (Galatea-Acis-Polyphemus; Glaucus-Scylla-Circe; and Circe-Picus-Canens). Underlying these inradiegetic triangles, Nagle sees a metaliterary triangle pattern: Ovid’s trio of erotic triangles in *Met.* 13 and 14 substitutes for *Od.* and *Aen.*. In the competition for readers’ attention and approbation, Ovid thus positions his epic besides the already canonized giants (1988: 95). The placement of the three love-triangles at the point of arrival in Italy and the narrative shift from Greek to Roman materials is therefore very appropriately chosen: as the latest epicist who treats Polyphemus, Circe, and Scylla, Ovid makes a self-conscious statement about the emulatory nature of Roman poetry confronting the Greek tradition (96).

\(^6\) J. D. Ellsworth (1986; 1988) notes that Ovid also takes up elements directly from Homer’s *Odyssey*, not only from Virgil’s adaptation in his Odysscean books (*Aen.* 1-6), and that “Ovid’s *Odyssey*” would be an equally suitable label for *Met.* 13.623-14.608.
During an “intimate scene of a women’s toilette” (Tissol 1997: 113), Galatea, distressed and close to tears, envies Scylla for her human suitors (Met. 13.740-745) because she has been vexed by a monstrous lover, the hideous Cyclops Polyphemus who jealously killed her boyfriend Acis (750-896). The inset tale is “the story of an unsightly giant, terrifying and ugly but not nearly as abject as Ovid’s female monsters” (Pietropaolo 2018: 194). Whereas Galatea’s personal involvement renders her a biased party rather than a neutral narrator (Farrell 1992: 266), she demonstrates advanced narrative skills (Pietropaolo 2018: 198) in her creative adaptation of the “comic tradition of Cyclopean representation” that often ridicules a giant’s disharmonious affection for a slender nymph (Tissol 1990: 49). The gap between nymph and Cyclops already being large, the background story about Acis’ death pushes the inherent drop in height from bathos to pathos, from romance to violence, to extreme levels (Griffin 1983: 193-195). Grotesque aesthetics, with their predilection for monstrosity, giantism, “the violation of natural boundaries and the disruption of the logic of proportions” (Pietropaolo 2018: 194) are at work in Galatea’s tale: she visualizes Polyphemus in the least empathetic way and relentlessly mocks his clumsy wooing attempts until his emotional suffering becomes a “spectacle” for her internal and Ovid’s external audience (Griffin 1983: 195). Although rejecting him with derision, the nymph “lingers on his effort to cross the boundary that separates them, simultaneously admitting him into her world and turning him away from it” (Pietropaolo 2018: 195). In her narration, several poetic traditions communicate with each other in a polyphonic “dialogue of genres”, namely epic, elegy, and bucolic-pastoral poetry (Farrell 1992: 240-241). Polyphemus’ Homeric characteristics (Od. 9) – enormous size, physical strength, menacing appearance, disrespect for the gods, and inclination towards violence – merge with those of Hellenistic accounts about enamored cyclopes (Theocr. Id. 6 and 11; Virg. Ecl. 2 and Geo. 1.404-409). Elegiac lovesickness smites the epic giant in a bucolic setting. The genres, topoi, and allusions, however, “do not retain their discrete, univocal identity, but work in dialogue to produce a generically innovative rendition of the story” (Farrell 1992: 245).

Although placed in a new, amatory context, we recognize the Homeric giant through numerous references which “retell a considerable part of the meeting of Odysseus with the Cyclops” (Ellsworth 1986: 28). In love, Polyphemus seems to forget his Homeric role: he neglects his herds (Met. 13.736; 781) and is surprisingly indifferent towards sailors passing by (769). Moreover, he suddenly cares for his appearance as if he had read Ovid’s eroto-didactic beauty recommendations. By expropriating on his unsuccessful attempts of cultus, consisting of combing his hair with a rake and shaving his beard with a scythe (764-767) while herself participating in a hair-styling session, Galatea brutally mocks his inhuman appearance: she derides him “for performing human actions that are discordant with his enormity and shagginess, and incongruous with the pieces of farming equipment that he uses as personal grooming tools” (Pietropaolo 2018: 199). Addressing him directly (tibi), she conjures his presence in a rhetorically elaborate phantastia that calls her audience’s attention to the “aestheticism of visualization” (198). Nonetheless, Polyphemus is familiar with courteous rhetoric: the love-song he performs outside Galatea’s cave resembles a paraklausithyron (201; Farrell 1992: 247), praising his beloved’s beauty and mourning her rejection. It also displays characteristics of pastoral poetry. Only the hundred reeds of his panpipe (Met. 13.784) remind us that he is still an epic rhapsode, or at least, a rhapsode within a hexametric epic: for bucolic Kleinformen, seven or nine reeds would suffice, whereas his “Wurlitzer-scale” syrinx (Nagle 1988: 80) is closer to the “hundred mouths typically required for high epic” (Barchiesi 2007: 416).” Referring to

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7 Creese (2009) analyzes potential sexual double-entendres of Polyphemus’ enormous panpipe and
Kenney’s labelling of the episode as “hyper-pastoral”, Farrell notes that “most of the pastoral motifs that Ovid employs here undergo a process of auxesis” (1992: 246). Polyphemus’ rhetoric of hyperbole and fixation on size and quantity, abundance and excess, reveal an aspiration to surpass and intensify generic conventions and previous poetic appearances (251-252), while reflecting the pastoral convention of competitive amoebeae before a jury (Barchiesi 2007: 421). His long list of compliments for Galatea and poetic comparisons of her beauty (e. g. splendidior uitro, tenero lascinior baude8, “more sparkling than crystal, more frolicsome than a tender kid”) outnumbers those of Theocritus and Virgil by far and goes beyond good taste. Polyphemus even intensifies Galatea’s name: she is not simply “milk-white”, as her name suggests, but “whiter than the snow-white privet leaves” (Met. 13.789: candidior folio niuei […] ligustri). That the nymph listens to his song while lying in her boyfriend’s arms in a cave adds a cruel note to Galatea’s self-portrait. The melancholy that prevailed in Theocritus’ pastoral love-song is, suitably, exchanged for grotesque amplifications and extreme violence (Jouteur 2001: 309). Theocritus’ Cyclops concluded his song with the philosophical insight that poetry is the φάρμακον (Id. 11.1) for unrequited love. His Ovidian version, by contrast, is far from accepting Galatea’s rejection: he hurls a part of a mountain at Acis when he finds the couple in flagrante. With such an epic killing mode par excellence that recalls his Odyssean behavior towards the Greeks, “his reformed character disintegrates” (Griffin 1983: 195) as if his attempts to become elegiac had failed (Lowe 2015: 220).9 There are hints, however, that he never really knew the rules of elegiac courtship: he prides himself in being an acceptable uir (Met. 13.850) and a dines amator who has more sheep than he can count (13.824) while an elegiac lover is per definition not the husband (uir) and notoriously pauper (Barchiesi 2007: 419; Pietropaolo 2018: 206). His shagginess and size, although attractive to his own judgment (13.839-845) contradict the girl’s beauty ideals: Galatea’s lover is young, beardless, and slim. At the moment he dies, he is changed into a river god10, an epitome of fluidity and changeability that contrasts with Polyphemus’ solidity and mass (Barkan 1986: 80). Polyphemus’ hirsuteness (Met. 13.766; 844-850) conveys a meta-literary comment on the genres and traditions at work in Galatea’s narration, being a metaphor for the “old-fashioned, primitive, unrefined” style which Ovid usually opposes in his poetic program of urbanitas (Barchiesi 2007: 417; cf. Pietropaolo 2018: 200). Galatea repeatedly thematizes the contrast between beauty and repulsiveness that is at the heart of aesthetic discussions on the integration of ugliness into arts: when the Cyclops sees his reflection in the water (Met. 13.840-841), his boastful self-descriptions operate via superlatives and in part hubristic exaggerations. He concedes that his single eye might be considered a blemish but compares it to a giant artistic shield (851-852) or the sun itself (852-853), while his enormous height, although feared by most, renders him more attractive than Jupiter (842-844). The beauty he sees in himself is that of grotesque art: “Ugliness mediated by a well-crafted image does not generate a sense of repulsion but a sense of gratification […] His mistake is that he considers that mirrored reflection as if it were an artistic image inviting him to the appreciation of and reflection on what it represents” (Pietropaolo 2018: 204-205). Visualizing

connects its hundred reeds to the hundred eyes of Argus, put to sleep by Mercury’s song in Met. 1.

8 I am grateful to Stephen Hinds who pointed out to me per litteras that this line corresponds to Horace’s Ode to the Spring of Bandusium (3.13.1: O fons Bandusiae splendidior uitro).
9 When Polyphemus reappears in Met. 14, he is again the rock-hurling giant raging against the Greeks that we know from Od. 9 and Aen. 3 (Lowe 2015: 219-220; Jouteur (2001: 263-271).
10 Ovid does not disclose whether Galatea and Acis continue their relationship after his transformation. They could be an even more ideal match now that he is a river god — she is a sea-nymph — but Galatea seems upset. On Ovid’s ambiguity on this matter, cf. Kenney 2008: 453.
Polyphemus’ self-admiration, Galatea fashions him as a successor of Narcissus who falls prey to an erroneous assessment of real and imaginary. But unlike Narcissus, the Cyclops does know that he sees himself (Met. 13.840: certe ego me noui); rather, his misjudgment is rooted in a philosophical discourse on the relativity of beauty and aestheticism. But the nymphs are subject to misjudgments too: “The reader’s experience of the scene is dominated by dramatic irony, for, unlike Scylla herself, who has no premonition of her future transformation, and Galatea, who does not know that her gentle companion will soon cross the boundary of her natural form to enter that of a grotesque being, Ovid’s readers are familiar with the myth” (Pietropaolo 2018: 196).

If Galatea and Polyphemus are at two ends of the scale, Galatea’s listener Scylla is to become a “piquant blend of the abhorrent and the alluring” (Lowe 2015: 81). The “oxymoronic” (Hopman 2012: 227) juxtaposition of maidenly beauty and monstrous repulsiveness split up between the two characters converges in one body once Scylla undergoes a metamorphosis. After listening to Galatea’s story, Scylla rushes off to a secluded pool, avoiding the more frequented bathing places where she could encounter unwanted suitors (Met. 13.900-901). Followed by an annoying suitor, Glauclus, Scylla now behaves exactly the way Polyphemus had accused Galatea of: she quickly runs away (908-909). Glauclus is now the self-interested narrator who tries to seduce his audience into believing a wondrous tale (935: res similis fictae, sed quid mihi fingere prodest?), just as Ovid himself did at the onset of Scylla’s story when he pretended to question the “validity of poetic tradition” (Nagle 1988: 90). Once more shedding her role, Scylla now becomes the addressee of a male’s wooing speech that Galatea was before. Glauclus recounts his transformation into a sea-god due to the consumption of strange herbs (916-956). His half-way metamorphosis anticipates Scylla’s fate (Hardie 2009: 60; Hopman 2012: 241): half of her body will also be changed to animal limbs through the magical herbs. Although she has just heard about the risks of rejecting suitors, she does not take Galatea’s “cautionary tale” (Pietropaolo 2018: 196) to her heart: like an elegiac puella dura (Jouteur 2009: 54), she rejects Glauclus outright, seeing neither the similarities between herself and Galatea (nymphs sprinting away), nor those between Polyphemus and Glauclus: unwanted suitors with extraordinary bodily features and verbose wooing attempts, both ending with the peroration that their efforts are futile if/since the courted nymph still resists (13.869 and 965).

Pharmaka against the bruised male ego

Glauclus, however, intends to alter the situation through magical help: he asks Circe for a love-potion. The powerful sorceress and “goddess of metamorphosis” now becomes an iconic “unifying figure” between Met. 13 and 14 (Segal 1968: 441). Not only does she dominate the second half of the “little Aeneid” (Otis 1970: 288), but she “enables Roman legend and history to be accommodated to the account of natural causes through metamorphosis, all brought about by the arbitrary exercise of divine power” (Tissol 1997: 214). Her rampant sexuality

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11 Parallels between Narcissus and Polyphemus, including allusive wording in Polyphemus’ speech, are outlined in Pietropaolo 2018: 201-206.
12 Drawing on Barthes’ The Pleasure of the Text (1975), Nagle analyzes the entire episode with the overlapping love-triangles as a sequence of narrative seduction and erotic seduction through narrative (1988: 75-76).
13 Glauclus’ transformation is already mentioned in Met. 7, when Medea – Circe’s niece – roams about in the same area, looking for herbs to help Jason. The narrative pattern of a young man asking for magical help with the result of an unhappy amorous entanglement is reiterated in the love-triangle Scylla-Glauclus-Circe in Book 13. On parallels between Medea and Circe in Ovid, see Segal 2002: 19-20.
renders her even more paradigmatic for the Metamorphoses’ pairing of violence and eroticism as narrative drives. As a “highly eroticized figure, susceptible to love at first sight” (Segal 2002: 22), she immediately falls in love with Glauclus herself (14.25-27) and tries to persuade him into accepting her instead of Scylla. To that end, she utilizes the stereotype of the unsuccessful lover who loves what flees from him, but unlike Polyphemus or the standard poeta amator, she expresses the pointlessness of the constellation: “Much better would you follow one whose strong desire and prayer was even as your own, whose heart burned with an equal flame” (28-29). From the “unsuccessful suitor”, Glauclus now turns into the “unresponsive beloved” (Nagle 1988: 82), while Scylla, albeit against her will and in her complete ignorance, becomes Circe’s erotic rival in the new love-triangle (Papaioannou 2005: 399), thus re-enacting the role of Acis from Galatea’s story: she, too, is to be the victim of a passionate brute’s indirect revenge. Yet Glauclus and Circe also re-enact the unhappy love story of Aeneas and Dido: Glauclus’ journey from Greece over Messina to Aeaea (14.1-9) mirrors Aeneas’ route (Tissol 1997: 210), and his marvellous aquatic deification “anticipates the apotheosis of Aeneas” (Ellsworth 1986: 31). Both Glauclus and Aeneas are “strangers come by sea asking the ruler of the place, a woman, for help”, they ultimately reject and leave her, whereas she “turns her hostility, in one case, against another women, in the other, against herself” (1986: 30). Unwilling and unable to afflict any magic on Glauclus, a fellow deity (14.40-41), Circe reacts to his rejection by preparing a trap for Scylla. Ovid’s sorceress, like her Odyssean model, embodies “the malignant and wildly destructive side of female passion” (Segal 1968: 439). Her “inner irrationality finds outward form in magic, which, after all, is the arbitrary, topsy-turvey reversal of nature’s processes for private aims” (1968: 439). Circe’s magic enables her to directly translate her jealousy into action (2002: 23). As a site for her act of revenge, she chooses Scylla’s favorite maritime locus amoenus (14.52). With noxious herbs, spells, and rituals, she poisons violates the peaceful landscape (Hopman 2012: 243).15 Her witchcraft, “working as it does through the body’s appetites” (Segal 2002: 1), takes effect when Scylla is about to cool her body. As with Narcissus in Met. 3, the “surface of a body of water is the plane of self-division” (Hardie 2009: 65). When Scylla immerses herself in the calm water, the lower part of her body is transformed into a horrible canine monster:

This pool, before the maiden’s coming, the goddess befoils and contaminates with poisons potent in generating deformity. Hereupon she sprinkles liquors brewed from noxious roots, and a charm, dark with its maze of uncanny words, thrice nine times she murmurs over with lips well skilled in magic. Then Scylla comes and wades waist-deep into the water; when all at once she sees her loins disfigured with barking monster-shapes. And at the first, not believing that these are parts of her own body, she flees in fear and tries to drive away the boisterous, barking things. But what she flees she takes along with her; and, feeling for her thighs, her legs, her feet, she finds in place of these

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14 Nagle lists parallels in wording and behavior between Scylla and Acis (1988: 83, footnote 11). For Hopman, however, Scylla and Acis contrast each other as Acis’ story ends positively for him, bringing him closer to his true self, while Scylla’s metamorphosis alienates her from her body (2012: 250). Hopman links this complementarity to an asymmetry between genders (women being more vulnerable) that is thematized in this episode.

15 Landscape in Ovid’s Met. often mirrors the violence that happens to women being raped (Hinds 2002: 130-136).
only gaping dogs’ heads, such as a Cerberus might have. She stands on ravening dogs, and her docked loins and her womb are enclosed in a circle of beastly forms (14.55-67).

In the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, Circe’s magic directly threatens masculine authority. But Ovid’s Circe is first and foremost concerned with the “sexual degradation of her rival” (Segal 2002: 23) which subsequently leads to Scylla being a challenge for patriarchal heroism. In modelling the girl into a dangerous *vagina dentata*, Circe attains her epic role indirectly – she turns the nymph into an instrument for her anger over amorous rejection and sexual frustration. The transformation is erotically motivated (Jouteur 2009: 54) and sexual in nature: what Circe seeks to destroy is essentially Scylla’s sex appeal whose “sexual parts become particularly ugly and fearful” (Segal 2002: 23). Her genitals and uterus being mutilated and exposed (Met. 14.67), the sexually reluctant nymph suddenly faces a horrifically contorted defloration: “the body parts that precisely define her virginity are conflated with their opposite, the heads of raging and promiscuous dogs” (Hopman 2012: 231). A product of the witch’s magic, the new Scylla has taken on some of Circe’s characteristics (Hopman 2012: 243). Since Scylla is now condemned to an “excessive sexuality” (Hardie 2009: 65) similar to Circe’s, the initial description appears in a new light: the phrase “in a distant time, she was a virgin” (Met. 13.734) refers “not just to her previous physical shape, but also to her formerly intact virginity, now compromised by descent into a monstrous and metamorphic sexuality” (Hardie 2009: 65). The readers gaze at Scylla’s “corps en devenir” (Jouteur 2009: 53) from top to bottom, almost voyeuristically, at the very same time as she herself scrutinizes her thighs, legs, and feet (Met. 14.64). Suddenly being both, a chaste virgin and a rabid monster, Scylla’s body becomes the surface onto which the male gaze inscribes the virgin/whore dichotomy: she combines the two patriarchal concepts of femininity – maidenly virtue and excessive lust (cf. Hardie 2009: 66). Moreover, she now embodies the two contradictory roles in one body that have previously been split between herself, the fleeing nymph, and Glaucus, the lover chasing her (Met. 14.62-63). This “contagious transfer” (Hopman 2012: 242) of words, behavior, experience, or even shape from rapist to maiden is a form of appropriating interpenetration that can be compared to other unrequited sexual advances in the *Met.* in which the persecutor succeeds in gaining influence and power, albeit not sexually in the strict sense, over an object of desire. Through Glaucus’ intervention, Scylla’s body is transformed through herbs, just as his waist was before. Scylla’s new canine lower body is a crude inversion of her previous rejection of sexuality: “Erotic *fastidium* is punished by a far more visceral form of disgust, *fastidium*” (Hardie 2009: 64).

As a result, Scylla experiences alienation from her own body: she “loses familiarity with her body as it is transformed, and tries to flee, initially in disbelief, from the monstrous appendages that are now part of herself” (Tissol 1997: 60). Ovid’s humorous stance on the fictionality of the subject and Glaucus’ autobiographic narration already anticipated someone in- or outside the narrative who would doubt the metamorphoses’ realism. Now we see that the incredulous skepticism about supernatural transformations has been “transferred from the poet’s readers to the subject of metamorphosis herself” (Hardie 2009: 62). Scylla both questions and abhors her transformation: in conformity with the stereotypical patriarchal anxiety over female sexuality, she experiences “repulsion from her own voracious sexuality” (2009: 66) which she cannot deny and hide, not even from herself, anymore. The dogs’ first

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16 Interestingly, archaic depictions of Scylla show her with a fish tail as well. In Ovid’s *Met.*, this hybridized body part is externalized and attributed to her suitor instead.
victim is Scylla herself: the new animal part is separate from and even hostile towards the remaining human part. Self-laceration, hence, precedes her notorious aggression against others, which is why Hardie speaks of a self-division that “Scylla shares with the personification of Invidia [Envy] in book two, who tortures herself at the same time as she attacks others” – a fitting comparand as “the dog is a standard symbol of invidia” (70). Horace, for instance, links envy and “doggishness” in the portray of the “canine” witch Canidia in his *Epod.* 5 (Oliensis 1991: 117-118). While Envy is infamously *edax* and therefore jealously consuming herself, Scylla is infamously *rapax* and *uorax*: her epic role is that of an ever-hungry man-eater. Ovid’s Scylla, however, combines both nightmarish thoughts: first, her canine half assaults her human half; only then she takes on the anthropophagous tendencies she had in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*.

The rest of the story is told quickly: Scylla stays where she is and seizes the first opportunity to take revenge: “to vent her hate on Circe, she robbed Ulysses of his companions” (*Met.* 14.70-71). Again, a main concern of Homer’s *Od.* 12 – Odysseus’ encounter with Scylla – is reinterpreted as a personal act of revenge between women. Scylla has obviously learned from Circe the art of indirect punishment: to hurt her, she attacks her lover. She has apparently overcome the self-division that tortured her after her transformation: now, she is clearly capable of using her monstrous parts for her own purposes and, hence, of fulfilling her epic role. Ovid, in turn, might be using her monstrous parts for his own purposes, as Stephen Hinds suggests *per litteras*: when Scylla attacks Odysseus’ crew, “could she be applying the bite of literary invidiousness to the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*?”.

**Forever frozen: Scylla’s appropriation of the voyeuristic gaze**

The canine metamorphosis is not the last transformation Scylla undergoes. After the long etiological digression, Ovid brings us back to Aeneas’ voyage and mentions briefly that the Trojans can pass Scylla safely because she no longer is the man-eating monster but has become petrified in the meantime: “She also would have wrecked the Trojan ships had she not before their coming been changed into a rock which stands there to this day. Sailors also avoid the rock” (*Met.* 14.72-74). The petrification is Ovid’s idea, yet perhaps inspired by her earlier epithet πετραίη that refers to her preference for rocky dwelling places rather than her own rockiness (Papaioannou 2005: 395-396). Scylla’s transformation into a cliff serves one poetic function: it differs from Virgil’s account. While Aeneas’ Virgilian crew had to use oars and muscles to escape the sea-monster (*Aen.* 3.558-560), salvation in Ovid’s *Met.*, by contrast, “does not come from human abilities […] but from chance. Simply put, [Ovid’s] Aeneas would not have escaped had it not been for Scylla’s petrification. Thus, heroic skills are replaced with the power of the metamorphic world [which] leaves little space for heroes and their helpers” (Hopman 2012: 238). The Scylla that Aeneas encounters in the *Met.* is a harmless, motionless stone – a geographical landmark “which bridges myth and reality” (Lowe 2015: 80) and designates “the crossing to a new world, a snapshot that captures a representative part of a life one leaves behind permanently, or even a memory in which one may nostalgically indulge in peace” (Papaioannou 2005: 396). While the threatening monster needed assertions of credibility and metalinguistic comments on fictionality and poetic license, a geological formation satisfies even the Hellenistic taste for myth rationalizations (Hardie 2009: 61; Lowe 2015: 78-80). For Ovid, who clearly has no problem with supernatural elements in his narrative, Scylla’s second transformation provides stability in a world of constant flux: the petrification is final, a “definite, irreversible departure from the Homeric world and its monsters” (Papaioannou 2005: 21).
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403; cf. Hardie 2009: 59). Scylla the cliff becomes a permanent emblem of poetic fiction: her past as a fleeing nymph and an ever-shifting hybrid are preserved in the stone statue that the “obsessive visualiser” (Hardie 2002: 6) Ovid erects for her – her stone monument which is still dreaded by sailors, and Ovid’s textual label next to it with etiological and historical summary.

Scylla’s metamorphic appearance in three different shapes – maiden, monster, and rock – can prompt associations with a tripartite coming-of-age scenario of the kind that French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep described (1969 14-27). The observant reader of all the “nymph and suitor” tales in Ovid’s Met. already knows this structure of initiation rites from Europa or Proserpina. Scylla’s development is likewise sexual, but unlike that of other maidens, the separation rites pushing her into the alienating liminal phase – monstrosity – do not involve rape through a male aggressor: instead, another woman deflowers the nymph violently, out of envy and jealousy, and separates her not only from her previous social surrounding, but even from herself. Scylla subsequently learns how to use her new role: she appropriates the monstrosity projected upon her and utilizes her grotesque corporeality against her enemies. At first scared of her new genitals herself, she soon incorporates the lesson she learns from the sexually liberated witch: when Scylla takes what she wants, she lives up to the expectations patriarchy associates with a monstrous female. Her hybrid body, a vast assemblage of seductive femininity and menacing bitches’ jaws, teeth, front legs, and claws, becomes her shield against the heroes of patriarchy, the conquerors and oppressors whose objectifying male gaze and subordinating assaults are celebrated and glorified in the epic tradition Ovid at once exemplifies and seeks to distinguish himself from. For Odysseus and his crew, Scylla – in Homer, Virgil, and Ovid’s brief flashback (Met. 14.70-71) – acts precisely as they expect: she is a dangerous, immoderate, voracious vagina dentata.

But when Aeneas encounters her in Met. 14, Scylla has already entered a new phase that is – if we are willing to suspend disbelief and follow the work’s internal logic – considered final, postliminal, and stable. Her second transformation is not as spectacular as her first, brutally conducted, one. As a rock, Scylla appears to rest in herself as though she had come to terms with her extraordinary physicality. Her femininity is no longer the passive object of patriarchal “scopophilia”, the male gaze that subjugates women to spectacles “to be looked at”, in Laura Mulvey’s words (1988: 62). Defying this voyeuristic gaze (or σκοπή) of intradiegetic heroes and extradiegetic readers looking at her (σκοπέω), Scylla the cliff (scopulus) is now a triumphal icon in her own right: not only protruding, visible, and thus avoidable for sailors (Met. 14.74: nauita uita), but also a “look-out rock”, a high place with a wide view, as the etymology of scopulus or σκόπελος (cliff) suggests (Maltby 1991: 551). Her transformation into a cliff thus allows Scylla to gaze out from her crag upon the passing sailors. Now that men are fleeing her, the initial situation of the nymph escaping unwanted suitors is reversed completely.

No longer a spectacle or an arena for heroic feats, Scylla eventually represents the memorial of her own biography of empowerment: her final state, the scopulus, preserves her entire life, the uita that is evoked, phonetically, persistently, in the seamen (nauita) and in the anxieties they project upon her (uitat). Ovid’s Scylla manages to combine the allegedly contradicting roles for women in the patriarchal imagination: she is a maiden and a monster, beautiful and ugly, active and passive, a victim and a perpetrator, subject to change and stable. The hybrid monster becomes an emblem of resistance: she defies debilitating either-or attributions, she rejects erotic advances (Glaucus), withstands the evil eye of jealousy (Circe), evades the objectifying male gaze, overcomes self-destructive dissociation (dogs), repels several heroes’ violent attacks (Odysseus, Aeneas), rebuts readers’ incredulous skepticism, and refuses
epic poets’ demonizing projections (Homer, Virgil). Ovid’s ancient monster Scylla is, it appears, not too far away from what we might consider an emancipated woman today.

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