CHAPTER FOUR

OVID AND VIRGIL

The single most important influence on Ovid in these narratives is Virgil, and again and again proper understanding of the Virgilian allusion is vital for full and informed appreciation of a passage. A massive amount has been written about Ovid’s connection with this predecessor, mainly with regard to the *Metamorphoses*,¹ but valuable work has also been done on reminiscences in the *Fasti*, especially with respect to individual sections.² However, so far there has been no overview of Ovid’s use of and relationship with Virgil in the *Fasti* and no comprehensive survey of the numerous techniques of allusion in evidence there. Taking into account recent advances in intertextuality,³ this (necessarily long and involved) chapter attempts to cover


² See RAMAGLIA, LAMMACHIA 312–4, DÖPP 60–76, LITTLEWOOD 1980 305–14, MCKEOWN 1984 171f., PORTE 144–50, SCHILLING 1990 = SCHILLING 1993 I 19–51, SCHUBERT, FANTHAM 1992b, BRUGNOLI-STOK and BARCHIESI 1997 21f. and 164–6. I have gratefully taken over various instances of allusion from these critics (and also from BÖMER and FANTHAM 1990), but I have also added many new examples not spotted by earlier scholars. The interpretation of the point of the reminiscences is also largely my own.

³ Out of a vast bibliography see especially WEST-WOODMAN, CONTE, LYNE 100ff., GARNER, FARRELL, PLETT, FOWLER 1997, HINDS 1998, GALE 2ff., 113ff., THOMAS 1999 and EDMUNDS. There are many competing theories and methods. My own approach is eclectic, and I try to avoid jargon and waffle and agonizing over precision of terminology. I belong in the camp of those who believe that ancient authors like Ovid deliberately utilized other texts in the expectation that readers would perceive that there is a relationship with those texts and that the comprehension of that relationship is of importance for appreciation. I speculate about Ovid’s intentions. We can, of course, never be absolutely sure about an author’s intentions, and Ovid may well have had other purposes too, but the aims posited in this chapter seem to me highly probable and consistently in evidence. Literary criticism necessarily involves interpretation and is not an exact science. I do try not to be too subjective or over-subtle and not to read too much in. Although intertextual critics are loth to admit this, sometimes echoes seem to have no particular point or purpose, and some of them may even be unconscious or coincidentally similar.
those aspects with particular reference to the mythical and legendary narratives (although most of what is said in it will also be relevant to the rest of the poem).

Ovid utilizes Virgil for a wide variety of purposes—to pay tribute to a great predecessor, to probe the issue of genre, to raise aesthetic and ideological differences, to show off his doctrina (learning), to provide intellectual entertainment, to inject subtle point, to deceive the reader, to give added bite and so on. Overall I have noted two main thrusts in Ovid's employment of Virgilian material. First of all he seems to be having a lot of fun. Although by no means all of the reminiscences are light-hearted (for example, see footnote 8 below on the sombre effect in connection with Remus’ ghost at 5.451ff.), very often Ovid was being flippant, impudently playing around with his revered source and slyly mocking venerable figures such as Aeneas and Dido. Secondly, Ovid seems to be parading and challenging his own cleverness, inventiveness and ability to ring the changes, by inverting, condensing, expanding, providing a sequel or prequel and so forth. Endlessly imaginative, Ovid does a great range of things with his model, and often does several things at once, with a density of reference that is at times kaleidoscopic and invites readers to lose themselves in pursuing echoes, variations and ramifications. There is a patent tour-de-force element in all this (far more so than in Ovid’s use of Livy); and if Ovid generally lacks Virgil’s seriousness and profundity, a cerebral aspect is still very much evident in the dexterity and complexity of allusion (although at times he may appear to be too fond of his own ingenuity and unable to leave well enough alone).

Ovid’s relationship with Virgil is rather involved. Elsewhere he evinces respect for him, writing that his poetry will be read as long as Rome is capital of the world, that the Aeneid is the most renowned poem in Latin and that Virgil is the supreme poet of the Aeneadae. The very frequency of references to Virgil’s works in the Fasti is a tribute to him, a tacit admission of his stature and importance and a sign that he is very much part of Ovid’s poetic world. And when Ovid employs Virgil to raise the tone or achieve a tragic effect he is in effect acknowledging Virgil’s sublimity and mastery of pathos. But Ovid also often exploits Virgil for mock-solemnity, and for adroit and witty twists. This does intimate that Virgil’s poetry is so famous

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4 Cf. A.A. 2.128 (of Odysseus) ille referre aliter saepe solebat idem ‘he was accustomed to tell the same tale again and again in a different way’.

5 Am. 1.15.25f., A.A. 3.337f., Ex P. 3.4.83f.