

Fear, Imagination, and Realization: Alcyone Imagines Ceyx to Death

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the narrative of Alcyone and Ceyx has received much comment in modern scholarship for its portrayal of mutual love, marital devotion, tragedy, and reunion. In the past scholars have typically focused on the elegiac aspects of the story and the human romance.¹ At first look the emotions between Alcyone and Ceyx are mutual, pious, equal, and driven by temperate love, not overwhelming lust. They are much like Baucis and Philemon of Book VIII and not very similar to other love stories in the *Metamorphoses*, which most often feature rape, burning lust, murder, and inequality between mortals and divinities. The tragedy that befalls them seems to be completely outside their control; it is something that could have happened to any married couple and their ostensibly perfect love deepens how awful Ceyx's death appears to the audience. And yet, under deeper scrutiny the perfect façade described above crumbles into something darker.² Alcyone and Ceyx are much less like Baucis and Philemon and much more like Laodamia and Protesilaus, or Hero and Leander, or other couples previously portrayed by Ovid in his *Heroides*.³ Their love-story is not all what it appears to be. As I aim to

¹ Numerous scholars have discussed the aspects of human romance, pathos, and conjugal love in the episode and how these contribute to its quality and importance. For example, Wilkinson (1955) twice calls Ceyx and Alcyone one of the "best" episodes in the *Met.* (172, 204), and sees its significance in the pathos created by Alcyone's love. Otis (1970, 230) found it so significant that he had to devote an entire chapter to it (231-77). Galinsky (1975, 97) cites the "altruistic and conjugal love of Ceyx and Alcyone" in examples of how the subject of Ovid's epic "is love rather than metamorphoses." For Fantham (1979) the story reads like a Hellenistic Romance, where the sweetness of the final reunion and the endurance of love are increased by tragedy and hardship (345). Rudd (2008) sees the episode as a "masterpiece of pathos (108)" and traces the theme of "unity in love" through the narrative.

² Hints of this interpretation can be seen in a couple of recent analyses of the episode. Tissol (1997, 72-84), in discussing imitation and images in the whole episode, recognizes how prophetic Alcyone's words before Ceyx's departure turn out to be. Likewise, Hardie (2002, 272-82) while recognizing links between this episode and elegy, also sees that Alcyone is "ironically prophetic (441)," she is oddly susceptible to *imagines*, and the reunion of the couple is not quite as happy as it seems at first. All these aspects of the narrative will be elaborated in my discussion below.

³ Laodamia and Protesilaus (*Her.* 13) and Hero and Leander (*Her.* 18, 19) are only the closest parallels. In fact, Wilkinson (1955, 205) already saw the first parallel, but he did not see any negative connotations within it. Similarly, Otis (1970, 236-7) makes the link between Alcyone and Laodamia, but only sees this as an affirmation of how devoted Alcyone is as a wife and lover. Tränkle (1963, 469), Griffin (1981, 151-2), and Rimell (2006, 182) mention several parallels between Hero and Leander and Alcyone and Ceyx. Fantham (1979, 331) cites both parallels but does not elaborate on the consequences. I discuss these and other parallels between Alcyone and Ceyx and the characters of the *Heroides* and their foreboding aspects further below.

prove, the couple, particularly Alcyone, have much more agency in their tragedy than appears at first glance. In fact, Ovid, by using parallels of other female heroines who had been separated from their lovers, presents Alcyone as the inadvertent creator of the storm that destroys Ceyx and the one most responsible for his death. Alcyone's love is not perfect and harmless. It is too overbearing and contains too much doubt. This, combined with her susceptibility to imagination and images, leads her to be the creator of her own tragedy.

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