

Dishonorable Laurels: Ovid's Critique of Augustan Apollo in *Metamorphoses* 1.452-567

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* continues to draw scholarly attention regarding its potential meanings, and to inspire new and imaginative ways of interpreting the various transformations throughout the text. Recently, Miller's (2002) discussion of an "Augustan Apollo" in the Apollo and Daphne encounter (*Met.* 1.452-567) suggests this scene emphasizes the motif of Augustan victory in connection with the aetiological function of Ovid's narrative. While I agree with Miller's identification of an "Augustan Apollo" and that the motif of victory is a key component of this scene, this paper will argue that Ovid's intention was not to exalt, but rather to critique Augustan victory by interrupting the original Callimachean *aetion* with a new foundation myth that depicts the laurel as a symbol of dishonor.

With the assistance of Callimachus' fragments (86-89) and a passage from Theopompus (115 *FGrH* 80), we are able to reconstruct the Callimachean foundation myth in which Apollo adopts the laurel almost immediately after his honorable victory over Python. However, as Pfeiffer (1949) points out, Ovid does not at all adhere to Callimachus' account, and chooses instead to invent a new *aetion* altogether (95 *ad loc.*). Ovid attributes Apollo's assumption of the laurel to the pursuit and attempted rape of Daphne, rather than to an honorable victory over the Python as the Callimachean fragments suggest. By inserting the Apollo and Daphne scene immediately after Apollo's defeat of the Python, Ovid explicitly departs from precedent and attributes negative connotations to the most recognizable symbol of honorable victory. Using Zanker's (1988) approach to the interpretation of Augustan "visual language" throughout Rome, especially concerning symbols of victory, I contend that Ovid's presentation of the conflict between Apollo and Daphne exhibits easily recognizable victory motifs in its use of specific vocabulary with immediate connections to Augustus and his personal victory honors (*honores*

1.565). Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree, and Apollo grants her the privilege of adorning the brows of all victorious leaders (*triumphum* 1.560), decorating the doors of Augustus' Palatine home (*postibus Augustis* 1.562), and even glorifying her as his own eternal symbol. However, the mention of this essential piece of Augustan victory iconography in the context of a suggestive rape subverts Apollo's honor with dishonor, thereby calling into question the meaning of the laurel in contemporary Rome. Thus, when Ovid's "Augustan Apollo" honors Daphne and himself, he is actually celebrating his own dishonorable victory.

This paper argues that Ovid's portrayal of Apollo's pursuit and Daphne's subsequent transformation initiates a comparison to Augustus' subjugation and subsequent transformation of Rome from a Republic to a veiled autocracy. Daphne, a defenseless victim, cannot resist the divinity and has no choice but to submit and desecrate her human form, much like Rome who must succumb to Augustus, the *divus filius* and descendant of Venus, and violate its Republican form. Ovid's new *actio* destabilizes the contemporary image of one of Rome's most venerable symbols of honor and victory, and suggests that the *princeps* himself exhibits his own dishonor by assuming the laurel as the victor in civil war.

Bibliography

Anderson, William S., ed. (1972). *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Books 1-5*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Beard, Mary. (2007). *The Roman Triumph*. Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Galinsky, Karl. (1975). *Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Habinek, Thomas. (2002). "Ovid and Empire." In P. Hardie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 46-61.

Hunter, Richard. (2006). *The Shadow of Callimachus: Studies in the Reception of Hellenistic Poetry at Rome*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jacoby, F. (1954) *Die Fragmente de griechischen Historiker*. Leiden: Brill.

Miller, John. (2009). *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nisetich, Frank. (2001). *The Poems of Callimachus*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Pfeiffer, R. (1949). *Callimachus, vol. 1: Fragmenta*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Powell, Anton, ed. (1992). *Roman Poetry & Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*. London: Bristol Classical Press.

Zanker, Paul. (1990). *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. A. Shapiro, trans. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.