Structural Lynx: The Function of the Lyncus and Triptolemus Episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

At the end of Book 5 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Calliope concludes her winning song in the contest between the Muses and the Pierides with a brief but eventful story that includes agricultural etiology, attempted guest-murder, and animal transformation. The Athenian youth Triptolemus has gone to Scythia to spread agriculture at Ceres' request, but when the Scythian king Lyncus attempts to murder him, Ceres saves her emissary by transforming the king into a lynx (5.642–661). This metamorphosis marks the end of Calliope's song, and shortly thereafter, Book 5 ends. Although the conflict between Lyncus and Triptolemus has received little attention in scholarship, its pivotal placement within the poem's pentadic structure marks it as significant and invites further consideration. The 15-book *Metamorphoses* is widely accepted to have been divided into three pentads (Holzberg 1998, 78). Scholars have further noted Ovid's technique of pausing his narrative at the end of a pentad, while also bridging the gaps between pentads through narrative continuity (Holzberg 1998, 79). This paper demonstrates how Ovid's vocabulary, themes, and metaliterary signaling work together to situate the Triptolemus and Lyncus story as a bridge between books and pentads.

Ovid casts the conflict between Triptolemus and Lyncus as a conflict between Athenian and barbarian, using the same vocabulary that he uses for the equivalent conflict at the beginning of the Tereus, Procne, and Philomela story in Book 6. Ovid links the Athenians Triptolemus, and Procne and Philomela, with the atypical adjective *Mopsopius* (5.661, 6.423), a rare word first used here (Anderson 1972, ad 6.421–423). Likewise, Ovid establishes a parallel between Lyncus and Tereus by calling each one *barbarus.* This word is used for the first time in the *Metamorphoses* with reference to Lyncus (5.657), but the word (and its derivative *barbaricus*) recurs four times in the next book to describe barbarian-Athenian conflict (6.423) as well as

Tereus and his Thracian origin (6.515, 6.533, 6.576). In last line of the Triptolemus and Lyncus story (5.661), the unusual use of marriage vocabulary (Anderson 1997, ad loc.) both ends Calliopes' song, and foreshadows Tereus and Procne's cursed wedding in Book 6.

As the Lyncus and Triptolemus story closes off the first pentad, it also looks backward to its beginning. Lyncus, feigning hospitality, attempts to murder his guest as he sleeps (5.658), just as Lycaon attempts to murder the visitor Jupiter as he sleeps (1.224) in Book 1 (Anderson 1997, ad 5.657–659). This connection points to deeper similarities between these episodes, the first and final metamorphoses of the pentad: in both cases, impious kings are turned into predatory animals with comparable names (λύκος, λύγξ; *lupus, lynx*). This ring composition helps to give closure to the first pentad, and simultaneously looks ahead to Book 6, where Tereus is compared significantly to a wolf (Kaufhold 1997, 68–69).

Finally, the Lyncus episode looks beyond the immediate context of Books 1–6 and toward Erysichthon's tale in Book 8. Lyncus' story provides an etiology for the nomadic lifestyle of the Scythians, who never received the gift of agriculture because of the crime of their king. This point is reinforced in Book 8, when Ceres once again lends her dragon-drawn chariot (5.642–643) to an ambassador so that she may recruit *Fames*, hunger personified, who dwells in Scythia (8.788–795).

It thus turns out that the unassuming episode appended to Calliope's lengthy rendition of the Proserpina myth plays a crucial role in the structure of Books 1–6 and beyond. Viewed in this light, Ceres' injunction that Triptolemus scatter seeds partly on uncultivated and partly on cultivated ground (5.646–647, *Triptolemo partimque rudi data semina iussit | spargere humo, partim post tempora longa recultae*) takes on a metaliterary meaning. The young Athenian's

Scythian excursus plants seeds that will bear fruit in Books 6 and 8, but also reworks old ground, forging a connection between the beginning and end of the first pentad of the poem.

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