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Helen, Ovid's Troublesome Character

Abstract: The episode of Paris, Helen and Menelaus in the second book of the Ars amatoria (ll. 357-372) seems to justify Ovid's relegatio in Tomis better than other controversial and deplored passages of the poem. The Ovidian episode, in fact, is very likely to underlie the defence of Julia the Elder, daughter of Augustus, who in 2 B.C. was banished from Rome officially for indecent behaviour, but unofficially for political motives since she joined an opposition filo-oriental movement.

The connection between the historical event and the poetic fiction lies chiefly in Helen, evoked in the Ars, in the Remedia (ll. 773-776), and in the Heroides (16, 299-316). A further evidence of this connection may lie in the Augustan order to expunge the episode of Helen from the second book of the Aeneid (ll. 567-588) to avoid any parallel between the Ovidian Helen/Julia the Elder and the Virgilian heroine. The order of expunction (in about 9 A.D.) was probably a precaution taken after a challenging "grassing" of Ovid on Vergilius. In fact, just in 9 A.D. the banished poet sent to Augustus his libellus of auto-defence where he polemically offered an irreverent interpretation of the Virgilian episode, not without blame, to exculpate himself and to hint to Augustus' actual or pretended disregard of the Virgilian immoral lines in contrast with the law.

Key-works: Ovid, Vergilius, Helen, Paris, Menelaus

In his *libellus* of self-defence written during the hard six months-journey from Rome to Tomis, Ovid states: *Perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error, / alterius facti culpa silenda mihi: / nam non sum tanti, renovem ut tua vulnera, Caesar, / quem nimio plus est indoluisse semel. / Altera pars superest, qua turpi carmine factus / arguor obsceni doctor adulterii* (ll. 207-212).

Carmen and *error* are made responsible for the poet's decay but, whereas Ovid spends no words for his *error* — pleading his wish not

to open again the unhealed wounds of Augustus¹ — he largely deals with his *carmen*, the critics unanimously indentify with the *Ars amatoria*². Ovid himself, however, denounced the noxious influence that his *Ars*³ exerted on him.

His daring celebration of the art of love was in high contrast with the Augustan legal restrictions on marriage. These laws meant to fight adultery, legally penalized as a crime for the first time, and celibacy⁴. According to modern commentaries, it is likely that just the lack of observance of these laws led to Ovid's banishment from Rome and to the ban from public libraries on his work⁵.

Yet, such a justification for the *crimen carminis* does not take into due consideration the poet's law studies (cf. *Trist.* 4, 10, 15-22) and his deep knowledge of the juridical matter testified by the interspersing of legal terms in his poem⁶. It appears thus that Ovid would have never been so reckless to write a poem in overt breach of the law!

The reasons underlying the *princeps*' peremptory edict of banishment issued in 8 A.D. were chiefly political and closely related to the sharp dynastic fight inside the Augustan *domus* between the branch of the Iulii and that of the Claudii⁷. Only bearing in mind this historical contextualization, is it possible to accurately interpret the

¹ Cf. l. 8 *culpa silenda mihi*; about the choice of *silenda* instead of *tacenda culpa* see L. Heilmann, *Silere-tacere: nota lessicale*, "QIG" 1, 1955, 5-16

² See the detailed bibliography in F. Rohr Vio, *Le voci del dissenso. Ottaviano Augusto e i suoi oppositori* (Padova 2000), 263 n. 482 and, eventually, N.F. Berrino, *Ovidio e la difficile successione ad Augusto*, "Euphrosyne" 36, 2008, 149-164. For a complete survey of the scholars' explanations about Ovid's unclear *relegatio* in Tomis see J.C. Thibault's volume, *The mystery of Ovid's exile* (Berkeley 1964).

³ Cf. *Trist.* 5, 12, 67-68 *Sic utinam, quae nil metuentem tale magistrum / perdiderint, in cineres Ars mea versa foret* with the opening *perdiderint* in *Trist.* 2, 207 just when Ovid confesses his two *crimina*. In the past, these lines may have convinced Sidonius Apollinaris and Aurelius Victor to place the blame of Ovid's banishment on this couplets poem (cf. Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 1, 27; Sidon. *Carm.* 23, 158-159).

⁴ Cf. the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* and the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* (18 B.C.), summarized in the *lex Papia Poppea* (9 A.D.).

⁵ Cf. *Trist.* 2, 8; 3, 1, 65; 3, 14, 17; *Pont.* 1, 1, 5 and E. Pianezzola, *Conformismo e anticonformismo politico nell'Ars amatoria*, "QIFL" 2, 1972, 51 ss., who gives relevance to some features of the dispute against the Augustan laws aiming to put the dynasty under the control of the State.

⁶ Cf. E.J. Kenney, *Ovid and the Law*, "YCIS" 21, 1961, 243-263.

⁷ Cf. B. Levick, *Julians and Claudians*, "G&R" 22, 1975, 29-38; A. Luisi-N.F. Berrino, *Culpa silenda. Le elegie dell'error ovidiano* (Bari 2002), 23-28; Berrino, *Ovidio e la difficile successione* cit., 149-151 and 161-162.

implications of the well-known scandals that involved Julia the Elder (2 B.C.) and Julia the Younger (8 A.D.), Augustus' daughter and granddaughter respectively⁸. Their indecent behaviour charge would seem to conceal political motives: both women, in fact, joined the opposition filo-oriental movement that Ovid also sympathized with⁹.

In several passages of the *Ars amatoria* there are hints at the poet's joining the circles opposing the Augustan rule: that is why, although already circulating in Rome in 1 A.D., the poem was included seven years later in the list of indictments the *relegandus*¹⁰ poet was charged with.

The present study analyses one of those passages that better displays the implicit political implications of the Ovidian treatise, seemingly harmless, on the art of love: the episode of Paris, Helen, and Menelaus of the second book of the *Ars amatoria* (ll. 357-372). The analysis of the episode aims to make manifest Ovid's underlying defence of Julia the Elder.

In 2 B.C. Augustus impeached his daughter for adultery and immorality and condemned her to the *relegatio in insulam*¹¹ by summary proceedings. Yet, the crime she was officially impeached with — namely, violation of the *leges Iuliae* — seems a pretext to conceal political manoeuvrings. Firstly, the most famous of Julia's lovers — five of them were consuls or nobles belonging to consular families (cf. Vell. 2, 100, 4 and Macrob. *Sat.* 1, 11, 17) — was the son of the triumvir Marcus Antonius, Iullus Antonius. He was condemned to death and executed¹² not for adultery — despite his relation with

⁸ About the political implications of the two scandals see M. Pani, *Tendenze politiche della successione al principato di Augusto* (Bari 1979), 71; A. Luisi, *L'opposizione sotto Augusto: le due Giulie, Germanico e gli amici*, "CISA" 25, Milano 1999, 181-192; A. Luisi-N.F. Berrino, *Carmen et error nel bimillenario della relegazione di Ovidio a Tomi* (Bari 2008), 110-123.

⁹ Cf. Luisi-Berrino, *Carmen et error cit.*, 124-133.

¹⁰ For a more detailed analysis of these passages see the first chapter of the aforementioned Luisi-Berrino, *Carmen et error cit.*

¹¹ R. Syme, *The crisis of 2 B. C.* (München 1974), 3-34.

¹² The sources do not agree on how Iullus Antonius died, whether by execution (Dio Cass. 55, 10, 15 and Tac. *Ann.* 1, 10, 4, 44) or suicide (Vell. 2, 100, 4): about this *querelle* see Portalupi 1967, 211-212). The other four noble lovers, instead, were banished. Their names are: Titus Quinctius; Crispinus Sulpicianus, consul in 9 B.C. (Vell. 2, 102, 5); Titus Sempronius Gracchus, Julia's lover since Agrippa, who wrote a letter that Julia tried to use to discredit Tiberius (Tac. *Ann.* 1, 53, 6); Appius Claudius Pulcher, son of the consul in 38 B.C., under the guardianship of Antonius as a boy (Cic. *Att.* 14, 13^a, 2), and Cornelius Scipio, a probable son of

Julia — but probably for having exploited his love affair to seize the imperial power æj ka^ TMp^ tÍ monarc...v toàto prfxaj).. Secondly, Tacitus reports that, among those in use, Julia and her lovers were tried just by high treason proceedings¹³ since she had summoned “a group of nostalgic Cesaro-Antonians eager to see an autocratic evolution”¹⁴. Also, since 10 B.C. they had been counting on a vast opposition literary tradition inclusive of the *Ars*¹⁵.

The episode of Paris, Helen, and Menelaus in the second book of the *Ars amatoria* comes after a series of mythological *exempla* where the poet shows how efficacious are his teachings for all those seeking success in love. But soon after the poet warns: *sed mora tuta brevis* since with the passing of the time fades excitement and blur the traits of the far lover’s face (ll. 357-358) as it happens to Helen, who takes warm shelter in Paris’ arms while Menelaus is away (ll. 357-372):

Sed mora tuta brevis; lentescunt tempore curae,

vanescitque absens et novus intrat amor.

Dum Menelaus abest, Helene, ne sola iaceret,

the consul in 16 B.C. and grandson of Scribonia, Julia the Elder’s mother (Vell. 2, 100, 5): about her five lovers see E. Meise, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der julisch-claudischen Dynastie*, München 1969, 4 ss. and R. Syme, *L’aristocrazia augustea*, (Oxford 1986), trad. it. Milano 2001, 137-138 and 180-181.

¹³ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 3, 24, 2 *Nam culpam inter viros ac feminas vulgatam gravi nomine laesarum religionum ac violatae maiestatis appellando clementiam maiorum suasque ipse leges egrediebatur*. E. Groag, *Der Sturz der Iulia*, “WS” 40, 1918, 150-167 and Id., *Studien zur Kaisergeschichte. III. Der Sturz der Iulia*, “WS” 41, 1919, 74-84; R. Syme, *La rivoluzione romana*, (Oxford 1939), trad. it. Torino 1962, 428-430; Id., *L’aristocrazia augustea* cit., 91 and n. 65; Pani, *Tendenze politiche* cit., 40-41; Rohr Vio, *op. cit.*, 208-250 agree on the political motives underlying Julia’s banishment.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Zecchini, *Gli scritti giovanili di Cesare e la censura di Augusto*, in *La cultura in Cesare. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Studi. Macerata-Matelica, 30 aprile-4 maggio 1990*, I (Roma 1993), 199 (“un gruppo di nostalgici cesaro-antoniani, impazienti di un’evoluzione autocratica”).

¹⁵ Cf. Syme, *The crisis* cit., 923 (not agreeable with C.E. Murgia, *The date of Ovid’s Ars* 3, “AJPh” 107, 1986, 74-94, in particular p. 80). About the anti-*Aeneid* features of Iullus Antonius’ poem and the anonymous *carmen de bello Actiaco* (cf. in particular pp. 59-81 for the chronology of the work and the political crisis in 2 B.C.) see G. Zecchini, *Il carmen de bello Actiaco. Storiografia e lotta politica in età augustea*, Stuttgart 1987, 68-70; about the poems by Sempronius Gracchus see E. Groag, in *RE* II-A 2, Stuttgart, 1923, 1371-1373 s.v. *Sempronius* n. 41 and fragments in Ribbeck 1962, I, 230.

hospitis est tepido nocte recepta sinu.
Quis stupor hic, Menelaë, fuit? Tu solus abibas,
isdem sub tectis hospes et uxor erant!
Accipitri timidas credis, furiose, columbas,
plenum montano credis ovile lupo!
Nil Helene peccat, nihil hic committit adulter;
quod tu, quod faceret quilibet, ille facit.
Cogis adulterium dando tempusque locumque;
quid nisi consilio est usa puella tuo?
Quid faciat? Vir abest, et adest non rusticus hospes,
et timet in vacuo sola cubare toro.
Viderit Atrides, Helenen ego crimine solvo;
usa est humani commoditate viri.

At first reading, it strikes, on the one hand, the relief given to this mythological event — much longer than the previous *exempla* celebrated by only two couplets (cf. ll. 353-356 *Phyllida Demophoon praesens moderatius ussit, / exarsit velis acrius illa datis; / Penelopen absens sollers torquebat Ulixes; / Phylacides aberat, Laudamia, tuus*) — and, in another light, the suspension of the poetic fiction through a blunt question to Menelaus (cf. l. 361 *Quis stupor hic, Menelaë, fuit?*). It appears, thence, the Ovidian wish to give relevance to one of the history's most famous adulterous relation: that of Helen with Paris. Yet, Helen is not to be blamed but only her husband Menelaus, who left her alone with a *non rusticus hospes*.

Such an interpretation is itself in contrast with the Roman juridical mentality in general — according to which adultery is a mere female

crime¹⁶ — and with the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* (18 B.C.) in particular, which turned adultery from a private offence into a legally penalized crime¹⁷.

Ovid, in fact, acquits Helen of every charge in “a line that sounds like a real verdict”¹⁸: *Helenen ego crimine solvo* (cf. l. 372).

But why is he so overtly on her side?

The answer lies in the scandal involving Julia the Elder in 2 B.C. The Ovidian lines, written one year after the woman’s *relegatio in insulam*, may underlie a defence of the most rumoured adulterous relation in Rome at that time: the one between the daughter of Augustus and Iullus Antonius, son of the triumvir Marcus Antonius.

Such assumption establishes the equivalences Julia the Elder/Helen and Iullus Antonius/Paris, both of them relying on the shared political views of Julia and Iullus — close to the Antonian model — that Pliny the Elder (*nat.* 7, 45, 149) and Dio Cassius (55, 10, 15) also report. The triumvir’s denigrators, besides, had already pointed at Antonius as a new Paris for his adulterous relation with the queen of Egypt Cleopatra/Helen: Horace had defined Paris *perfidus hospes* (cf. *Carm.* 1, 15, 2) — a phrase meaningfully retrieved in Ovid’s *non rusticus hospes* (cf. *Ars* 2, 369)¹⁹ that makes Paris a man about the town, lacking *rusticitas*, and the elegiac lover *par excellence*²⁰ rightly ‘allowed’ to make advances to Helen.

Ovid frees both Paris and Helen from any blame: cf. l. 365 *Nil Helene peccat, nihil hic committit adulter* — and namely, the anaphoric *variatio nil ... nihil* — and the two terms referred to the guilt — *peccat* and *adultery* — placed meaningfully at the end of each emistich; thus, Menelaus is made the only to be blamed for having left Helen alone and provided the adulterers with the time and the place to betray (cf. l. 367 *Cogis adulterium dando tempusque locumque*).

Menelaus’ blame may equally be levelled against Tiberius who in 2 B.C., year of the scandal, had been living for four years in Rhodes —

¹⁶ Cf. N.F. Berrino, *Mulier potens: realtà femminili nel mondo antico* (Galatina 2006), 63 and n. 299.

¹⁷ Cf. E. Cantarella, *L’ambiguo malanno. La donna nell’antichità greca e romana* (Milano 1995), 139.

¹⁸ Similarly E. Pianezzola (a c. di), *Ovidio. L’arte di amare* (Milano 1991), XX.

¹⁹ Similarly Pianezzola, *Conformismo e anticonformismo* cit., 53 n. 39; about the representation of Paris in the Augustan literature see G. Rosati, *Protesilao, Paride, e l’amante elegiaco: un modello omerico in Ovidio*, “Maia” 43, 1991, 110 ss.

²⁰ Cf. Rosati, *op. cit.*, 103-115.

away from his homeland as the Atreid — in a sort of self-imposed exile.²¹

The town of Sparta, Menelaus' kingdom, leads to a further parallel between Tiberius and Menelaus, the latter regarded as singularly responsible for Helen's guilt in the second book of the *Ars*.

The Spartans, in fact, were clients of the Claudii²² and Tiberius, as a boy, had been hosted with his mother Livia in Sparta at the time of the proscriptions ensuing the Perusin War. Even Octavian, grateful for the hospitality offered to his wife and her son by first venter, had rendered honours to the Lacedaemonians (cf. Dio Cass. 54, 7, 2).

In the light of the aforesaid political context, the defence of Julia the Elder underlying the episode of Paris-Helen-Menelaus becomes a more reliable hypothesis thanks to a further evocation of this myth in the *Remedia amoris*, written soon after Julia's *relegatio* between 1 and 2 A.D.

As in the *Ars* (2, 261), almost at the end of the *Remedia* (ll. 773-776) Ovid bluntly asks Menelaus why he was now so sad after having naively allowed Helen's kidnapping with his absence from Sparta:

Quid, Menelae, doles? Ibas sine coniuge Creten
et poteris nupta lentus abesse tua;
ut Paris hanc rapuit, nunc demum uxore carere
non potes: alterius crevit amore tuus.

Just as in the second book of the *Ars*, also in this poem the myth is introduced by a blunt question to Menelaus who becomes once again the only person responsible for his wife's adultery.

Another analogy in the *Remedia* strengthens the parallel between Menelaus and Tiberius: the latter was in Rhodes at the time of the

²¹ M.L. Paladini, *A proposito del ritiro di Tiberio a Rodi e della sua posizione prima dell'accessione all'impero*, "NRS" 1957, 1-32; M.B. Levick, *Tiberius' retirement to Rhodes in 6 B.C.*, "Latomus" 31, 1972, 779-813; Ead., *Tiberius the politician*, London 1976, 30 ss.; D. Sidari, *Il ritiro di Tiberio a Rodi*, "AIV" 137, 1978-1979, 51-69; Rohr Vio, *op. cit.*, 236-237. About the reasons of Tiberius' departure from Rome see Levick, *Tiberius' retirement cit.*, 779-813 and Luisi-Berrino, *Carmen et error cit.*, 28-29.

²² Cf. Suet. *Tib.* 6, 2; Dio Cass. 48, 15, 3 and A. Frascchetti, *Livia, la politica*, in *Roma al femminile* (Roma-Bari 1994), 123-151.

scandal involving his wife as the former was on the island of Crete, emphatically mentioned at the end of the hexameter (cf. l. 773).

As Ovid is the only Latin poet to refer to Menelaus' absence from Sparta²³, he was almost certainly not prompted by an antiquarian spirit but rather by political motives.

The political motives at the root of the dealing with the episode of Paris-Helen-Menelaus become increasingly manifest when Ovid evokes the myth once again in his *Heroides* XVI and XVII — epistles written after 4 A.D.²⁴, the year of the establishment of the Augustan line of succession.

The early death of the two Caesars — Lucius in 2 A.D. (*ILS* 139) and Gaius in 4 A.D. (*ILS* 140) — actually compelled the *princeps* to adopt Agrippa Postumus, Julia the Elder's youngest son²⁵. The Julii, then, seemed to have an advantage in the succession²⁶ but that was not completely true since Augustus had also adopted Tiberius and, consequently, his son Drusus Minor: so, the scale tipped in favour of the Claudii²⁷.

In 4 A.D. the relationship between the Julii and the Claudii was very difficult. After the establishment of the line of succession, Ovid

²³ Cf. J. Schmidt, in *RE* XV 1, Stuttgart 1931, 811 s.v. *Menelaos* n. 2.

²⁴ About the difficult dating of the work see N.F. Berrino, *Crimen carminis concausa della relegazione di Ovidio*, in "Classica et Christiana" 4/1, 2009, 35 n. 34.

²⁵ The adoption made on 26 June 4 A.D. (cf. *ILS* 143; Vell. 2, 112, 7; Suet. *Aug.* 65, 1 and H.U. Instinsky, *Augustus und die Adoption des Tiberius*, "Hermes" 94, 1996, 324-343) was then revoked after the charges of depravation and insanity that led to the banishment of Agrippa in Sorrento in 7 A.D. (cf. Vell. 2, 112, 7; Plin. *Nat.* 7, 45, 150; Suet. *Aug.* 65, 3 and 9; Dio Cass. 55, 32, 2; Schol. Iuv. [ed. Wessner 1931] VI 158, 1 with I. Cogitore, *Mancipii unius audacia* (*Tacite, Ann.*, II, 39, 1): *le faux Agrippa Postumus face au pouvoir de Tibère*, "REL" 68, 1990, 125-126). The charges hid Livia's sly manoeuvrings to favour the accession to the throne of her son Tiberius (cf. e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 1, 3, 4; Plut. *De garrul.* 11, 508a with Rohr Vio, *op. cit.*, 254-280, in partic. p. 254).

²⁶ Cf. the several portraits of Agrippa (cf. F. Salviat-D. Terrer, *Un portrait officiel à Narbonne: Agrippa Postumus?*, "RAN" 13, 1980, 65-72 and Id.-Ead., *Les portraits d'Agrippa Postumus et les monnaies de Corinthe*, "RAN" 15, 1982, 237-241) that attest his relevant role.

²⁷ B. Levick, *Drusus Caesar and the Adoption of A.D. 4*, "Latomus" 25, 1966, 227-244 and Sumner 1967, 413-435. To establish a new balance, Augustus ordered to Tiberius to adopt Germanicus who, being the son of Antonia the Younger and Drusus Nero Claudius, belonged to the dynasty of Antonius and safeguarded both the Claudii and the Julii since he was also the future husband of Agrippina the Elder, Julia the Elder's daughter.

sided with the Julii and discredited Tiberius²⁸ to show his disappointment with the adoption. That is why the poet evoked again just in 4 A.D. the episode of Paris-Helen-Menelaus to denigrate Menelaus/Tiberius.²⁹

As noted earlier, Ovid did so in the *Heroides*, a work in contrast with the Augustan directives just because of its metre³⁰, and — as if to better draw attention to the myth — he may have placed the *Heroides* XVI (*Paris Helenae*) and XVII (*Helene Paridi*) as the first two epistles of the *Double Heroides*.

In the *Heroides*, Menelaus, away from Sparta, is once again regarded as singularly responsible for the adultery. He seems even eager to aid the guest's love, as Paris himself states in *epist.* 16, 299-316:

Sed tibi et hoc suadet rebus, non voce maritus,

neve sui furtis hospitis obstet, abest.

Non habuit tempus, quo Cresia regna videret,

aptius: o mira calliditate virum!

'Res et ut Idaei mando tibi' dixit iturus

'Curam pro nobis hospitis, uxor, agas'.

Neglegis absentis, testor, mandata mariti:

cura tibi non est hospitis ulla tui.

²⁸ About Ovid's overtly being "on the side of the party supporting the Julii in the line of succession and opposing Livia and Tiberius" in the *Ars* see A. Braccesi, *Livio e la tematica d'Alessandro in età augustea*, in M. Sordi (a c. di), *I canali della propaganda nel mondo antico*, CISA 4, Milano 1976, 191-194.

²⁹ About Ovid's interruption of his *Fasti* see A. Luisi, *Sulla datazione dei sei libri dei Fasti di Ovidio*, "Invig. Luc." 26, 2004, 139-145.

³⁰ Cf. A. Arena, *Ovidio e l'ideologia augustea. I motivi delle Heroides e il loro significato*, "Latomus" 54, 1995, 824, who remarks that the elegiac couplet "implied an autonomy that not only concerned style and form but at the same time expressed an existential opposition to conformist and levelling tendencies" of the Augustan laws on marriage, deplored in the *Heroides*.

*Huncine tu speras hominem sine pectore dotes
posse satis formae, Tyndari, nosse tuae?
Falleris: ignorat! Nec, si bona magna putaret,
quae tenet, externo crederet illa viro.
Ut te nec mea vox nec te meus incitet ardor,
cogimur ipsius commoditate frui;
aut erimus stulti, sic ut superemus et ipsum,
si tam securum tempus abibit iners.
Paene suis ad te manibus deducit amantem:
utere mandantis simplicitate viri!*

The portrayal of Menelaus is quite defaming: he is described as a fool as in the *Ars* (ll. 360-361), where he appears almost numbed with *stupor*.

Helen, then, accepts the poet's suggestion of exploiting (cf. *utere*) Menelaus' *simplicitas viri*, a phrase purposely placed at the end of the line; besides, the echo of her words *simplicis utamur commoditate viri* uttered in *Heroides* 17, 178 proves that she then will follow the poet's advice³¹.

³¹ Not only does the final hyperbaton *simplicis ... viri* highlight the lexical retrieval in the sixteenth epistle but also underlines the noun *commoditas*, occurring uniquely in Ovid's poems and not in other Augustan poetical works and referred to the episode Paris-Helen-Menelaus (other passages are *ars* 2, 371-372 and *Her.* 16, 312: cf. thereby A.N. Michalopoulos, *Ovid Heroides 16 and 17. Introduction, text and commentary* (Cambridge 2006), 244). The noun matched to the verb *utor* may refer to the *populares*, the supporters of the political project planned by Ovid and close to the Antonian model. J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la république* (Paris 1963), 556-557, in fact, demonstrates that the *populares* took over the principles of *libertas* and of *commodum* (the latter matched also to that of *utilitas*) to indicate the interest of a person or of the community and to point out the privileges that people claimed or were already given. The not so poetical use of *commoditas* may, thence, manifest Ovid's political views.

Ovid continues his denigration underlining the overt credulity Menelaus shows at the moment of his departure for Crete. When he recommends that his wife takes care of their guest, he does not realize how profoundly he is going wrong (cf. *Her.* 17, 157-164); similarly, Tiberius, leaving for Rhodes, made an evaluation error: he realized too late that he had given full scope to his political opponents but, lacking any permission to come back, *remansit igitur Rhodi contra voluntatem, vix per matrem consecutus, ut ad velandam ignominiam quasi legatus Augusto abesset* (Suet. *Tib.* 12, 1).

Moreover, Menelaus is *iners* (*Her.* 16, 314) and *rusticus* (*ibid.*, 1. 222), the latter expressing a judgment on his behaviour and social status³². Such a characterization allows a further disparaging juxtaposition with Tiberius — a man held in contempt by his wife for his lower status (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1, 53, 1 *fuerat in matrimonio Tiberii florentibus Gaio et Lucio Caesaribus spreveratque ut imparem*), incapable of taking decisions by himself (Suet. *Tib.* 50, 2), and bad-tempered (*ibid.* 51, 1, where he refers to some *codicilli* of Augustus *de acerbitate et intolerantia morum* of Tiberius)³³.

Menelaus' defaming description is opposed to the "undeniable heroic aura" of Paris³⁴ and by this contrast the denigration against Tiberius / Menelaus is manifest still further.

Ovid, in fact, wanted to waken the Claudii's aspiring pretender to the throne by striking Menelaus/Tiberius and joining all those who, in diametrical opposition to the supporters of Julia's banishment, deplored Tiberius' behaviour at the moment of his wife's *relegatio in insulam*³⁵.

Moreover, the expunction of some hexameters from the second book of the *Aeneid* (ll. 567-588) may further demonstrate Ovid's hint at the scandal of 2 B.C. In these hexameters Helen, the protagonist, shows a modest attitude, crouching in the temple of Vesta, hiding

³² Cf. P. Mastrandea (a c. di), *Aureae Latinitatis Bibliotheca*, Bologna 1991, s.v. and Id.-L. Tassarolo (a c. di), *Poesis* (Bologna 1995), s.v.

³³ In addition to these passages, it is worth quoting Tac. *Ann.* 2, 30, 3 *callidus et novi iuris repertor Tiberius*, having an ironic tone.

³⁴ Cf. Arena, *op. cit.*, 838.

³⁵ Cf. Suet. *Tib.* 11, 4 and *ibid.* 50, 1; also Suet (*Tib.* 21, 3 where the *princeps* who *epistulis aliquot ut peritissimum rei militaris utque unicum p. R. praesidium prosequatur* and *ibid.* 51, 1 together with the aforementioned *codicilli* of Augustus *de acerbitate et intolerantia morum* of Tiberius) does not agree and attest the existence of two different kinds of traditions, one supporting Tiberius and the other opposing him.

from people's glances, and fearing either Danaids' revenge or her deserted husband's anger. But her attempt to remain unseen fails since the furious Aeneas (l. 588 *furiata mente*), noticing her, is about to throw himself against her when Venus, his mother, intervenes to appease his anger and to bring him to reason.

Conte³⁶ has definitively proved that Vergilius was the author of these expunged lines. A long dispute concerning the authorship of these lines arose because of their absence in the *codices potiores* and because of the absence of commentaries by Servius, Servius Danielinus, and Donatus; it is only thanks to Servius Danielinus (*ad Aen.* 2, 566), to the *praefatio serviana*, and to late codes devoid of independent value that these hexameters have been transmitted.

Thus, although *nulla quaestio* about the authorship, the reasons of such an expunction still remain unclear and may be clarified taking into consideration the troublesome equivalence Helen/Julia the Elder.

The *Servius Danielinus* (*ad Aen.* 2, 566) reports that these hexameters *obliti sunt*³⁷ by Tucca and Varius — the grammarians whom Augustus gave the task of “emending” the *Aeneid ut superflua demerent, nihil adderet tamen* (*Serv. comm. in Aen. praef.*) — and that the expunction fulfils two possible purposes (*ad Aen.* 2, 592): the first concerns Aeneas' characterization as *pius* since *turpe est viro forti contra feminam irasci*; the second avoids the contradiction with the episode of Helen and Deiphobus, son of Priamus, in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* (ll. 511-530). Deiphobus tells that Helen helped the Achaean warriors to get in Priamus' house *et contrarium est Helenam in domo Priami fuisse illi rei, quae in sexto dicitur, quia in domo est inventa Deiphobi, postquam ex summa arce vocaverat Graecos*.

Servius' assumptions are consistent but not entirely convincing. Although a *vir fortis* is supposed never to lose his temper with a woman, it is known that Aeneas does not always behave as a gentleman with the *femineus sexus*³⁸ and that he gets angry³⁹, even if *pius*.

³⁶ Cf. G.B. Conte, *L'episodio di Elena nel secondo dell'Eneide: modelli strutturali e critica dell'autenticità*, “RFIC” 106, 1978, 53-62 and Id., Conte, *Questioni di metodo e critica dell'autenticità: discutendo ancora dell'episodio di Elena*, “MD” 56, 2006, 157-179.

³⁷ The meaning of *obliti* is that of G. Thilo, *Servii grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, I, *Aeneidos librorum I-V commentarii*, Hildesheim 1961, 304.

³⁸ There exist a vast literature about the attitude of Aeneas towards Dido (for a detailed bibliography see e.g. F. Della Corte, in *Enciclopedia virgiliana*, II, s.v. *Eneide* (Roma 1985), 251; A. La Penna, in *Enciclopedia virgiliana*, II, s.v. *Didone* (Roma 1985), 55-57).

Besides, although the avoidance of contradiction between the episode in the second book of the *Aeneid* and Deiphobus' narration may be a reliable hypothesis, the two passages are linked by an underlying "ideological strand"⁴⁰: the *fata* are responsible for Helen's *scelus* (cf. *Aen.* 6, 511-512 *set me fata mea et scelus exitiale Lacaenae / his mersere malis*). Venus, then, well explains such ideology when she reminds her furious son that neither Paris nor Helen are to be blamed for the destruction of Troy but exclusively the gods (cf. *Aen.* 2, 601-603 *non tibi Tyndaridis facies invisita Lacaenae / culpatusve Paris: divom inclementia, divom, / has evertit opes sternitque a culmine Troiam*, and the meaningful anaphora *divom*).

The Virgilian lines of the second book and Deiphobus' narration, in which the gods and the fate are made the real responsible, seem to free Aeneas from the blame for having betrayed his homeland.

In fact, when the Romans took over the legend about the Trojan origins of their town in the IV century B.C, two versions of the myth circulated: that about the *pius heros* Aeneas and that about the *proditor* Aeneas who had bartered his betrayal with the Greeks for *pars praedae et domus universa incolumis*⁴¹.

Vergilius removed from the official tradition the defaming version about "Aeneas the betrayer" and introduced the one about the *pius Aeneas*⁴² in the episode of Helen to discharge Aeneas of the blame of *proditio* from the beginning of the poem. The lines, thence, may have fulfilled this purpose until their later *emendatio* in consequence to Ovid's implicit defence of Helen/Julia the Elder in the *Ars* that made Helen an increasingly troublesome character in both literary and political fields.

³⁹ Cf. e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 10, 813-814; 12, 107-108 and *ibid.*, 525-528. About the use of *ira* and *iracundia* in political contexts see R. Syme, *History in Ovid*, Oxford 1978, 224.

⁴⁰ Similarly E. Paratore, *Virgilio. Eneide*, III, *Libri V-VI* (Verona 1979), 290 on Verg. *Aen.* 6, 511-512 *set me fata mea et scelus exitiale Lacaenae / his mersere malis; illa haec monumenta reliquit*, who offers this interpretation "although the actual incompatibility of the two places".

⁴¹ Cf. Dict. 4, 22 with V. Ussani junior, *Enea traditore*, "SIFC" 22, 1947, 112-113; about the *proditio* of Aeneas also see Pascal 1904, 231-236.

⁴² Similarly Ussani, *op. cit.*, 113. Also see R. Heinze, *La tecnica epica di Virgilio*, (Stuttgart 1989), trad. it. Bologna 1996, 100 n. 2, who remarks how the older exegetes often draw the attention to the passages where Vergilius is eager to defend Aeneas from any blame of cowardice and disloyalty towards his homeland.

The present study, thence, has tried to establish a link between the adultery of Helen — evoked in the *Ars* (2, 359-372), in the *Heroides* and in the *Remedia* — and the real adultery committed inside the imperial *domus*.

Menelaus, away from Sparta, left Helen home with Paris, their guest, and provided her with *tempus locumque* to betray as Tiberius, away from Rome, left Julia alone with her lover Iullus Antonius.

Ovid implicitly acquitted Julia by placing the blame exclusively on Tiberius (cf. *Ars* 2, 371-372 *Viderit Atrides, Helenen ego crimine solvo; usa est humani commoditate vir*). Afterwards, the equivalences Helen/Julia the Elder and Menelaus/Tiberius became known in Rome, rumours increased, and, as a probable consequence, the equivocal passages of the *Aeneid* were expunged: they were liable to double interpretations and hints at Julia's adultery. For the same reason, instead, the episode of Helen and Deiphobus of the sixth book of the *Aeneid* was not emended since, this time, Helen played a negative role⁴³, consistent with the disapproval of Julia's immoral behaviour.

Moreover, Varius and Tucca were given the order of emending after Vergilius' death (cf. the aforementioned *Serv. comm. in Aen. praef. Augustus vero, ne tantum opus periret, Tuccam et Varium hac lege iussit emendare, ut superflua demerent, nihil adderent tamen*) and nearly contemporaneously to the opposition literature already in circulation which included the *Ars amandi*⁴⁴.

There is nothing preventing the two grammarians from also emending anything else liable to discredit the image of the mythical ancestor of the *princeps* and his dynasty⁴⁵. To avoid any connection, the passage of the second book of the *Aeneid* was expunged after that Ovid's poetical defence of Helen/Julia had become known. It was Livia, the wife of Augustus, who probably suggested to her husband the expunction since she immediately grasped the underlying denigration against Aeneas/Augustus and Menelaus/Tiberius; after all, she had already worked to build Augustus' "good reputation"⁴⁶.

⁴³ Cfr. Verg. *Aen.* 6, 511-527 that tells the *scelus exitiale Lacaenae* who mimicking a bacchic ritual, shook a torch to recall the Danaoi and hoped to be relieved from her past faults by betraying the Trojans.

⁴⁴ Cfr. Syme, *The crisis* cit., 923, opposed by Murgia, *op. cit.*, 80 and supported by Zecchini, *Il carmen de bello Actiaco* cit., 70.

⁴⁵ Such a political interpretation may be one of the "other vaguer reasons" of Conte, *Questioni di metodo* cit., 158 leading to the expunction of the episode of Helen in the second book of the *Aeneid*.

⁴⁶ About the call to *clementia* from Livia to her husband after the conspiracy of Cinna see Rohr Vio, *op. cit.*, 195. Livia was as informed about the plot as Augustus, together with, obviously, the accomplices and the spies.

According to Conte, Ovid certainly knew the expunged lines as showed by the correspondence between *Aen.* 2, 578 ... *partoque ibit regina triumpho* and *Her.* 16, 133 *ibis Dardanias ingens regina per urbes*⁴⁷. This correspondence is not the only one: for instance, in the fifth epistle of the *Heroides*, Aeon, Paris' deserted wife, hopes that *Sic Helene doleat desertaque coniuge ploret* (l. 75), evoking Vergilius' *deserti coniugis iras* (*Aen.* 2, 572), Helen's fear of Menelaus' rage.

Even after his relegation in Tomis, Ovid continued to evoke the expunged hexameters. The image of Helen having no choice but to implore at the altar of a god is the Virgilian positive portrait of her that probably the exiled Ovid used to embody his condition through a meaningful lexical retrieval. In *Tristia* 5, 2a, in fact, he takes shelter *sacram, quamvis invisus, ad aram* (l. 43), as Helen, *invisa*, takes shelter near the altars (*Aen.* 2, 574 *atque aris invisus sedebat*).

Finally, Helen's portrayal in the second book of the *Aeneid* seems to summon the reader's compassion: she is sitting speechless among the ruins of the temple of Vesta (cf. the meaningful *tacitam* in l. 568, foregrounded by the metrical pause) as hated by the Trojans as by the Greeks, and fearful of their revenge (ll. 571-574, by a skilled use of parallelisms).

Once again Venus, who had already calmed Aeneas down, exculpates Helen and places the blame of the destruction of Troy exclusively on the gods' cruelty (ll. 601-603 *Non tibi Tyndaridis facies invisus Lacaenae / culpatusve Paris: divom inclementia, divom, / has evertit opes sternitque a culmine Troiam*)⁴⁸.

Ovid, following Venus' merciful attitude, acquits Helen of the *crimen adulterii* and places the blame on her foolish husband (cf. the aforementioned ll. 371-372 *Viderit Atrides, Helenen ego crimine solvo; / usa est humani commoditate viri*).

Thus, Ovid ironically⁴⁹ retrieves those troublesome lines of the *Aeneid*, reshapes them and compels Augustus to order their *emendatio*⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Cf. Conte, *Questioni di metodo* cit., 166-167.

⁴⁸ These lines attest the preexistence of ll. 567-588: already E. Parator, *Virgilio. Eneide*, I, *Libri I-II* (Verona 1978), 346-347.

⁴⁹ Conte, *Questioni di metodo* cit., 166.

⁵⁰ Ovid had already made ironic use of the myth of Aeneas and his irreverent reshaping of the Virgilian lines further demonstrates his political views. About the myth of Aeneas "played for laughs" see Davis 2006, 105; For a meaningful analysis of the passages of the *Metamorphoses* reshaping some lines of the *Aeneid* according to political purposes see S. Lundström, *Ovids Metamorphosen*

The emendation will be still more necessary after Ovid's challenging *libellus* of auto-defence. In the second book of the *Tristia* he seems to reduce the epic poem celebrating the Augustan *domus* to the mere fourth book of the *Aeneid*, the book about the illegitimate relation between Aeneas — the mythical ancestor of the prince! — and the queen of Tyre, Dido. Once again Ovid manipulates the Virgilian lines in order to show how even the origins of the imperial dynasty are to be traced back to an adulterous relation.

This time, yet, the protagonist is just the precursor of Augustus: cf. *Trist.* 2, 533-536 *et tamen ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor / contulit in Tyrios arma virumque toros, / nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto / quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor*, lines endowed with a pondered choice and *dispositio verborum*. Thanks to a 'fractioned' structure (nominative-genitive-nominative-genitive-nominative), the first hexameter draws the reader's attention either to the work, or to its author (by *auctor* emphatically placed at the end), or to Augustus — he who, more than others, had the poem at heart, (cf. the meaningful possessive *tuus* gives the line a more sentimental tone); the following line mocks the incipit of the *Aeneid*: the well-known Virgilian *arma virumque cano* (*Aen.* 1, 1) is replaced by the irreverent *arma virumque toros* (*Trist.* 2, 534), where *toros* has a strong erotic connotation⁵¹ and is foregrounded by being at the end of the line, by the alliterative hyperbaton of the adjective *Tyrius* and by the poetical plural which "multiplies Aeneas' Phoenician (luxurious, lustful, exotic) and Carthaginian (anti-Roman) love affairs"⁵².

Ovid gives similar relevance to the following couplet by the litotes *non legitimo foedere* (l. 536) that bridges the metrical pause and by an etymological play with the initial *nec legitur* of the previous hexameter⁵³.

und die Politik des Kaisers, Uppsala 1980, 56-63. 106-107 and A. Coppola, *Diomede in età augustea. Appunti su Iullo Antonio*, in *Hesperia I. Studi sulla grecità di Occidente*, 1990, 133: in the Ovidian evocation of the Virgilian episode of Achaemenides, evoked in the third book of the *Metamorphoses*, P.V. Cova (*L'episodio di Achemenide: Ovidio contro Virgilio*, in "Analecta Brixiana". *Contributi dell'Istituto di Filologia e Storia dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* (Milano 2004), 19 and n. 20) detects a "subtle moral criticism" perhaps aiming to "demystify the official hypocrisy pretending to believe in traditional ideals".

⁵¹ Cf. R. Pichon, *Index verborum amatoriorum* (Hildesheim-Zürich-New York 1991), 281-282.

⁵² Similarly A. Barchiesi, *Il poeta e il principe. Ovidio e il discorso augusteo* (Roma-Bari) 1994, 19.

⁵³ About *lex* from *legere* see *ThL* VII 2, 34-42.

The image of Aeneas and of the *Aeneid* offered by Ovid is, thence, very different from that of the laudatory poem *par excellence* celebrating the imperial dynasty⁵⁴.

Defending his *carmen* through an irreverent evocation of the Virgilian poem, Ovid almost seems to suggest that the *princeps* does not notice (or he pretends not to notice) Vergilius' faults: even the poet charged to celebrate the Augustan *domus* is not flawless and writes immoral lines in contrast with the law (cf. the aforementioned *non legitimo foedere* in l. 536). Quoting Barchiesi, it seems "almost a grassing to Augustus"⁵⁵.

But Ovid goes still farther making a daring parallel between himself and Vergilius. Vergilius, *iuvenis*, had celebrated with no consequences (l. 538 *luserat*) the love stories of Phyllis and Amaryllis, whereas the old Ovid was punished for some lines that, *iuvenis*, he had thought harmless (ll. 537-546): the bucolic hexameters of the young Vergilius, notwithstanding their erotic tone, were morally tolerable unlike the Ovidian *Ars*.

Ovid's grassing on Vergilius perhaps fuelled rumours: according to the *vox populi*, the emendation of ll. 567-588 in the second book of the *Aeneid* was the response of the *princeps* to the challenging Ovidian denunciation.

The expunction may, thus, date back to 9 A.D, year of the appearance in Rome of Ovid's *libellus* of auto-defence. This book did not help to relieve him of the punishment; the grassing on the poet who had immortalized the *princeps*' glory, the defence of Julia the Elder underlying the *Ars*, the overt opposition to Tiberius and to the Claudii's accession to the throne⁵⁶ well explain why, even *post*

⁵⁴ Another ironic reshaping of Verg. *Aen.* 1, 1 is in Ov. *am.* 1, 1, 1 (according to G.B. Conte, *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario* (Torino 1985), 63 "The Ovidian antiphrastic reshaping of the incipit of the *Aeneid* ironically mocks the high epic poetry from which it differs").

⁵⁵ Barchiesi, *op. cit.*, 19. Remarkably, C. Newlands, *Transgressive acts: Ovid's treatment of the Ides of March*, "CPh" 91, 1996, 330-331, regards as "politically subversive" the evocation of another famous Anaeadic passage, the *fabula* of Anna, in *Fast.* 3, 545-654, and S. Lamm, *Die Darstellung des Augustus bei Tibull und Ovid*, Berlin 2006, 43-55 points out the Ovidian parodic and caricatural representation of Aeneas but also Ovid's always respectful attitude towards the *princeps*.

⁵⁶ About Ovid's interest in the political manoeuvrings inside the Augustan line of succession see Berrino *Ovidio e la difficile successione cit.*, 149-164.

mortem Augusti, for Ovid there was neither any remission of sentence nor any permission to come back nearby Rome.

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