

Epic and genre



Epic/tragedy

- epic engages with tragedy by drawing on tragic intertexts (e.g. Apollonius' *Argonautica* as “prequel” to Euripides' *Medea*)
tragedies also drawing on epic intertexts (Seneca using Vergil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*).

Cross-contamination of literary tradition complicates issue of detecting what is “epic” and what is “tragic”.

Epic incorporating features and content of tragedy

- epic engages with tragedy by incorporating features associated with tragedy (e.g. messenger speech: see Aeneas' messenger-like speech narrating fall of Troy in *Aeneid* 2) and content associated with tragedy (which then also becomes associated with epic): e.g. Furies (from Aeschlyus' *Oresteia* on); also > epic (e.g. in the *Aeneid* and its epic successors)

“in wild disorder each man snatches **arms, arms** (arma, arma), whether his own or a stranger's; they change helmets and drive horses into yokes not theirs. Fierce love of death and slaughter rages in every breast and nothing stands in their passion's way; they plunge, **making up for their delay** (redimuntque moras)” (*Theb.* 7.135-9, tr. Shackleton Bailey)

‘Aeneid’ and tragedy

- “tragic” nature of the Carthaginian episode (see e.g. Harrison; Horsfall; Panoussi; Spence): e.g. fall in fortune of *regina* Dido; Dido’s apparent “moral flaw”, *hamartia*; division of Book 4 into 3 parts (“acts”) with *at regina* (4.1; 296; 504); tragic intertexts: Dido evoking Sophocles’ Phaedra and Ajax, and Euripides’ Medea
- metageneric markers for “tragic” material: theatrical terms and features: e.g. Carthaginians shown building theatre foundations, 1.429 (Carthage = backdrop to the setting of Dido's tragedy); cf. *scaena* at 1.164; simile (471 *scaenis*); buskins (tragic footwear: (*OLD* 1b, s.v. *cot(h)urnus*) 1.337 (*coturno*): goes on to give information/ introductory material: Venus’ “prologue” (as start of tragedy)

Tragedy and epic

“She would like be Pentheus in his frenzy when he was seeing columns of Furies and a double sun and two cities of Thebes; or like Orestes, son of Agamemnon, driven in flight across the **stage** (scaenis) by his own mother armed with her torches and black snakes, while the avenging Furies sat at the door” (*Aen.* 4.469-73, of Dido hounded by Aeneas in dreams)

- “tragic” marked up by advertisement of epicness (presence of another genre leads to assertion of epicness which then flags up generic intrusion): e.g. *arma* used to conjure the epic genre (cf. *Aen.* 1.1 *arma virumque cano*)

Epic marking up tragic



“old as he is, he vainly throws his long-disused **armour** (arma) about his aged trembling shoulders, girds on his useless sword, and rushes to his death among his thronging foes.” (*Aen.* 2.509-11, tr. Fairclough and Goold)

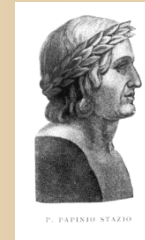
“The reappearance of the key word *arma* at this point of the narration and in the initial position of the hexameter gives Priam's action a symbolic connotation. By wearing his *arma*, Priam attempts, futilely, to regain an epic dimension and to break away from tragic space” (Rossi 2004: 48)



Statius' *Thebaid* and tragedy

- *Thebaid* Nemean episode:

Euripides' *Hypsipyle* is key tragic intertext (cf. Soerink)
metageneric gestures e.g. theatrical language (*fabula*)
evoking presence of epic (*arma*)



Epic and tragedy

“And yet come tell us, whosoever you be.... come tell us, as we briskly leave your waters, what is your home and country, under what stars you draw your breath. And say, who is that father? For the gods are not far from you, though Fortune has deserted, high blood is in your aspect, awe breathes in your afflicted face.’ The Lemnian sighs, **stays awhile** (cunctata) in modest tears, then makes reply: ‘Ruler, you bid me freshen monstrous wounds—**Furies** (Furias) and Lemnos and weapons brought into narrow beds and men fought down with swords of shame. Ah, to my heart the crime returns, the cold **Fury** (Eumenis). Alas for them on whom was brought this madness! **Ah night!** (o nox!) Ah father! For I am she, captains, lest perchance you be ashamed of your kindly hostess, she who alone snatched her parent away and hid him. **Why do I weave a long preamble to a tale of woe?** (quid longa malis exordia necto?) And **arms summon you** (uos arma uocant) and the great enterprise you have at heart. This much it is enough to tell: I am Hypsipyle, child of famous Thoas; a captive, I bear the thralldom of your Lycurgus.’” (Adrastus to Hypsipyle after soldiers’ thirst has been quenched and Hypsipyle’s reply, *Theb.* 5.20-39, tr. Shackleton-Bailey)

Epic



“not the Lemnian songs, relieving me the labour of weft-thread and web-stretching shuttle, that the Muse desires me to sing” (Hypsipyle, Eur. *Hyp.* fr 752.f9.-11)

- Hypsipyle goes on to tell Lemnian massacre story > Argive princes (who have been reprising role as bit characters in Euripides' *Hypsipyle*) here listen to a story familiar from tragedy > futilely postponing entry as key players in world of Theban tragedies (*Thebaid* 7-12 evoke Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes*, Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Phoenissae*)



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