

THE APOTHEOSIS OF AUGUST IN OVID: A TEXTUAL PROBLEM

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In *Met.* XV, 838f. we read:

*nec nisi cum senior +similes+ aequaverit annos
aetherias sedes cognataque sidera tanget.*

The word *similes* is evidently corrupt, and has not yet been healed: for all the details cf. Bömer's commentary *ad loc.*, and Magnus' apparatus. Heinsius changed *similes* into *Pylios*: his conjecture is too violent paleographically to be acceptable. Moreover, the phrase *Pylios aequaverit annos* could only mean "after he reached Nestor's age" and would be unsuitable: in *Pylios annos* (*Pont.* II,8,41f.) meant "remain alive in old age", not "dying". Housman suggested *meritis*, which is paleographically rough and conceptually inappropriate (*aequaverit annos* indicates *aequalitas*, i.e. equality of age).

A suitable and flattering comparison in line 838 would be between the aged deified Augustus ascending to heaven and an aged deity as his parallel. Now, the only deity who was old (the others were envisaged and represented in art as young or at most middle-aged) was *Fatua*, "represented...commonly as an aged woman", and "identified with...Semele"¹.

From all this it follows that we can restore the text of line 838 by conjecturing Semeles to replace the nonsensical *similes*.

For Semeles in the same *sedes* cf. *Met.* III,278. As an aged deity Augustus was not alone, so Ovid implies, witness Semele.

1. Cf. A.S.Murray, *Who's who in Mythology*, London 1988, pp. 140, 143. Murray drew his data from Welcher and Preller.