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Tragic Theoxena: Livy, Iterative History, and Performance

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Abstract

The Theoxena episode (Liv. 40.4) is a striking example of how Livy crafts a tragic narrative through intratextual and intertextual references. Discussed briefly by earlier scholarship, the iterative nature of the Theoxena episode has not been fully explored, especially in the context of tragedy. In this paper, I examine Theoxena's characterization in four aspects: (1) Livy's vocabulary throughout the episode that establishes Theoxena's place within the family unit, and highlights the transgression associated with her actions; (2) Theoxena's relationship with Verginius and how Livy differentitates between a noble act of sacrifice and a horrific act of murder; (3) Further intratexts with Livian episodes which deepen the connection between Theoxena and tragedy; (4) Theoxena's relationship with Euripides' *Medeia*, and how Livy uses this intertext to paint Theoxena as a murderous mother. I argue that Livy uses the performance of the tragedy genre and gender to create a tragic space in which Theoxena's actions are portrayed not only as heinous but, more importantly, as transgressive and disruptive. In a single sentence, then, Livy uses the iterative nature of Greek tragedy to make the Theoxena episode dramatic on several levels, which rely on literary echoes of his own corpus and of Greek and Roman tragedy on the whole.

Keywords

Livy; Historiography; Tragedy; gender; Theoxena

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Introduction

It is a tragic tale: a parent commits against their child to protect them from a greater threat.[1] They do this out of love for their child, believing it is better for them to be dead than to suffer at the hands of a tyrant. This is not the story of Livy's Verginius, similar though it may be. This article instead explores the tale of Theoxena, as told in Book 40 of the *Ab urbe condita.*

In 182 BCE, Philippos V of Macedon murdered Herodikos of Thessaly and the husbands of his two daughters, Theoxena and Archo; the women were left to care for their young sons. While Theoxena did not wish to marry again, her sister Archo married Poris, and they had several children together. After Archo died, Theoxena, not wishing her nieces and nephews to live without a mother, married Poris. After learning that Philippos would likely persecute her family, she suggested to Poris that they kill the children to prevent them from falling into Philip's hands. Poris was horrified at the suggestion, so instead, the family left Thessaly for Euboia, but Philippos' men found them. Theoxena took up a sword and a cup of poison and instructed her children to choose one of them so that they could be free. She killed the children, then threw herself into the sea with her husband.[2]

This paper explores the intertextual and intratextual links of the Theoxena episode in Livy, with a consideration of tragedy throughout. This discussion of Theoxena considers the presentation of her motherhood; her brief speech in which she encourages her children to kill themselves; her intratexts with other Livian women; and her intertexts with the tragic Medea. Then, this article argues for Livy's ability to imbue the Theoxena episode with tragedy through the use of set pieces associated with the Euripidean Medea and linguistic markers that become tragic through their iterative nature within Livy's narrative. The presentation of Theoxena's gender is inextricably linked to the presentation of her motherhood, both of which are established as traditional within Livy's prose, yet they are disrupted through her choices and actions. This presentation, paired with the episode's tragedy, denotes a form of performance in which Theoxena's status as both a woman and a tragic character within a historiographical text is put on display.

A variety of studies have discussed Theoxena in Livy, but none have thoroughly explored the tragic and iterative nature of the episode itself. Smethurst was among the first scholars to examine Theoxena. He argued that Livy arouses pity from his reader by presenting Theoxena as a 'Greek Verginia' in how she escapes Philippos' lust.[3] Arieti, too, compared her to the Verginia episode, suggesting that she instead takes on the role of Verginia's father as she would rather see the children dead than be victims of sexual assault.[4] More recently, Keegan continued this trend, comparing Theoxena to Livian and historical women in an attempt to better understand her character. He concludes that Theoxena's characterisation and actions reflect Livy's wider narrative strategies concerning women.[5] McClain's article on female direct speech in Livy also discusses Theoxena, though such discussion is limited. She argues that Theoxena's speech is centred around death to highlight her motherly desperation.[6] While this article takes into account the various aspects of the Theoxena episode that have been discussed by scholarship, from her connections to other Livian women, to the tragic nature of the episode and her

[1] Translations of ancient Greek texts follow the Loeb Classical Library. Latin authors are quoted in the original with adapted English translations also following the LCL.
[2] A summary based on Livy's (40.4) account.
[3] Smethurst, 1950: 85.
[4] Arieti, 1997: 218.
[5] Keegan, 2021: 132–133.
[6] McClain, 2020: 243–244.

speech, I move further into discussing the episode by utilising linguistic and narrative analyses. In this way, I demonstrate the performative, tragic, and iterative nature of Livy's episode.

Naturally, then, more important to this article is the broader scholarship on the nature of tragedy within historiography. However, the article lacks the scope to delve into the many and varying interpretations of tragic history as it shifts its focus. Hence, I discuss some particularly influential studies that examine the relationship between tragedy and history. As part of this scholarly debate, Walbank was among the first to counter von Fritz's argument for an Aristotelian version of tragic history.[7] Instead, Walbank argued that the genres of tragedy and history were fundamentally linked by their shared ancestor, the epic, and a wealth of shared features, including performance.[8] Fornara followed on this approach, discarding the concept of a separate school of 'tragic history' and instead asserting that both genres arouse pleasure in their audiences through imitation of emotion.[9] Marincola likewise rejected the notion of a separate school of tragic history, arguing that the tropes associated with 'tragic history', such as reversals of fortune, are found also in Thucydides.[10] Furthermore, he notes that Roman historiography was always associated with drama and poetics, as Ennius was both a poet and a historian.[11] Rutherford further developed this approach, examining how tragedy and history are related. They both include emotion, narrative features, intellectualism, and the supposition that history is tragedy. Rutheford concluded that historians can use tragic history within their writing for effect, and that there is no such sub-genre as 'tragic history'.[12] Most relevant to this work is Santoro L'Hoir's analysis of how Roman historians used tragedy in their histories, with a particular focus on Tacitus. For L'Hoir, Tacitus employed thematic tragic vocabulary and references to stagecraft to create tragic moments. More specifically, she argues that Tacitus' treatment of women in the *Annales* is crafted around the deployment of transgressive vocabulary and 'bad' female behaviour. These elements are intentionally used within Tacitus' narrative framework to generate tragedy.[13] Much like Santoro L'Hoir, I examine similar strategies for creating tragedy in Livy, focusing on the vocabulary and narrative structures he uses, which create repeated performances throughout his corpus.

My discussion of the Theoxena episode begins with a dissection of performance and performativity, constructing how we may diagnose performance and tragedy within a written text. Then, I move to an analysis of Theoxena herself, especially her characterisation, how (and where) Livy situates her within the familial unit, and how he signals the transgressive nature of her actions. After this, I consider Theoxena through a series of Livian intratexts, starting with Verginia, and the ways that Livy makes Theoxena a tragic agent through her otherness. I also analyse Theoxena's connections to the Astapen Women (Liv. 28), Tullia (Liv. 1), and the women of the Syracuse Conspiracy (Liv. 26), all of which add to the tragedy of the heroine. Finally, I consider Theoxena's characterisation compared to Medeia, including the methods of death which both employ, and their relationship with motherhood. In a sentence, this article can be understood as an examination of the iterative and performative nature of Livy's history through the character of Theoxena.

[7] von Fritz, 1958: 85–145.
[8] Walbank, 1960: 229–233.
[9] Fornara, 1983: 123–124.
[10] Marincola, 1997: 23.
[11] Marincola, 1997: 26.
[12] Rutherford, 2007: 501–514.
[13] Santoro L'Hoir, 2006: 111–158.

What's in a Name? Performance and Performativity

To thoroughly and definitively analyse aspects of performance in the Theoxena episode, it is useful first to define performance and performativity. The definition of these terms is twofold: (1) I consider the performance of gender, and (2) I approach dramatic performance as a framework that influences Livy's portrayal of Theoxena. In general, performance and performativity are challenging to define given the range of meanings they hold. To perform can mean to excel, to act, and to show off simultaneously, but none of these truly encapsulate aspects of gender performance.[14] In the context of this article, we may define performance as 'showing doing', that is, performing (*sic*) an action for the purpose of it being seen by others.[15] In the context of the Theoxena episode, where feminine behaviour is at the core of the narrative, performance must align with gender performance, in which aspects of femininity or feminine behaviour are exaggerated for internal and external audiences. Furthermore, the performance, be it gendered or applied to all the various characters in a tragic play, only exists within the bounds of that performance.[16] For gender performance and performativity, one must look to Butler, who argued that gender is itself an act. In other words, gender is not definitive or corporeal, but rather, it is a performance which sustains itself by being continually enacted in social contexts.[17] Butler's arguments went further than the work of West and Zimmerman, who similarly had argued that gender is an 'accomplishment' that is achieved through social interaction.[18] These approaches emphasise performance in relation to some form of social viewership. Essentially, performance cannot exist without an audience. Furthermore, gender performance relies on iterative and sustained performances; this quality is also evident in Livy's portrayal of female actors through his consistent intratextuality. The concept of gender performance becomes especially relevant when we consider Roman and Greek dramatic performances, in which women were enacted by men on stage.[19] Then we can speak of tragic femininity, which is acted out on a stage for the benefit of an audience.

The relationship between historiography, drama, and rhetoric is expressed through the performative aspects of historiography itself.[20] In his preface, Livy shows an awareness of the innate performativity of historiographical writing: 'each new writer believed that in their facts they can attain greater authenticity, or that in their style, they can surpass the rudeness of antiquity'.[21] Every new writer of Roman history claimed to write a newer, more complete history. The combination of authorial self-posturing and the undeniable influence of drama and rhetoric on the genre reinforces the general sense of historiography's performativity. However, the relationship between historiography and performance does not provide sufficient context to argue that the Theoxena episode is definitely

[14] *OED s.v.* Perform I.1.a; I.2.a.; I.4.c.
[15] Schechner, 2013: 28.
[16] Schechner, 2013: 169.
[17] 'Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means', Butler, 1990: 163–180. Consider Simone de Beauvoir's (2010: 293): 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.'
[18] West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126–127.
[19] Dutsch, 2015: 17.
[20] The bibliography for the relationship between historiography, drama, and rhetoric is voluminous, approaching the various facets of each genre and their connections. Some seminal studies include Brunt, 1980; Woodman, 1988; Wiseman, 1994; 1998.
[21] Liv. *Praef.* 2–3: dum novi semper scriptores aut in rebus certius aliquid allaturos se aut scribendi arte rudem vetustatem superaturos credunt.

performative. Thus, I attempt to diagnose performance through aspects of Livy's narrative, essentially performance as it appears in the fabric of the narrative itself. For this, I believe it is essential to look at dramatic stagecraft. Stagecraft may comprise costumes, settings, props, and gestures, all of which were vital to the production of ancient (and modern) drama.[22] Therefore, when Livy refers to any aspect of stagecraft, it may imply further dramatic structures at play.

However, stagecraft alone is not enough to argue for an episode's performativity. Livy frequently interacts with and imitates the narrative structures characteristic of tragedy. Acts such as murder and suicide often feature in female-led episodes, and they often carry with them a sense of pollution, which is synonymous with tragedy.[23] Furthermore, Livy employs standard tragic narrative techniques such as reversals of fortune and recognition scenes in episodes that already contain references to stagecraft.[24] The use of concepts such as *peripeteia* and *pathos* by Greek and Latin historians is central to the introduction of tragedy into historical narratives.[25] However, I argue Livy goes further than the typical features associated with tragic history. The combination of visuality, implied by references to stagecraft, these tropes of tragic history, and the iterative nature of Livian history, all work in conjunction to create distinctly performative episodes. Therefore, I employ these markers to: (1) demonstrate that the Theoxena episode is tragic through its use of tragic stagecraft and themes evocative of the tragic genre; and (2) propose that this performance of the tragic genre also implies a performance of Theoxena's femininity as a character, written by Livy, in a narrative which, in itself, is a play-tragedy where men would have played female characters.

Ferox Femina: Theoxena in Livy

The introduction of Theoxena is crafted to highlight her multifaceted roles within her family and society. Livy emphasises her status as both a daughter and a wife, as well as her capacity for motherhood through several references to these social roles:

> in viduitate relictae filiae singulos filios parvos habentes; Theoxena et Archo nomina iis erant mulieribus. Theoxena multis petentibus aspernata nuptias est; Archo Poridi cuidam, longe principi gentis Aenianum, nupsit, et apud eum plures enixa partus, parvis admodum relictis omnibus, decessit. Theoxena, ut in suis manibus liberi sororis educarentur, Poridi nupsit; et tamquam omnes ipsa enixa foret, suum sororisque filios in eadem habebat cura.
>
> The daughters were left widowed, each having one young son. The names of these women were Theoxena and Archo. Though many desired her, Theoxena rejected the idea of marriage; Archo married a certain Poris, by far the most distinguished of the Aenian people but after she gave birth to many children, she died in his house, leaving

[22] For Roman republican tragedy and its associated stagecraft, see Manuwald, 2011: 62–77. For specific aspects of staging: for 'tragic boots', see Beare, 1964: 191; for *togae* as costumes in a *toga praetexta*, see Manuwald, 2001: 26–29; for the effect of staging on audience perception, see Erasmo, 2004: 2–7. Dutsch (2015) discusses comic costumes as a feminine façade and gendered performance within a comic space.
[23] Meinel (2015) examines the links between pollution and Greek tragedy.
[24] See Zeitlin, 2012; McClure, 2015, for the exploration of the role of women in recognition scenes. For a theoretical discussion on (internal and external) recognition, Sissa, 2006. For the reversal of fortune in *Oedipus Rex*, Vernant and duBois, 1978.
[25] Fornara, 1983: 127–133; Rutherford, 2007: 508–510.

> all of them still very young. So that she may have the upbringing of her sister's children in her own hands, Theoxena married Poris and had the same care for her own son and the sons of her sister as if she had herself given birth to all of them.
>
> Livy 40.4.2–5

In this short section of the episode, Livy presents Theoxena through all her potential familial roles. Following the murder of her husband, Livy returns Theoxena to her daughterly status by referring to her as *filia*, perhaps referring to the lack of protection the two sisters now had as fatherless, husbandless women. The next piece of information we receive about Theoxena is that she rejected marriage for a second time. Livy uses *aspernor*, which shows Theoxena's aversion towards the possibility of marriage.[26] The fact that she can reject this marriage indicates that she is no longer under *patria potestas*, highlighting her lack of daughterly status and her possible independence.[27] This is set in stark contrast to Archo, who immediately marries Poris, seemingly for his status and wealth. Then Livy refers to Archo's wifehood when she marries Poris. He then grants Theoxena a second, metaphorical motherhood when he writes that she took on her sister's children 'as if she had herself given birth to all of them'.[28] Livy uses *enixa*, which he also uses to describe Archo's literal bearing of her children. The repeated vocabulary equates Theoxena's fostering with natural motherhood and promotes the sense of a literal, not figurative, birth. It is possible that Livy introduced Theoxena in this way to ensure that her multiple statuses were cemented in her characterisation before moving on to focus on her motherhood in the remainder of the episode. The fact that Theoxena takes responsibility for her sister's children would have likely been common for Roman mothers, given high divorce rates and spousal death, which would result in blended families.[29] In the introduction to Theoxena, Livy presents her as acting within relative accordance with the expected roles of a Roman woman. She is a mother and wife who casts aside her independence to foster her sister's children.

Livy hints at Theoxena's transgressive actions early in the episode. He writes that Theoxena 'turned her heart to a dreadful thing' (*ad rem atrocem animum adiecit*) when she plotted to 'kill them all with her own hands' (*sua manu…omnes interfecturam*), but Poris was 'horrified at the mention of such a detestable act' (*abominatus mentionem tam foedi facinoris*).[30] While Theoxena does not murder her children in the same vein as Medeia, Livy frames Theoxena's plot as murder. His vocabulary choice here also serves to define the corruption of Theoxena's motherhood. The repeated terminology for wicked, terrible, and heinous acts (*atrox, abominatus, foedus, facinus)* defines the transgressive quality of Theoxena's motherhood.[31] Livy returns to the same vocabulary later in the episode when he writes that Theoxena 'turned her thoughts back to the heinous act she had contemplated', again, referring to murdering her children.[32] The ring composition ensures the audience realises that Theoxena's transgression is not sudden: it is a fundamental aspect of her motherhood. Livy presents Theoxena's maternal independence as potentially dangerous, since, while mothers held high status, their power within the family should not usurp that of the father if the household's social structure is to be maintained.

[26] *OLD. s.v. aspernor* 1; 2.
[27] Frier and McGinn, 2004: 19–20.
[28] Liv. 40.4.5: et tamquam omnes ipsa enixa foret.
[29] See Bradley, 1991: 79–99.
[30] Liv. 40.4.7.
[31] *OLD s.v. atrox* 6a; *s.v. foedus* 4a; *s.v. facinus* 1b; *facinus* is often used with an adjective to define the quality of the deed.
[32] Liv. 40.4.13: ad multo ante praecogitatum revoluta facinus.

Before Theoxena proceeds with her plan, she gives a brief speech to her children where she presents them with methods of death. Livy writes:

> et posito in conspectu poculo strictisque gladiis 'mors' inquit 'una vindicta est. viae ad mortem hae sunt; qua quemque animus fert, effugite superbiam regiam. agite, iuvenes mei, primum qui maiores estis, capite ferrum, aut haurite poculum, si segnior mors iuvat.'
>
> Setting the cup before their eyes along with unsheathed swords, she said: 'Death alone is our freedom. These are the paths to death; use whichever method you please, escape the king's tyrannical behaviour. Come, my children, older ones first, take the sword or drain the cup, if you prefer a slower death.'
>
> Livy 40.4.13–14

While Livy previously framed Theoxena's plot as murder, we may examine to what extent her actions qualify as infanticide. Van Hooff asks the same question: 'Can suicide committed on orders be regarded as a *mors voluntaria*?'[33] Theoxena's speech suggests there was little choice in the matter. Livy has Theoxena use four imperatives: *effugite*, *agite*, *capite*, and *haurite*. The children are not given a choice as to whether they will live or die, and Theoxena alone is responsible for their deaths.[34] The ages of Theoxena's children (adopted and natural) raise questions about the persuasive power of the commands. Theoxena describes the children as *iuvenes* in her speech, which implies they are young adults, not young children.[35] The image of a child being forced to commit suicide is lost with Livy's vocabulary in Theoxena's speech, and instead, she is portrayed as a mother encouraging her children to free themselves from tyranny through a political suicide.[36] Despite this, Theoxena is still the instigator of the suicide, and Livy does portray her encouragement of death in a murderous light. Earlier in the episode, he states that 'she turned her thoughts to the gruesome plan and had the heart to say that she would kill them all with her own hands'.[37] This, in addition to the vocabulary surrounding the act throughout the episode, seems to be an attempt to horrify the act, despite Theoxena not being directly responsible for the deaths of her children and step-children. The horrific nature of the act aligns with other child deaths in tragedy, which are often portrayed as sacrificial. Iphigenia and Polyxena are two such examples whose deaths are literal sacrificial *topoi* in Greek tragedy.[38] At first, one could note several differences between these virgin deaths and the deaths of Theoxena's children, such as age, and the fact that the gender of Theoxena's children is not specified. However, Livy's framing of Theoxena's actions purposefully portrays them as something akin to the horrific nature of child sacrifice we find

[33] van Hooff, 1990: 94.
[34] McClain (2020: 244) also notes Theoxena's use of imperatives but argues that her speech is bookended by death, cf. Liv. 40.4.14.
[35] Liv. 40.4.14. *OLD s.v. iuvenis* 1; *TLL* VII 734–737, IA.
[36] For more on enforced and political suicides, see Edwards, 2007: 114–143; Hill, 2004: 183–212. Political suicides were often considered quintessentially Roman deaths, especially from the time of Cato the Younger. However, a variety of other non-Roman characters commit political suicide, such as the Astapan women (Liv. 28.23) or Sophoniba (Liv. 30.12.11–15.11), see Martin, 1942; Haley, 1989; Fabre-Serris, 2021.
[37] Liv. 40.4.6–7.
[38] Loraux (1991: 31–34) notes that virgins are often sacrificed in tragedy (with Antigone as the exception). See Aesch. *Ag.* 223–247 for the sacrifice of Iphigenia; Eur. *Hec.* 522–579 for the sacrifice of Polyxena.

in the broader field of Greek tragedy. The lines between forced suicide, political suicide, and murder are blurred so that Theoxena's act is portrayed in a Medean fashion.

Death is Our Freedom: Theoxena and Verginia

Livy's choice of vocabulary elsewhere suggests a possible intratextual link in the episode: the Verginia episode. Both Verginius and Theoxena declare that only death can free their children from a tyrant.[39] Livy even uses the same vocabulary in both episodes: the Latin verb *vindico* is heavily associated with slavery and manumission.[40] Similarly, the threat of sexual assault is present in both narratives. The Verginia episode revolves around the threat of sexual assault that the heroine faces from Appius Claudius. The episode is even introduced with a reference to Appius' lust: 'The desire to rape a plebian virgin seized Appius Claudius'.[41] Likewise, Theoxena believes that the guards of the king will assault her children: 'she thought that they [the children] would be subjected to the wantonness not only of the king, but also of the guards.[42] *Why, then, is Theoxena presented as a tragic and transgressive figure?* The difference may be attributed to gender and ethnicity factors. Verginius, as a Roman father, had the legal right to take his daughter's life, and the backdrop of Roman *libertas* in the episode ensures that his actions are not considered transgressive.[43] Theoxena's actions are othered by her non-Romanness.[44] She is not the first foreign agent of tragedy in Livy. The house of Tarquin is established as foreign to Rome (even though they are still Italian), and Livy creates a framework in which they are explicitly linked to the tragic action in Book One.[45] Livy makes it clear that no *Roman* mother would willingly kill her child, and according to Livy, an act such as infanticide can only happen on non-Italian shores. Theoxena's foreignness allows her to take on the role of a tragic agent within Livy's history, where she both establishes the antithesis of proper Roman maternal behaviour and simultaneously creates a space for tragic actions.

A transgressive, foreign woman performing tragic-coded acts within a space defined as dramatic can only be described as a performance of tragedy. Indeed, transgressive femininity is a cornerstone of Greek tragedy, often featuring female protagonists who act against expected social roles. Clytemnestra subverts her wifehood by murdering Agamemnon; Antigone defies Creon, her *kyrios* and king, by burying Polynices; and Medeia discards her motherhood by murdering her sons.[46]

[39] Liv. 3.48.5: Hoc te uno quo possum' ait 'modo, filia, in libertatem vindico. Arieti (1997: 218) argues that Theoxena takes on the role of Verginius to save her children from sexual assault.
[40] *OLD s.v. vindicta* 1a.
[41] Liv. 3.44.2: Ap. Claudium virginis plebeiae stuprandae libido cepit.
[42] Liv. 40.4.6: ludibrio futuros non regis modo sed custodum etiam libidini rata.
[43] Even though the power of the paterfamilias was often tempered in reality (Dixon, 1992: 40–49), Verginia is still under the complete power of her father, and she would be expected to obey his commands (Hallett, 1984: 136–144). See also Langlands, 2006: 97–108.
[44] We can assume that Theoxena was Greek, given that Livy (40.4.1) describes how Theoxena's father was '*principem Thessalorum*' (a leading man in Thessaly). I use 'non-Roman' here as generic terminology for those who were not of Roman descent. For more on race and ethnicity in the ancient world, see Cornell, 1997: 9–21; Isaac, 2004; McCoskey, 2012; Kennedy *et al.*, 2013; Haarmann (2014).
[45] See Liv. 1.46–59 for tragic actions by the house of Tarquin; Michels, 1951; Feldherr, 1998: 187–193.
[46] For more on Clytemnestra and her self-representation as a wife and mother, see Chesi, 2014a: 1015; 2014b. For Clytemnestra as a punisher of men, Gkotzampasopoulou, 2022–2023. Simas (2020) provides a complete analysis of Clytemnestra's character from Homer to late Greek tragedy. For Antigone's lament as a means of reasserting her familial ties, see Moro, 2022. Cavarero (2010: 51) argues that Antigone's characterisation revolves around her unfulfilled role as a wife and mother. Coo (2020) discusses the politics of sisterhood in *Antigone*. See Dibble, 1992, for Antigone's 'androgynous' communication in *Antigone*. The trope of gender subversion does not only apply to women. Pentheus symbolically becomes a woman, and this transgressive transformation is linked to the destabilisation of space and society in the *Bacchae*, cf. Zeitlin, 1996.

The Theoxena episode plays into this trope, and Livy's framing of the episode as tragic, both in its content and in its intratextual links with other tragic episodes, confirms Theoxena's characterisation as a tragic, foreign woman.

The intratexts between the Theoxena and Verginia episodes also serve to dramatise the action in the historical Theoxena narrative. The Verginia episode contains several tragic themes and can be read as a micro-tragedy in its own right.[47] This is no more evident than the moments after Verginius kills his daughter, Verginia:

> Ille ferro quacumque ibat viam facere, donec multitudine etiam prosequentium tuente ad portam perrexit. Icilius Numitoriusque exsangue corpus sublatum ostentant populo; scelus Appi, puellae infelicem formam, necessitatem patris deplorant. Sequentes clamitant matronae: eamne liberorum procreandorum condicionem, ea pudicitiae praemia esse?
>
> With his knife, Verginius made a path for himself wherever he went, and he was guarded by a crowd who accompanied him while hastened to the city gate. Icilius and Numitorius raised the bloodless body to show the people; they lamented Appius' crime, the girl's unhappy beauty, and the necessity of a father's actions. Matrons followed wailing, 'Was this the condition of our children's births? Were these the rewards for virtue?'
>
> Livy 3.48.6–8

There are three elements of tragic stagecraft here that highlight the dramatic nature of the episode: (1) the knife; (2) the display of Verginia's body; (3) the *matronae*. First, the knife serves as a prop, and Livy takes care to highlight it. The knife acts as a conduit for Verginius' assertion of his paternal rights over his daughter. Its continued presence in the narrative may indicate Verginius' possession of tragic guilt and responsibility. Second, the public display of Verginia's body also involves both internal and external audiences. In Greek tragedy, an *ekkyklema* would display scenes involving death and corpses, whether the result of suicides or victims of aggression.[48] In a similar vein, Verginia's body is exhibited (*ostendo*) to the crowd. Livy's description of the body ensures that the external audience can also 'view' the corpse. The use of *exsanguis* highlights the amount of blood spilt in addition to the lifeless and inanimate image of the body of Verginia. The body provides a focal point for the mourning of an innocent girl, while also possibly acting as a prop to showcase the consequences of unchecked libido in the same way that Verginius' knife embodies his paternal authority and tragic guilt.[49] Finally, the matrons who raise the lament for Verginia are an internal audience to the action and serve to inform the (external) audience's reaction. [50] Female crowds in Livy, particularly *matronae*, act like a Greek tragic *chorus* when they lament the circumstances of protagonists in dramatic episodes.[51] The public nature

[47] The tragedy of the Verginia episode relies on the passivity of Verginia herself, and the role of her father. Both Joplin (1990) and Joshel (1992) argue that Verginia is a passive conduit of either male violence or jealousy. Ahlheid (1995) argues that the episode is a tragedy in three acts, in which Verginia is a victim of tyrannical lust. The tragedy of Verginia's murder is supported by Loraux (1991: 31–48), who highlights that virgins in Greek tragedy tend to be killed rather than kill themselves (except for Antigone).

[48] Rehm, 1992: 37, 68; von Möllendorff (2015) argues that the *ekkyklema* creates a second stage within the theatrical space, where the characters on stage become, in turn, spectators of a drama.

[49] For enjoyment of seeing tragic corpses, see Worman, 2021: 11–12.

[50] Walsh, 1961: 185; Levene, 2006: 73–77.

[51] Santoro L'Hoir, 1992: 83–84.

of the subsequent mourning is significant because it is relatable to the genuine societal mourning of a girl who never became a wife.[52] The reference to the *matronae* throughout the episode, in the role of guardians and supporters of Verginia, solidifies their function as tragic commentators on the pathetic action, which, in turn, adds to the episode's tragic framing.

The Theoxena episode contains similar themes, such as the display of the sword and poisoned cup, but not to the same extent as the Verginia episode. Livy's narrative connections between the two, from the threat of sexual assault to his choice of vocabulary, have two distinct effects on the Theoxena episode. First, the intratext transfers the explicitly tragic nature of the Verginia episode to the historical Theoxena episode. Therefore, it imbues it with a comparable level of drama, while implying a performance of genre in the Theoxena episode, which can only be accessed through this same intratext. Second, the intratext highlights the iterative nature of Livy's narrative, comparable to the various retellings of mythology and the Epic Cycle in Greek and Roman tragedies, which in itself, plays into the performance of genre throughout Livy.

Theoxena and Other Livian Intratexts

There is a further connection between Theoxena, Verginia, and another episode involving the involuntary deaths of non-Roman women: the case of the Astapan women. Livy uses the adjective *semianimus* only three times in his corpus: at 3.57.4 to refer to Verginia; at 28.23.2 to refer to the Astapan women; and at 40.4.15 to refer to Theoxena's children.[53] In the cases of Verginia and the Astapan women, *semianima* applies to women who their husbands and fathers have killed while asserting their own freedom. Livy describes the murder of the Astapan women as 'a more atrocious kind of slaughter in the city since a crowd of weak and defenceless women and children was being murdered by their own citizens, who were hurling bodies, most still breathing, onto a burning pyre'.[54] Livy does not frame this episode as an encouraged political suicide. It is murder, and a heinous murder at that. The pair of *imbellem inermem* highlights the weakness of the women and children by suggesting they were incapable of fighting back against their 'attackers'.[55] Furthermore, Livy's choice of *caedere* to describe the slaughter as opposed to its cognates *necare* and *occidere* adds to the physicality of the slaughter since *caedere* has a sense of cutting and slicing.[56] Livy continues to add vivid details to the description of bodies being thrown on a pyre, including gory descriptions such as: 'and streams of blood were putting out the rising flames'.[57] The details in this portion portray the deaths of the Astapan women as a gruesome murder, as opposed to a necessary, yet sad, killing in the name of freedom. This intratext further aids in portraying the

[52] Loraux, 1998: 33–34 on female public mourning. We may consider similar forms of public mourning for virgins from funeral inscriptions, where the girl's virginity is often mentioned, as is the sense that she died too young, e.g. *CIL* I² 1222: Sei quis havet nostro conferre dolore(m) | adsit nec parveis flere quead lac{h}rimis | quam coluit dulci gavisus amore puella(m) | [hic locat] infelix unica quei fuerat; [trans. 'If anyone feels called to share my sorrow | let them be welcome and let their tears flow freely. | The daughter whom he raised joyfully and with deep affection | an unfortunate father has buried here, the only daughter he had'] *CIL* VI 7998: hic sum Bass[as]ita, pia fi[lia] | virgo pudica [trans. 'Here I lie, Bassa, a filial daughter | a virgin maiden.']

[53] The fourth refers to a brawl between Caeso and a man afflicted with plague. See: Liv. 3.13.3.

[54] Liv. 28.23.2: foedior alia in urbe trucidatio erat, cum turbam feminarum puerorumque imbellem inermem cives sui caederent et in succensum rogum semianima pleraque inicerent corpora.

[55] Throughout his history, Livy uses a formula containing *femina* and *pueri* as a shorthand for feminine weakness of non-Romans. The formula is never used to describe Romans. For examples, see: Liv. 25.36.8; 28.19.13; 36.24.10; 38.21.14; 39.49.8; 40.38.6; 41.11.5.

[56] *OLD. s.v caedo.* 3c; 3d; 8. Adams (1973: 290–292) briefly analyses *caedo*.

[57] Liv. 28.23.2: rivique sanguinis flammam orientem restinguerent.

Theoxena episode as a tragic infanticide through the use of *semianimus*, which is used in the highly visual and pathetic Astapan women episode.

The performance of tragedy is further highlighted through Livy's repeated use of tragic-coded language when he introduces the Theoxena episode. When the episode is first introduced, Livy writes 'such cruelty, detestable in itself, the destruction of one household rendered more detestable'.[58] The vocabulary and composition of this sentence are evocative of two similarly tragic-coded episodes in Livy: the Syracuse Conspiracy and Tullia.[59] Referring to the murder of Heraclia, the daughter of Hieron, and her two daughters, Livy (24.26.14) writes: 'the slaughter, lamentable in itself, was made more lamentable by what followed'.[60] The repeated use of *foedus* and *miserabilis*, respectively, highlights the pathetic nature of the scene, while also characterising the 'crimes' in question as tragic in nature.

More importantly, the introduction to the Theoxena episode also shares similarities with Livy's declaration of tragedy in the Tullia episode in Book One. At the start of the episode, Livy writes '[t]he royal house of Rome (romana regia) produced an example of tragic crime'.[61] The use of *romana regia* is significant, given that Roman tragedy was often set in a *regia* as opposed to a *domus*.[62] Furthermore, Livy expressly locates the home as the setting of tragedy and as the forebear of the *exemplum* (Tullia).[63] The theme of tragedy is continued with *tragicus*, which Livy uses only twice in his corpus.[64] This statement functions as a tragic prologue to the Tullia episode, in which Livy introduces the main characters and the setting, and reveals the ending of the 'play'.[65] It is, therefore, not unlike Livy to explicitly alert the reader to the beginning of a tragic episode. The declaration of cruelty and detestable acts, and the destruction of a household, are at home in a tragic prologue and essentially describe Theoxena's actions, alerting the reader to potential transgression and tragedy. The intratexts with Tullia are not limited to this, however. Both women are labelled as *ferox* at critical points in their respective episodes: the moment of decision or contemplation.[66] For Theoxena, her mind 'turns back' (*revoluta*) to the plan to kill her children, whereas Tullia 'turns away' (*aversa*) from her husband.[67] By linking Theoxena's character and the episode itself to previous tragic-coded episodes featuring equally tragic acts, Livy establishes the episode's tragic tone throughout and may also encourage the audience to seek out tragic intertexts with another (in)famous foreign child-murderess — Medeia.

[58] Liv. 40.4.1: Eam crudelitatem, foedam per se, foediorem unius domus clades fecit.
[59] For the full episode of the Syracuse Conspiracy and Tullia, see Liv. 24.26 and 1.46–48, respectively. Heraclia, a daughter of the previous king Hieron, learned that the assassins were coming to kill her and fled with her two daughters to the shrine of the Penates in her house. She pleaded with the assassins, but they, nonetheless, killed her. Her daughters fled in terror, but collapsed soon after, dead from wound exhaustion. Tullia Minor was the daughter of Servius Tullius, the sixth king of Rome. She murdered her husband to marry her sister's husband (Lucius Tarquinus). She then goaded her new husband into conspiring against her father and becoming the king of Rome. Lucius killed Tullius, and Tullia drove over the body of her father while on the way home from the forum and cursed her family in the process.
[60] Liv. 24.26.14: Caedem per se miserabilem miserabiliorem casus fecit. For more on the Syracuse Conspiracy in Livy, see Jaeger (2003), who compares the murder of Heraclia to the suicide of Lucretia; also, Evans, 2017; Keegan, 2021: 50, for mob violence in the case of Heraclia and her daughters.
[61] Liv. 1.46.: tulit enim et romana regia sceleris tragici exemplum.
[62] Feldherr, 1998: 176, 191, on the *regia romana*. Tragedy would usually be set in a royal palace, cf. Vitr. *De Arch*. 5.6.8.
[63] Feldherr, 1998: 191.
[64] For the second occurrence of 'tragicus', cf. Liv. 24.24.2; Feldherr, 1998: 188.
[65] Manuwald, 2011: 323. There are several examples of tragic prologues from Greek tragedy, cf. Eur. *Med*. 114: σὺν πατρί, καὶ πᾶς δόμος ἔρροι [trans. D. Kovacs: 'May you perish with your father and the whole house collapse in ruin']; Eur. *Hipp.* 48–49: ἀπόλλυται | Φαίδρα[trans. J. Morwood: 'Phaedra | must die']. Similarly, in Sophocles (*Ant*. 69–78), Antigone informs the audience of her plans and that she will die.
[66] Liv. 40.4.13; Liv. 1.46.6: angebatur ferox Tullia [trans. 'Defiant Tullia was vexed'].
[67] Liv. 40.4.13; 1.46.6.

Murderous Mothers: Theoxena and Medeia

The act of infanticide in a tragic context is reminiscent of Medeia, especially due to Euripides' retelling of the myth in 431 BCE.[68] The story of Medeia was also retold by several Latin authors. Ovid's *Heroides* and Seneca's *Medea* likely give us the most complete picture of the Latinised version of the story of Mede(i)a. However, Seneca wrote well after Livy, and therefore, I shall not use his characterisation of Medea as evidence for intertext in this section, even though both authors were likely influenced by Roman Republican tragedies on Medea by Ennius, Pacuvius, and Accius, of which only fragments survive. The Greek tragic tradition of the Medeia myth doubtlessly influenced Roman Republican tragedians in her presentation as a foreign witch and transgressive mother. Medean intertexts may be found in the episode's small details.

First, there are the methods of infanticide or suicide that both women offer. In Euripides, Medeia uses poison (*pharakon*) and a sword (*xiphos*) to achieve her goals.[69] These methods of murder seem to have found their way into the Roman characterisation of Medea, too. In the *Heroides*, Ovid has Medea say: 'So long as I have a sword and fire and poisons, no enemy of Medea will escape vengeance'.[70] Medeia's instruments have implications for the presentation of her gender both in Euripides and beyond. The use of poison has a strong tradition in Greek tragedy, where it is presented as disrupting the power dynamics in the home. Medeia and Deaneira are two such examples. Both women offer the gift of a *peplos* that is covered in poison in marital contexts. In Euripides' *Medeia,* Glauke is gifted with a poisoned dress under the guise of a wedding present as revenge for Jason's betrayal.[71] Likewise, Deaneira gifts a *peplos* smeared with centaur blood to prevent Herakles from loving any other women.[72] Marriage imagery is central to Sophocles' narrative, where Herakles dies an 'emasculating death' while dressed in a pseudo-wedding gown.[73] This use of poison against men brings the issues of the established social order, gender roles, and bodily invasion to the fore. Then, it subverts them, thereby making the female use of poison transgressive.[74] Furthermore, the use of poison within a tragic context seems to be feminised explicitly through its emasculation of men and its power to disrupt gender dynamics within the domestic space. Medeia's use of a sword to kill her children is in direct contrast to her earlier use of poison against Glauke. Medeia is the only character to wield a sword in the play, and, in doing so, asserts her masculinity by taking her children's lives into her own hands, a role usually reserved for a *kyrios*. Medeia's use of male weapons and their effect on her gender presentation are also reflected in the Theoxena episode.

[68] The plot likely existed before Euripides, but Euripides' play ensured that the infanticide was canonised, Boedeker: 1997: 127–129.
[69] References to the poison, Eur. *Med*. 385; 789; 1126; 1201; and the sword, Eur. *Med*. 393; 1243; 1325.
[70] Ov. *Her*. 12.181–182: dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt sucusque veneni/hostis Medeae nullus inultus erit.
[71] Eur. *Med.* 982; 1065–6; 1188–1190.
[72] Soph. *Trach.* 555–587; 672–722.
[73] Lee (2004) 272; Soph. *Trach*. 1062–1063: γυνὴ δέ, θῆλυς φῦσα κοὐκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν, | μόνη με δὴ καθεῖλε φασγάνου δίχα. [trans. H. Lloyd-Jones: 'But a woman, a female and unmanly in her nature, | alone has brought me down, without a sword']. Similarly, Herakles is feminised by the poisonous death, as are other male victims of poison. See Faraone, 1994; Stanley Spaeth, 2014: 56.
[74] Hallissy, 1987: 3–4; Stratton, 2007: 47. The image of a woman using herbs to subvert gender roles is found as early as Homer's *Odyssey* (10. 281–399) and the character of Kirke, who uses *pharmaka* (drugs) to turn Odysseus' men into pigs. The spell is only reversed after Kirke (the woman) submits to Odysseus (the man). For more, see Brilliant, 1995: 165–175; Pollard, 2008: 128–129.

Livy uses the same pair of a sword and poison when describing Theoxena's plan to kill her children: 'she diluted the poison and produced a sword'.[75] Theoxena's use of poison here is noteworthy in the context of Livy. There is only one other episode where Livy discusses poison: the mass poisoning in Book Eight. In this episode, Livy describes how a group of *matronae* caused the death of several citizens by giving them poison. Two of the women, Cornelia and Sergia, claimed that the poisons were medicinal and attempted to prove their innocence by drinking them. All the *matronae* eventually drink the poison and die in the *forum*. Livy's vocabulary for the poison is standard: he describes it as *venenum*, *medicamentum*, and *venificium* at various points.[76] However, Livy explicitly links this female use of poison to a disaster in the city. He begins the episode by writing the year was *foedus* (terrible) because of *humana fraus* (human depravity).[77] The transgressive tone of the poison is established in Book Eight, which prepares the reader for Theoxena's use of poison to kill her children in Book 40. The Theoxena episode feeds into this narrative of poison and transgression since she uses it to kill her children, thereby disrupting the family unit and asserting her power. Then, if we account for the tragic nature of the Theoxena episode, the description of Theoxena's tools may feed into the tragic-coded representation of poison as something which fundamentally disrupts the home. Furthermore, Theoxena and Medeia use their social roles as mothers to take on a masculinised sense of power over children by deciding on their deaths.[78] Issues of gender subversion are equally at home in the tragic sphere.[79] The sense of incomplete or subverted femininity of both women may contribute to the sense of rejected or distorted motherhood in the episode, given that motherhood was entirely the domain of women in the ancient world.

Particularly, motherhood was considered a pivotal role for women to fulfil in the ancient world, to the extent that it led to a fundamental shift in women's identity in the Greek and Roman worlds.[80] In this context, when a woman became a mother, she would also be subject to a new set of expectations regarding her behaviour. Both Roman and Greek mothers were expected to take an active role in child-rearing and to act as moral educators for their children until a certain age.[81] The emotional connection

[75] Liv. 40.4.13: venenum diluit ferrumque promit.
[76] Liv. 8.18.6, 8, 11. *OLD s.v. venenum* 1a; 2a. *Venenum* allegedly shares an etymological history with *Venus,* thereby lending *venenum* a sense of eroticism, Pharr, 1932: 272. *OLD s.v. veneficium.* 1a; 2a; *OLD s.v. medicamentum* 1a; 2a. With the adjective *malum*, *medicamentum* takes on the meaning of poison in the sense of a bad or baneful drug, cf. *OLD s.v. medicamentum* 3.
[77] Liv. 8.18.1.
[78] Zeitlin (1985: 68) discusses Medeia's character as somewhat between male and female.
[79] On issues of gender in tragedy, see Zeitlin, 1985. For example, Aischylos' Clytemnestra shifts her gender presentation from masculine to feminine depending on her audience; also, McClure, 1999: 71–76.
[80] For example, a Greek woman would be a *nymphe* if she was married, but not a mother, and a *gyne* only after she had given birth, see King, 1993: 111–113; Demand, 1994: 17; Wickramasinghe, 2013. The Romans also used specific terminology which related to a girl's virginal or maternal status, but to a lesser extent than the Greeks. For example, *puella* and *virgo* both mean a young girl, but *virgo* has a greater emphasis on physical virginity (Watson, 1983: 123–143). Likewise, *matrona* meant a married woman, but also had links to maternity and modesty.
[81] Pl. *Leg.* 792e: ἀπάντων δὲ ἥκιστα εἰς δύναμιν τὸν ἀρτίως νεογενῆ· κυριώτατον γὰρ οὖν ἐμφύεται πᾶσι τότε τὸ πᾶν ἦθος διὰ ἔθος [trans. R. G. Bury: 'For because of the force of habit, it is in infancy that the whole character is most effectually determined']. In concept, Roman mothers were expected to instil traditional Roman *mores* in their children, Dixon, 1988: 7. Indeed, Cicero and Tacitus emphasise the importance of Roman children being raised on their mothers' knees rather than being entrusted to nurses, Cic. *Brut.* 211: Legimus epistulas Corneliae matris Gracchorum; apparet filios non tam in gremio educatos quam in sermone matris. [trans. 'We have read the letters of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi; it is evident that her sons were nursed not less by their mother's speech than on her lap.']; Tac. *Dial.* 28.4: Nam pridem suus cuique filius, ex casta parente natus, non in cellula emptae nutricis, sed gremio ac sinu matris educabatur [trans. 'In the good old days, every man's son, born from chaste parents, was brought up not in the chamber of a nurse, but in his mother's lap, and at her breast.']

between mothers and their children cannot be understated, particularly when we consider the multiple depictions of grieving mothers in Greco-Roman literature.[82] All of these expectations constitute an expected performance of motherhood, which, in turn, was essential to the performance of accepted femininity for women who had given birth.

We may briefly consider Veturia, the mother of Coriolanus, an *exemplum* for how Livy portrays successful Roman motherhood. Veturia is defined by her maternity throughout her appearance in Book Two. She plays into the stereotype of the grieving mother when Livy writes that she was 'distinguished by her extraordinary sadness' (*insignem maestitia*).[83] In her speech to Coriolanus, one of the longest made by a female character in Livy's *History*, Veturia begins by establishing her identity as a mother, in contrast to Coriolanus' status as her son: "She said: 'Allow me to learn, before I accept your embrace, whether I have come to an enemy for a son, whether I am a captive or a mother in this camp'".[84] Livy has Veturia question Coriolanus' identity, while asserting her own as his mother. The pairing of *hostis* and *filius* implies that Coriolanus' identity has shifted, and as a result, he is now unrecognisable to his own mother. Veturia's questioning of her son's identity then affects her own as she questions whether she is a *captiva* or a *mater*. Veturia fulfils the conditions of motherhood I previously discussed: she is defined by her maternity; she grieves; she serves as a moral educator for her son; and she fulfils her maternal responsibilities to a great degree. This comes in stark contrast to Theoxena, who does not abide by the Greco-Roman conventions of motherhood.

Theoxena and Medeia have different relationships with motherhood. An essential part of the tragedy of Medeia is her rejection of motherhood, leading to several speeches where she debates the infanticide.[85] Theoxena has no such struggle as her mind turns to the act.[86] Both characters seem to undergo a symbolic birth in their narratives, tied to the presentation of their motherhood. As mentioned above, Livy presents Theoxena's adoption of her sister's children as a birth, whereas Ovid's Mede(i)a says: 'my rage will give birth to a great menace'.[87] Theoxena does not reject her motherhood as Medeia does, but she certainly subverts it with the act of infanticide. Both women have different motivations for the murder. Medeia seeks revenge against Jason for rejecting their marriage, whereas Theoxena seeks to save her children from tyranny. Theoxena also differs from Medeia because she commits suicide following the death of her children. Livy writes: 'Theoxena herself embraced her husband, who would share her death, and then hurled herself into the sea'.[88] In Livy's narrative, Theoxena cannot commit

[82] Grief was also particularly associated with mothers, cf. Cic. *Fam.* 9.20.3: patriam eluxi iam et gravius et diutius quam ulla mater unicum filium [trans. 'As for my country, I have mourned her longer and more grievously than any mother ever mourned her only son']. It would also often be the role of wives and mothers to grieve at funerals in Rome, see Loraux, 1998: 30–33; Mustakallio, 2005: 190; Erker, 2011: 44–48; Panoussi, 2019: 85–86. Both Hecuba and Andromache in Euripides' *Trojan Women* show the extent of maternal grief: Eur. *Tro.* 603–604: ὦ τέκν᾽, ἐρημόπολις μάτηρ ἀπολείπεται ὑμῶν. | οἷος ἰάλεμος <οἷος ὀδυρμός θ᾽> οἷά τε πένθη [trans. D. Kovacs: 'My sons, your mother parts from you, a mother whose city | is desolate! What lamentation, <what keening,> what griefs']; 757–758: ὦ νέον ὑπαγκάλισμα μητρὶ φίλτατον, ὦ χρωτὸς ἡδὺ πνεῦμα [trans. D. Kovacs: 'O child that my arms have held when | young, so dear to your mother, O sweet fragrance of your flesh!']

[83] Liv. 2.40.4.

[84] Liv. 2.40.6: 'Sine, priusquam complexum accipio, sciam,' inquit, 'ad hostem an ad filium venerim, captiva materne in castris tuis sim.'

[85] Eur. *Med.* 1019–1080. Medea's rejection of motherhood is also found in the Roman tradition, cf. Enn. *Trag.* (=Goldberg and Manuwald, 2018: F. 93): nam ter sub armis malim vitam cernerequam semel modo parere [trans. 'I would rather fight for my life under arms three times than give birth just once']. See also: Eur. *Med.* 250–251, Foley, 1989: 64–65, 73–83.

[86] Liv. 40.4.6; see also above.

[87] Ov. *Her.* 12.208: ingentis parturit ira minas.

[88] Liv. 40.4.15: ipsa deinde virum comitem mortis complexa in mare sese deiecit.

this crime and walk away free, as Medea does. It is entirely possible that the Theoxena episode was Livy's attempt at a Medean-style tragedy, one that is resolved through the death of the main character.[89] Theoxena's own suicide brings a closure to the episode, which is necessary because it signals the end of the tragedy, thereby allowing Livy to move back into the realm of historiographical storytelling. His tragic digressions do not disrupt Livy's status as a historian. Yet again, his history is enriched by these tragic episodes that highlight transgression, ambiguity, and female characterisation.

Conclusion

The tale of Theoxena in Book 40 of *Ab urbe condita* presents a deeply complex intersection of historiography, tragedy, and gendered performance within Livy's expansive narrative. As this article has demonstrated, Livy crafts a scene imbued with tragic-coded language, imagery, and actions. Simultaneously, Livy comments on Theoxena's characterisation as a non-Roman woman who seems to defy the expectations for maternal behaviour. Livy's tragic presentation of the Theoxena episode, however, relies on the intratextual links to other tragic Livian episodes, which contribute to the iterative nature of Livian tragedy. The Greek and Roman tragic stages relied on retellings: presenting the audience with a tale they are intimately familiar with, and often changing the language and plot to present a new version of the myth. Likewise, Livy uses the first pentad, full of mythological and pedagogical tales of female virtue, to dramatise and tragicise the historical tale of Theoxena through his use of language and tragic set pieces.

Further, Livy's intertextual strategy enriches the narrative by aligning Theoxena's story with well-known tragic archetypes. Livy's intertextual engagement with Euripides' *Medeia* elevates our understanding of Theoxena's motherhood and femininity. We may read the Theoxena episode as a tale of a brave woman who freed her children from tyranny, just like Verginius and Verginia in Book Three. However, Livy's use of language for Theoxena's actions and the explicit references to Theoxena's weapons link her to Medeia in such a way that we are encouraged to see Theoxena through an utterly tragic lens. The act of arming her children and encouraging their deaths resonates with Medeia's own infamous acts of maternal destruction. The Theoxena episode is a retelling of the Verginia episode; she is a Tullia in disguise, a Medeia in a historiographical context. She performs all these roles simultaneously as the narrative demands. The complexity and cyclical nature of the episode epitomise Livy's narrative techniques for his female-led tales.

This brings me back to the *crux* of this article: performance. Aspects of performance in the Theoxena episode are multifaceted. First, Theoxena performs the roles of daughter, wife, and mother at different points. More importantly, at times this performance is disrupted by non-adherence to expectations for female behaviour. Second, given that these social roles were so ingrained in the definition of Roman femininity, Theoxena's womanhood is at times performed and equally disrupted when she incites her children to commit suicide. Third, the genre of tragedy is performed within a historiographical space, since Livy puts aspects of tragedy on display to signal that the episode occurs within a tragic space, which is sustained only so long as the tragic action continues. Performance here operates not only at the level of individual character but at the structural level of the narrative itself, as Livy consciously shifts his historiographical mode into tragic drama. After the Theoxena episode, the tragic space reverts to history and the performance ceases.

[89] Briscoe (2008: 419) mentions that the story likely derived from Polybios, even if the original does not survive and that 'it cannot, of course, be assumed to represent the truth'.

In sum, Theoxena's episode is the pinnacle of Livian performance. Theoxena performs her gender and her maternity within a space laden with performative tragedy. By staging her actions within a tragic framework, Livy problematises both Theoxena's maternal role and the presentation of her gender identity. By imbuing the episode with intertextual references to Greek tragedy and intratextual parallels to earlier figures in his work, Livy constructs a narrative space where Theoxena's actions are both understandable and horrifying, noble and devastating. Ultimately, Theoxena stands as one of Livy's most compelling tragic figures. Her story, though brief, echoes through Livy's work as a testament to the fraught intersection of gender, historical storytelling, and the power of performance.

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