What Counts in Ovid’s Tale of Rome?

I. Aeneas’ *Virtus* = manly excellence – *not* his ‘piety’ (= *pietas*) as Virgil would have said (p. 506)

II. Aeneas, the son of Venus: how does he emancipate from the divine foolishness of his mom? Or does he?

III. Or does it matter at all, when the new-style hero is not shown in heroic action and his deeds are left unsung? >>> apotheosis

IV. Why does it matter to introduce apotheosis?

V. Augustus needs a divine father

VI. Romulus

VII. Evading chronology: Pythagoras and Numa

VIII. Pythagoras’ teachings: Science or religion? Does the difference matter?

“There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.” (Harold Pinter, Nobel Prize for Literature, 2005)
Essay question to prepare for the final: 8:30 AM, Friday, December 16, 2005

Writing short essays and relying on the texts we have read, please answer TWO of the following questions:

NB: Here you need not formulate questions. The questions are given to you in the essay topics. Treat each essay topic as the outline of a mini-paper, making sure you answer the question in full. Although you may expand the question to suit your interests, you must make sure you answer the questions in all of their parts. You are encouraged to offer summaries of the texts, stories, myths, but make sure you explain why what you summarize is important, how the stories you summarize or merely refer to, help you elucidate all the aspects raised in the questions.

1. Relying on your reading of the *Odyssey*, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* (especially the *Eumenides*), Sophocles *Electra* and Euripides’ *Electra* and *Andromache*, discuss the relationship between parents and children in myth. Who matters more, mother or father? And how?

2. Whether explicitly or implicitly, many approaches to myth take into account the opposition nature vs. culture. Relying on your reading of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, analyze and compare two or more of Ovid’s tales of metamorphosis as metaphor for the cycle of death and rebirth, like Vertumnus and Pomona. How does Ovid see the world of nature in relation to the world of culture? Is there a divide or an unbroken continuum between the two? How does shape matter when everything in nature is constantly changing into new forms? And in particular, what are the consequences of the metamorphosis from the ‘culture’ form of the human body, as it were, into such entities of nature as trees, spiders, birds and other wild creatures?

3. What is myth? Relying on your familiarity with the Argive and Theban sagas, offer your interpretation of what myth is. The texts you might consider are the following: Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Homer's *Iliad*, Sophocles' *Oedipus King*, Oedipus at Colonus*, and Antigone*, as well as Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Trojan Women*, and *Andromache*.

4. Violence is a recurrent theme in myth. Why? What purposes does violence serve? How does it operate? Relying on your reading of Hesiod and the *Homeric Hymns*, show how the violence in which the gods engage reflects on the human level by focusing on ONE of the following mythical females: Clytemnestra, Andromache, Antigone, Jocasta, Hermione, Hecuba. You may compare and contrast, but you must focus on not more than one female character.

5. What does it mean to be a woman in the world of myth? Relying on the texts we have read, illustrate what counts in establishing one's identity as a woman. Then proceed to answer also this second question: What does it mean to be a man in the world of myth? Relying on the texts we have read, illustrate what counts in establishing one's identity as a man.