Statius’ *Achilleid*
and its literary predecessors
A tragic reading of the *Achilleid*

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2019

Julene Abad del Vecchio

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
# Table of Contents

Abbreviations ............................................................................................................... 4  
Abstract ......................................................................................................................... 5  
Declaration ...................................................................................................................... 6  
Copyright statement ...................................................................................................... 6  
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................... 7  

CHAPTER ONE  
Introduction ................................................................................................................. 8  
1.1 Mapping the territory .......................................................................................... 8  
1.2 *Amor is in the air*: the dominant reading of the *Achilleid* ...................... 10  
1.3 *The dark side of the Achilleid*: the tragic reading of the poem ................. 12  
1.4 *Unfinished business*: the question of the poem’s completion .................... 21  
1.5 *Repetita iuvant*, but not always: the creation of tradition(s) ...................... 27  
1.6 *Achilles objectified*: a literal *scriptus puer*? ............................................ 37  
1.7 *Leggere è un po’ morire*: theoretical and methodological frameworks ...... 41  
1.8 Recapitulation: summary of chapters ............................................................... 46  

CHAPTER TWO  
So, ya wanna be a hero, kid? Leonine imagery and problematic portrayals ....... 48  
2.1 *I’m thinking about the lions tonight* ............................................................... 48  
2.2 *Hear me roar*: lion imagery ....................................................................... 50  
2.3 *Hungry like the lion*: Achilles’ diet ............................................................. 58  
2.4 *You are what you kill*: practices of omophagy .......................................... 65  
2.5 *Achilles Ὠμηστής*: Achilles, Bacchus and Pentheus .................................... 71  
2.6 *For never was a story of more woe than this*: conclusion ......................... 84  

CHAPTER THREE  
*Sub Herculea Umbra* Epic and tragic transgression ........................................... 86  
3.1 *And then a hero comes along* ....................................................................... 86  
3.2 *Looting the club from Hercules*: the hero as a Flavian exemplum ............ 87  
3.3 *Somebody that I used to know*: a ‘Herculean’ aposiopesis ......................... 89  
3.4 *Crush Zeus! Freeze Zeus! Melt Zeus!* A Herculean Achilles .................... 96  
3.5 δαίμονι ἴσος? A Jovian simile ...................................................................... 104  
3.6 *Oh Father, Where Art Thou?* A (Senecan) absence of Jupiter ............... 111  
3.7 *Problematic fence-sitting*: conclusion ....................................................... 121
CHAPTER FOUR

Tradunt dolos patres The role of Ulysses

4.1 El siempre invincible griego, el nunca vencible Ulises

4.2 The Ulyssean stat(i)us quo

4.3 I'll make a man out of you: Odysseus’ nature in the Philoctetes

4.4 ‘Am I Ulysses?’ No, but you are now, boy: Ulyssean manipulations

4.5 The ships not taken: alternative traditions

4.6 Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? Ulysses’ characterisation

4.7 Thesiphone, thou help me for tendyte / Thise woful vers: Ulysses the Fury

4.8 Timete Danaos et dona ferentis: conclusion

CHAPTER FIVE

Tremefactus vates Calchas’ role and vatic authority

5.1 A fare il profeta mai nessuno ci guadagnerà: re-thinking vatic authority

5.2 Vatic imposter syndrome: the manipulation of the vates

5.3 Destabilising forces: Calchas’ authority

5.4 Sibylline Calchas: bodily possession

5.5 An unlikely prophet: Calchas and his male counterparts

5.6 A song of war and death: outcomes of furor

5.7 Truly a tragic Thetideid? Conclusion

Ending at the end: conclusion

Bibliography

Word count: 79,997
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barth</td>
<td>Caspar von Barth, <em>P. P. Statii qua exstant</em>, Zwickau, 1664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLL</td>
<td><em>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</em>, Leipzig, 1900-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All abbreviations of authors and works follow the conventions of the *OCD* as found in *OSEO* (*Oxford Scholarly Editions Online*), with the following exceptions:

For the *Achilleid*, I have retained *Ach.* instead of *Achil.*

For Lucan, I have employed *BC*, following Asso’s commentary (2010).

For Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*, I have retained the traditional *Val.Fl.*

For some of Seneca’s plays, I follow Fitch’s list of abbreviations in the Loeb edition (2002), with the exception of the *Hercules Furens*, which I abbreviate *Her.Fur.*

Unless otherwise stated, the text of the *Achilleid* is taken from Dilke (1954); translations are mine; Greek and Latin texts follow their most recent Loeb editions for consistency.
Abstract

The present thesis begins with the assumption that the *Achilleid* of Statius is a completed, unified and coherent poem worthy to be treated as an epic in its own right, with a highly polished and symmetrical narrative. I aim to analyse the poetic language of the *Achilleid* and certain central aspects of its tale that lend themselves to a narrative reading which I describe as ‘tragic’, or ‘darker’. This interpretive choice that I uphold differs significantly from the standard way of reading the poem, which has long been devoted to unearthing its less epic, more charming, elegiac and softer traits, as it has been conceived to be a light-hearted, maternally-propelled episodic ‘break’ in Achilles' mythological cache.

To the contrary, in this thesis I read some of the poem’s elements that I consider to be a) epic b) ‘tragic’, a term which I define both as generically charged and ontologically relevant in terms of its foreshadowing powers, and its ability to elicit a literary memory that intertextually recalls previous *nefas*-driven narratives in the literary tradition. Whereas it is generally believed that there is no space in the *Achilleid* for the world of ‘proper’ epic/tragedy to come into view, this thesis examines the embryonic but ingrained presence of issues that intimately pertain to this ‘darker’ world, and which cast an ominous shadow on the poem and have repercussions on the epic’s main characters.

The methodological framework upon which this thesis relies is based on reader-response theory, inter and intratextuality, as well as the analysis of overarching structural and thematic resemblances. I explore in-depth the characterisation of Achilles in the poem, traditionally a liminal figure who fluctuates between divine, mortal, and bestial classifications, and I reflect on how the lion imagery that pervades the poem offers itself to the readers as an opportunity for the deconstruction of his traditional portrayal. Additionally, the narrative’s employment of a Herculean standard for Achilles to follow opens up the uneasy question of heroic excess and transgression, deriving from other Thebaidic figures such as Tydeus and Capaneus, and Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*, a text whose juxtaposition with the *Achilleid* also reveals two tragic elements crucial to the poem. First, the paradox between the way Achilles is constructed as opposed to the expectations stemming from his absence, and secondly, the absence of a father figure. The latter emerges when reading the poem alongside Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, a tragedy I contend to be crucial for our understanding of the *Achilleid*, and which complicates Achilles' triumphant return to his epic sphere at the end of the poem, and the standard scholarly interpretation of Ulysses as a father figure for the hero. Highlighting the paradoxical nature of the *Achilleid* brings this thesis to reflect upon the poetic persona of the poem: scholars have seen that this is indeed a ‘Thetideid’, and that maternal anxieties drive the narrative forward. I read the presence of a feminised seer, Calchas, alongside the poetic endeavours of Thetis, the real *diva* behind the poem’s composition.

The thesis offers another angle from which to read parts of the *Achilleid* that have not previously been the subject of a more profound literary scrutiny, and it adds to the poem’s generically complex polyphony. The thesis analyses how Statius’ last composition, inter/intratextually dialogues with its literary predecessors, and weighs itself up against a tradition that seemingly allows no space for a different *Achilleis* to emerge.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright statement

i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=24420), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s regulations (see http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.
Acknowledgments

This thesis would not exist if it were not for my supervisor, Professor Alison Sharrock. I thank her deeply for her academic professionalism and inestimable scholarly insight throughout this process, but also for her kindness, patience and unfailing encouragement. It has been an honour and a privilege completing this thesis under her guidance. Grazie di cuore.

I give thanks to the other members of my panel, Roy Gibson, Andrew Morrison and Ruth Morello, for their precious comments, brilliant judgement (along with their vetoes), and especially for their reassurance at weak and unstable times. From the CAHA Manchester department, I must also give special thanks to David Langslow for pointing me to the (then!) understudied Flavians in 2013, as it was under his expert wing that I finished my first dissertation on Statius’ *Achilleid*. I also wish to express my gratitude to Polly Low, Ian Goh, Roberta Mazza, Stephen Todd and Jenny Bryan for their words of wisdom at exactly the right times during the writing-up stages, first and last.

The introduction of this thesis originates from a two-week stay at the Fondation Hardt in Vandœuvres: I am thankful for their generous support and the opportunity to research in their marvellous library. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the scholars present at the *Achilleid Workshop* in Geneva, where I was able to try out some ideas, received important feedback on the thesis, and had an idyllic sojourn of three days spent carving up the poem. I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The completion of this thesis inevitably brings an 8-year journey to an end, or at least it gives the impression of a concluding moment. It’d be a Herculean task (pardon the cliché) to recall every person who has changed (and improved) me during these years in the Northern Powerhouse. First and foremost, I must thank my Classics postgrad family and brilliant colleagues. A special mention goes to Kat, Matt, Serena, Matteo, Eleni, Silvi and Tom for their friendship, and without whom the long rainy days (and exceptional summer) would have been intolerable. Thanks to Anna e Federica for the pep-talks and the much-needed coffees, and to my various office mates Sihong, Ryan, Bobby and Ginte, who have kept me sane, hydrated and motivated. I am also grateful to those friends who left Manchester but only corporeally: Fernando, Shannon, Charlie T., Marci (my brilliant proof-reader), and Kepa. Finally, a colossal debt of gratitude to Charlie, my patient love and my best friend.

The thesis has two joint dedications:

a Paola e Iñaki, che mi hanno insegnato ad essere. *sciunt cetera genitores*.
a Carmela: ogni frase porta un po’ di te. Senza quel fatidico *superior stabat lupus*, niente avrebbe avuto un senso.

*Ipse ego, qui nullos me adfirmo scribere versus,*  
invenior Parthis mendacior, et prius orto  
sole vigil calamum et chartas et scrinia posco.  
navem agere ignarus navis timet; habrotonum aegro  
non audet nisi qui didicit dare; quod medicorum est  
promittunt medici; tractant fabrilia fabri:  
scribimus indocti doctique poemata passim
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“The greater the monument, the greater the man. The stone that the Greeks quarry for his grave is huge and white, stretching up to the sky. A C H I L L E S, it reads. It will stand for him, and speak to all who pass: he lived and died, and lives again in memory.”

Madeline Miller (2011) The Song of Achilles

1.1 Mapping the territory

‘Debajo de tal belleza / ¿es posible que se esconda / tan cruel naturaleza?’.

These are the incredulous words of Quirón to a cross-dressed Aquiles in Tirso de Molina’s mythological comedy El Aquiles: the centaur cannot reconcile the youth’s beauty – natural and constructed – with his feral nature. From its composition at the end of the 90s AD, the Achilleid of Publius Papinius Statius has held a profound influence in the collective imagination for centuries, despite how little of the poem actually ‘survives’, 1,127 verses.

Its outrageous plot sees the ἄριστος Ἀχιλῶν (II.1.91) stripped of his manly, burgeoning valour as he enters unwarlike territory. Achilles yields to a female agent, his too-much-of-a mother (nimis…mater), Thetis, and he surrenders to donning feminine garments because of his amor for another woman, Deidamia, with whom the hero has a liaison and a child, Neoptolemus. This is a narrative that inevitably grabs any well-disposed reader’s attention.

The play of Tirso de Molina illustrates the essence of Statius’ poem: the – ostensibly – paradoxical tension between Achilles’ virtus and amor. How do we resolve the image of a beautiful, cross-dressed ephebic youth with that of the ruthless hero par excellence that he will turn out to be? The timeless fascination is that the poem offers no easy answer, or even, no answer at all. The composition

---

1 Tirso de Molina (1612) El Aquiles 495-97.
2 The similarities with Chiron’s own speech in the Achilleid are evident (Ach.1.152-55). See Shecktor (2009) 17 for parallels.
4 The popularity of this theme in art shows its enthralling nature: on depictions of the transvestite Achilles, and Statius’ debt to visual arts, especially contemporary iconography, see Foucher (1996) and Cameron (2009).
advances an Achilles portrayed as an extremely torn and enigmatic proto-warrior, with embedded tensions that often transcend the boundaries of the poem and recall pivotal questions that pertain to his traditional past. For instance, we become aware of the conflict of his denied immortal destiny in opposition to his mortal status by birth, and we quickly perceive the overwhelming presence of a mother (Koster notoriously calls the poem a ‘Thetideid’) against the baffling absence of his biological father, Peleus.\footnote{Koster (1979) 199.} We witness Achilles’ struggle with the prospect of a long and fameless life hostile to the thrill of a short and glorious one, and Achilles’ contradictory conformity, alteration and downright overturning of heroic codes.\footnote{For the Achilleid as a poem of paradoxes and ‘multi-dimensions’, see Bessone (2016) 174-76, and Davis (2015) 152-72: most of the Achilleid’s main subject matters can in fact be read in binary terms, often divergent but closely connected. Yet duality is often the beginning of the interpretation (to paraphrase Hinds’ well-known reflection on ‘cf.’ in Allusion and Intertext).} The Achilleid is, in sum, a poem of unstable dichotomies; therefore, its Achilles is an exceptionally complex hero, and it is as such that we must read him and the text in which he performs.\footnote{A complexity already intrinsic to his Iliadic characterisation, see Griffin (1986) 36-57.} The Achilleid is also a poem of expectations, which tantalize its readers with proleptical hints – subtle and not so subtle – to the looming, all-encompassing Trojan War. Ultimately, this is the dark prospect from which Thetis attempts to shield Achilles, a narrative that we are allowed to glimpse with the ‘intrusion’ of the Aulis episode at Ach.1.397-559. ‘War is always around the corner’, Sanna writes about the Thebaid, and this pertains to the Achilleid too.\footnote{Sanna (2008) 211.}

The poem’s multi-layered narrative gives scope to the reading of the present thesis: the inquiry into the ‘darker’, and tragic aspects of the Achilleid, long thought as intrusive addenda within a more relaxed composition adverse to ‘proper’ epic. I examine the poem from a tragic and epic perspective, an endeavour that will add to the plethora of thematic and generic discourses that are ingrained in the composition. In this introduction, I begin with an analysis of the dominant status quo of the scholarship of the poem; subsequently, I outline my ‘darker’ interpretation of the poem, providing the necessary background and semantic classifications upon which the thesis rests. I will then discuss the vexata quaestio of
the poem’s completion, an examination that will lead me to an inquiry where I extend a consideration on the narrative’s high level of refinement and subtlety. The penultimate section brings the reading within its methodological framework, before ending with a summary of the thesis’ contents.

1.2 Amor is in the air: the dominant reading of the Achilleid

One of the crucial themes of the Achilleid is the dichotomy between amor and virtus. Amor creeps in, and fuses with, Achilles’ virtus, and remains with the hero even after the cross-dressing has come to an end. At the thought of Deidamia being carried away by some unknown plunderer, Achilles blushes yet again (Ach.2.85: inpulit ora rubor). The overt intrusion of amor and youth within the epic has encouraged scholars to concentrate their scrutiny on the poem’s un-heroic, ‘softer’ elements, reading the Achilleid as a sweet and charming piece.

Koster’s seminal 1979 study opened up what became a standard, and very fruitful way of interpreting the poem. He read the Achilleid as a highly Ovidian composition: this is initially flagged by the programmatic proemial word deducere (Ach.1.7: sed tota iuvenem deducere Troia). This verb echoes the proem of the Metamorphoses, which marks the commencement of the ‘spinning out’ of the narrative (Met.1.4: ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!). The metapoetic connotations of the word initially transform the Achilleid into a Callimachean, finely-spun carmen deductum, but the all-encompassing, chronological statement of intent of the beginning of the composition (Ach.1.4-5: omnem…heroa) results in an Ovidian generic tension between ‘the poem’s exhaustive scope and its

---

9 The poem is motivated by amor; see Feeney (1994) 97-8, who also mentions the ‘flip-side of this motif, the epic eroticization of war’, cf.99 for some relevant vocabulary in the poem.
10 This is Rosati’s reading, whose introduction to the Italian edition of the Achilleid (1994a) 5-61, a reprint of a previous contribution of his (1992), argues that Statius portrays an Achilles who is less martial, more ‘humane’, distant from the Horatian label of impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer (Ars Poet.121).
11 A research team at the University of Geneva, with Damien Nelis as project leader, is working towards an open-access digital edition of the Achilleid (out in 2019), which will have a new critical text as well as images of 231 manuscripts of the poem. McNelis’ commentary will be out in 2020.
12 In the words of Sharrock, an ‘outwardly fluffy composition’.
13 Koster (1979) 189-90.
Similarly, Feeney spots another Ovidian marker in the proem: through the usage of *mea tempora* in the same metrical position as in the proem of the *Metamorphoses*, the beginning of the *Achilleid* deliberately pledges its alliance to Ovid (*Ach.1.11: nec mea nunc primis augescunt tempora vittis* with *Met.1.4*).\(^\text{15}\)

Koster’s evaluation is followed by a conjecture of how the *Achilleid* would (and could) have continued: the future of the poem, according to his somewhat tendentious reading, would have concentrated on erotic encounters between Achilles and other women. Achilles the warrior-lover, the poster boy for *militia/servitium amoris*, would have starred in individual, self-contained erotic episodes, for which the liaison with Deidamia becomes the guideline.\(^\text{16}\) The poem is then envisioned as a sort of mock-epic, highly un-Homeric and profoundly elegiac. Aricò’s examination initially agrees with that of Koster, identifying elegiac forces as principal narrative drives encased within an epic framework. He, however, is more restrained when it comes to speculation over the future of the composition: he argues that Statius would have attempted to find a connective *nexus* between elegiac and epic elements.\(^\text{17}\)

Scholars have continued to read features of the Scyrian narrative, concentrated on *eros*, with an attentive eye to its more relaxed, elegiac tones.\(^\text{18}\) Rosati has explored central themes of the *Achilleid*: Achilles’ *ambiguitas*, his

---

\(^{14}\) Hardie (1993) 63 n.8; Barchiesi (1996) 58-9; Hinds (1998) 142 n.26; Heslin (2005) 72. The presence of parenthetic interjections in the proem (*sed plura vacant; sic amor est*) also indicate a neoteric treatment of epic: see Heslin (2005) 72-3. The deliberate presence of *amor* in the proem can be simultaneously identified as the poet’s impetus/love for his composition, and the love that his hero will experience. See Acosta-Hughes (2014) 563-73 for the suitableness of the epyllion for a transitory ephebic subject matter, relevant here. See Kozák (2016) for Catullus 64 and the *Achilleid*.


\(^{16}\) Koster (1979) 196-97, *contra* Méheus (1971) xx, who speculates that ‘on a donc tout lieu de croire que le héros, une fois transporté à Troie ne se serait pas révélé moins brutal que ses collègues de la *Thebaïde*’.


\(^{18}\) Cf. Augoustakis’ review (2018) of Bitto (2016): ‘the latter [sic. the *Achilleid*] is associated with sweetness, urbanity, charm, irony’.
ephebic traits, his liminality, and Deidamia’s fashioning as an Ovidian *reliquia*.\textsuperscript{19} The presence of Ovid the elegist has been the subject of rich analyses, such as Cyrino’s on the cross-dressing episode with the help of the *Ars Amatoria* (1.681–704), followed by Fantuzzi’s from an Ovidian perspective.\textsuperscript{20} Both Sanna and Micozzi assess elegiac *topoi* in the characterization of Achilles as a proud disciple of Ovid the *praeeceptor amoris* and his erotic strategies in the midst of a *furtum amoris*.\textsuperscript{21} The most significant element of the poem is its subversion of gender boundaries, which in turn expose the process of Ovidian generic hybridization and ‘the dynamism of genre as an operative category’ through the renegotiation of feminine and masculine boundaries.\textsuperscript{22} The array of traditions available to Statius for the crafting of the *Achilleid* turn the text into the perfect ‘programmatic theatre’.\textsuperscript{23} Statius’ multi-layered intertextual connections are seen in the proliferation of studies of other genres juxtaposed alongside the poem. The manifestation of the more relaxed tones of the lyric genre has been newly brought to light by Keith, who reads Achilles’ singing performance beside Horace’s *Carmina*.\textsuperscript{24} Comedy (of errors) is also present: the most overt sexual(ising) nuance of the poem occurs when Achilles, once his masculinity has been reasserted, stands in front of Lycomedes *sicut erat* (*Ach.* 1.891).\textsuperscript{25} The poem’s tranquil tone is also conveyed through the focused used of visuality and visual language.\textsuperscript{26}

1.3 *The dark side of the Achilleid: the tragic reading of the poem*

The light-hearted reading of the *Achilleid*, where a reluctant Achilles is comically coaxed into cross-dressing by an overbearing mother, falls in love with a woman, attempting to write out his most recent, shameful past, is still the most common

\textsuperscript{23} Barchiesi (1996) 62.
\textsuperscript{24} Keith (2017) 283-95, but also Myers (2015b).
\textsuperscript{25} Köpte (1934) 12 already highlighted the comic aspects of the poem, but a publication by Hanses (forthcoming) on Menander and New Comedy will be a welcome addition.
interpretive route. It is a pleasant piece. But Statius’ allusive composition constantly navigates predecessors and genres: the argument of this thesis is that a darker picture can arise, as we will see with the multiplicity of possible interpretive roads that the poem puts forward.

Following its generic and thematic hybridisation, I advance the consideration that violent and tragic undertones of ‘proper’ epic surface in the Achilleid, and their scrutiny can magnify our understanding of the text and its mechanisms, constituting another substratum of interpretation that complements the standard one. I propose to read the poem under its rightful ‘epic’ label, accounting for the menacing and problematic undercurrents of epic as a genre, as well as revealing previously unnoticed tragic intertexts that enhance the reflection of the Achilleid as an ultra-condensed and generically rich narrative. The poem’s narrative scope – and its wealth of interpretable elements – is determined from its incipit:

Magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti
progeniem et patrio vetitam succedere caelo,
diva, refer.

(Ach.1.1-3)

The opening sentence – ‘il movimento iniziale più solenne che mai poeta epico latino abbia concepito’ – presents the poem’s subject matter, Achilles, through his papponymic Aeacides, grandson of Aeacus, situating the hero as a descendant of Jupiter.27 Achilles becomes the offspring feared by the Thunderer, an explicit reference to the unfulfilled prophecy predicting that Thetis’ son from any marriage would have eventually become greater than his father.28 This is not only the ‘stuff’ of epic, this is the material of cosmic, dangerous ultra-epic. The beginning of the poem extends clear references to Gigantomachy, and Achilles is cast in the mould of a character who could have overthrown the king of the gods.29

27 For the quotation, see Barchiesi (1996) 47; on Aeacides see Uccellini (2012) 30-1.
28 See Bessone (2016) 174-208 for an analysis of Achilles’ familial relationships in the proem (as well as tensions within). On patrio vetitam succedere caelo, Uccellini (2012) 13 highlights the idiosyncratic hypothetical reaction of a reader who did not know that Achilles was not the offspring of Jupiter. I read the carefully positioned hint to this alternative tradition as intentional: Achilles’ threat is almost configured as still active, as we will see in the third chapter.
Epic familial conflicts can be pushed and complicated, as the use of the papponymic *Aeacides* in the opening of an epic could be a reverberation of another opening: the Catalogue of Heroes in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, where Peleus and Telamon are designated with their patronymic Αἰακίδαι. Their introductory story portends tragedy, as it bears echoes of fratricidal slaughter as the murderers of Phocus (*Argon*.1.90-3).\(^{30}\) The adjective *magnanimus* is also not devoid of issues: the only hero in the extant *Achilleid* who is described as such is Tydeus (*Ach*.1.733), and the term is used most often of Tydeus in the *Thebaid*, thus drawing an uneasy link between the cannibal hero, and our Achilles.\(^{31}\)

It is from these tensions, outward/inward-facing plot and programmatic überepic vision, that the present thesis arises.\(^{32}\) I propose to undertake a reading of the *Achilleid* from a darker viewpoint. Its bleaker components have not been systematically analysed as interwoven leitmotifs embedded within the fabric and the characters of the poem, and as drivers of the narrative. The thesis brings these gloomier elements into view and postulates another angle from which we can interpret this epic poem. Scholars have perceived the occasional incidence of darker themes that foreshadow the Trojan War throughout the *Achilleid*, but their significance has not been adequately addressed. Most importantly, these hints are constructed as presaging Achilles’ mortality, an element from which this thesis originates, but one that is not necessarily tragic in itself. I will see how Achilles’ mortal destiny is not only linked to the promised future of glory, but is envisioned rather as an oppressive, pessimistic eventuality that lurks beneath the surface.

---

\(^{30}\) As well as replacing the patronymic of the *Iliad*: Uccellini (2012) 30-1 notes that ‘Stazio non si accontenta [del patronimico Pelide], preannuncia di non volersi fermare al ’padre’, ma al ‘bisnonno’ di Achille [risalendo] più indietro ancora nella vita dell’eroe rispetto alla narrazione omerica’. Uccellini highlights that *Aeacides* is used to refer to Peleus, but also Telamon and Phocus (and even for Phyrus) in Ovid, but Apollonius’ *Argonautica* is not acknowledged.


\(^{32}\) My reading is indebted to Barchiesi’s interpretation of the p(r)oem.
Furthermore, this thesis will explore how the poem engages with ideas of violence, problematic heroic (de)construction, menacing nuances and ultra-epic threats that go beyond Achilles’ future epic demise. The implications of these darker clues for the narrative of the Statian poem have not been methodically assessed, so this thesis will read them as an interpretive unity.

In order to activate this reading, I provide here definitions of what I mean by ‘darker’ and ‘tragic’. We must start from the premise that darker themes, intertwined with violence, are an intrinsic part of the epic genre, to a greater or lesser extent. Barchiesi’s interpretation of the proem identifies three main themes: the dangerous excess and the trespassing of human boundaries, the genesis of a monarchical power in Greece (Ach.1.457-59: tunc sparsa ac dissona moles / in corpus vultumque coit et rege sub uno / disposita est) and the difficulties of sexual identities and issues of Otherness, leitmotifs which would not have seemed trivial to the contemporary audience in 95AD. At its core, the Achilleid deals with serious matters, and I aim to place them centre-stage in my analysis.

I am by no means attempting to find a Romantic ‘tragic worldview’, a concept championed, through an empirical interpretation of tragedy as a genre, by Schiller and Nietzsche (among others). The German movement Sturm und Drang dramatically re-interpreted Greek and Latin literature, and froze tragedy by placing it on a ruined pedestal; Schopenhauer’s pessimistic reading of tragedy ends with a reflection that the essence of tragedy lies within the epiphanic realization that the ‘world and life cannot provide any just satisfaction…the tragic spirit lives on in that insight’. Whilst the epistemological tragic Weltanschauung is detached from the mechanisms of Athenian tragedy, there is something to be

34 Schiller, On Tragic Art, who theorised ‘tragic’ as a way of interpreting man as a sufferer, a conflict between free will and the inevitability of fate. Schiller paved the way for Nietzsche’s radical views (1872) in the The Birth of Tragedy. Human existence is an eternal strife between calm Apollinean and raging mad Dionysiac spirits, with the acceptance of incomprehensibility and irrationality. See Henrichs (2005) on Nietzsche. See Most’s contribution (2000) 15-36, as he calls attention to the colloquial use of the word ‘tragic’ detached from its historical, social and generic significance, but in a paradoxical way, for even Aristotle’s own theorisation views it in its decontextualized essence.
35 Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, 2.495.
gained from the ‘hypostasization’ of the genre, as Most argues: a more fluid and invigorating supra-generic discourse, which I adopt here. In particular, I am interested in how tragedy as a genre has, at heart, what Most defines as the tragic episode: ‘a single, crucial moment of human decision, invariably taken on the basis of insufficient information or the wrong considerations and leading to great unhappiness’. Hamartia and hubris are main characteristics of the ‘tragic’, which in turn highlight the problematic issue that lays between human autonomy versus the will of the gods, a dichotomy that exits in the Achilleid. In this way, we will see how seemingly triumphant moments are cloaked in fact with darker connotations, which problematise their initial reading. This thesis offers to bring to view a more sinister side of the events in the Achilleid, which often elicits what Parkes calls the ‘ethos of tragedy’.

The adjective ‘tragic’ can be used to refer to a catastrophic/pessimistic result, which lays emphasis on the futility of the human condition: subsequently, it naturally initiates discussions of generic significance. Accordingly, throughout the thesis, I operate on a bipartite definition: I describe as ‘tragic’ the moments in the Achilleid that hark back to junctures in epic poetry that are pathos-charged, and foreshadow death and disastrous outcomes for the characters, but are not necessarily constrained by the generic sense of the word. I concurrently read certain thematics and scenes alongside a number of Greek and Roman tragedies, in order to see how elements of the literary dramatic tradition are at play. Epic and tragedy have always been narrowly intertwined, neighbouring genera since Aristotle’s proto-literary critical interpretation of their mimetic similarities, such as Homeric’s extraordinarily intertwined, neighbouring genera since Aristotle’s proto-literary critical interpretation of their mimetic similarities, such

---

36 Sistakou’s excellent book (2012) brings this to the extreme, as she reads Apollonius’ Argonautica, Lycophron’s Alexandra and Nicander’s Theriaca and Alexipharmaca in conjunction with nineteenth century Romanticism.
37 Most (2007) 27.
38 Already Rutherford (1982) 152 talks of blindness as the ‘tragedy of humanity’ in his examination of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon and Cassandra’s fate; Papaioannou and Marinis (forthcoming).
39 Parkes (forthcoming). I thank Ruth Parkes for sharing an early draft of her contribution.
40 See Most (2000) 18-33 for the different hermeneutic approaches to ‘tragedy’ and its definitions throughout time. See Rinon (2008) for a study of the inexplicable ‘tragic’ in the Homeric epics. One early example is Easterling (1984) 1-8, showing how Sophocles (once deemed the most unhomeric of the tragic triad), continually engages with Homeric themes.
41 See Schiesaro (2005) 269-86 for a helpful introduction to Roman tragedy: interestingly, ‘Republican authors display a definite predilection for topics connected with the Theban saga, the family of the Pelopides, and, first and foremost, the Trojan War and its aftermath’.

16
as the formal category they can belong to (simple, complex, moral or pathetic), and their shared elements: epic requires reversals, discoveries, and anagnorises too (Poet.1459b). It is particularly problematic to treat epic and tragedy as unrelated genres, with clear pomeria, when they effectively belong to the same ager. The engagement of epic with tragedy is a reasonably well-trodden path, and it is generally accepted that epic comes with a great deal of tragic baggage too.

This dual reading of the tragic in Statius’ Achilleid is the product of Neronian and Flavian literary interactions, and more specifically, derives from Statius’ earlier work, the Thebaid. The poet’s 12-book composition is the outcome of a profound engagement of epic and tragedy, and the appropriation and re-working of tragic themes into epic. In the words of Bessone, ‘la Tebaide è in gran parte un’opera al nero…negativa, che sfida lo statuto del genere [i.e. epic] di celebrare i κλέα ἀνδρῶν, le imprese degli eroi, consegnandole a fama immortale’. The Thebaid walks and redefines the fine line that edges epic and tragedy – Thebes is the tragic stage par excellence – and is intensely influenced by Lucan’s Pharsalia, as well as Senecan tragedies, texts where we find a predilection for horrid themes, flawed heroes and all-encompassing bleakness. Most importantly, the main

---

42 Homer is a tragic poet, Arist. Poet. 1448b; Resp. 10.595b-c.
43 Aristotle’s differences between the genres: the presence of music and spectacle (Poet. 1459b), and the disparity in length and meter. See Scodel (2005) 181-97 for shared stories in epic and tragedy.
44 The Zeitgeist of reading tragic elements in Flavian epics is in constant flux: a new volume, edited by Papaioannou and Marinis under the provisional title Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic, will be an important contribution. The volume sets out to identify tragic elements and theorise, beginning from Aristotle, what can be considered as tragic, and why. See Kircher (2018), for the relationship of Homer and Virgil with tragedy; note Griffin’s (1986) 56 reflection that the plot of the Iliad is ‘truly tragic’; see Mac Góráin (2018) on Virgil and Sophocles; Hardie (1997), Panoussi (2002), (2009), Rebeggiani (2016) for the relationship of Virgil with Greek tragedy; see Curley (2013) for tragic reminiscences in Ovid’s Heroïdes and Metamorphoses. The Achilleid follows these Ovidian footsteps, the rape of Deidamia is indebted to the Euripidean treatment of the myth in the lost Skyrioi: Heslin (2005) 196-98. The figure of the nurse in Statius (Ach.1.669-74) is an interloper from the Greek tragedy, as one of the fragments (fr.682 Nauck) presents us with a possible stichomythia between the τροφός and Lycomedes.
45 Aricò (1986) 2959 talks about ‘un sentimentalismo poetico [in the Achilleid] già presente nella Tebaide’, contra Bitto (2016) 57-67, who has theorised that the Achilleid is a work of ethos, whilst the Thebaid is a work of pathos. This latter characterisation still feeds into the interpretation of the Achilleid as leaning towards an elegiac, lyrical, and comedic poem.
46 Bessone (2011) 19-20; 100. Bessone (forthcoming b) talks of Statius’ engagement with tragedy in the Thebaid as self-destruction.
narrative drive in the *Thebaid* is embodied by the celebration of what ought not to be celebrated: *nefas* (an indescribable ‘wicked, forbidden act’).

Whilst it is difficult to provide a categorisation of the word, *nefas* in the *Thebaid* is put centre-stage instead of being suppressed, exacerbating the Senecan tension between ‘the desire to speak and to remain silent’, and the re-telling of the Seven Against Thebes becomes a twisted commemoration and indictment of the tyrannical autocratic power in the backdrop of a nefarious world.

What I aim to discern here is this complete transformation of the epic genre through the employment of tragic vision and tragic diction, and ultimately how these themes can be discerned in this more relaxed poem too. After all, Thebes is an ubiquitous spectre in the proem of the *Achilleid* (*Ach*.1.12-3: \textit{scit Dircaeus ager meque inter prisca parentum / nomina cumque suo numerant Amphione Thebae}).

Regarding Senecan drama read into the *Achilleid*, the scholarship has recognised the presence of Senecan diction: Fantham’s seminal work in 1979 shows that the relationship between Thetis and Achilles is tragically modelled reading of the *Thyestes* (2003) 1-7 is particularly useful to delineate the central themes of Senecan tragedy, and the playwright’s penchant for exploring issues of revenge, mortality, negative exempla and human passion taken to the extremes. Most recently, Augoustakis (2015) 377-95 has read Seneca’s *Oedipus* and *Thyestes* in the *Thebaid*, see 337 n.1 for a useful compendium of scholarship on Senecan drama and the *Thebaid*. See also Ripoll (1998) 323-40 and Soerink (2014) for Greek tragedy in the *Thebaid*. For the influence of tragedy on other Flavian epicists, see Sauer (2001); Davis (2014) 192-210; Marinis (2015) 343-61.

*Nefas* is the antonym of *fas*, often relating to an offence against divine law.


*Scire* is a highly programmatic verb for Statius: more on this in the final chapter. Thus, *contra* Parkes (forthcoming), who sees that the ‘true’ possibilities of tragic elements in the poem come into view once Achilles boards the ships en route to Aulis: for Parkes, the *Achilleid* goes beyond the closural ‘limitations’ of a tragic plot with the commencement of Achilles’ voyage, marked out as *longus* (*Ach*.2.22: \textit{incipit et longo Scyros discedere ponto}). However, the *Achilleid*’s extant plot is complete and the engagement with tragic elements is already enacted.
onto that of Andromache and Astyanax in the *Troades*. The two sets of characters, operating on opposite battle-sides, share similar characteristics: the anxieties of a mother, and her failure to protect her son, embody a tragic, universal response that supersedes *agmina*. Senecan echoes provide specific characterisations to the players of the *Achilleid*: I intend to extract them from the text in order to analyse their mutual dialogue, and to see how their framework can reconfigure, and add to, our interpretation of the poem. Bessone discusses Seneca’s influence on the *Achilleid*, but describes it as an ‘ironical degradation’, claiming that the death threat to Achilles is not as immediate as it is for Astyanax (and Andromache by proxy). I argue against this view, showing how the repeated mentions and allusions to Achilles’ mortality and deep-rooted heroic transgression do not diminish the prospect of death, but rather, emphasize the issues that surround it, accelerating the narrative towards war and the character’s demise. *Nefas* is also present in the *Achilleid*. The word occurs four times in the extant narrative:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\ldots \text{non aequa nefandis} \\
&\text{fratribus:} \\
&(Ach.1.111-12) \\

&\ldots \text{saepe ipsa – nefas!} – \text{sub inania natum} \\
&\text{Tartara et ad Stygios iterum fero mergere fontes.} \\
&(Ach.1.133-34) \\

&\ldots \text{silet aegra premitque} \\
&\text{iam commune nefas} […] \\
&(Ach.1.668-69) \\

&[...\text{Longum resides exponere causas}] \\
&\text{maternumque nefas} […] \\
&(Ach.2.43-4)
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{51} \text{Fantham (1979) 457-62. Delarue mentions Senecan diction (2000) 195, as does Setaioli (2015) 262 who states that ‘even Statius’ other, less bleak epic…is influenced by Seneca’s tragedy, especially the *Troades*, but no further analysis is elicited.} \]

\[\text{52} \text{See also McAuley (2015) 357-60.} \]

\[\text{53} \text{Bessone (forthcoming a).} \]
It is crucial, I argue, that two out of the four instances of the usage of the word are employed to define Thetis' feminine agency throughout the poem. The other two mentions simultaneously evoke other transgressive epic narratives, as the Lapith-battling Centaurs are seen the ‘nefarious brothers’ of Chiron, but also this transgressive epic, as the illicit relationship of Achilles and Deidamia becomes a ‘common nefas’. In the second example, Thetis herself dubs the dipping of Achilles in the Styx as a nefarious act, whilst in the last example, Achilles labels Thetis' trick of the transvestis as a *maternum nefas*, and the hero chooses not to dwell on the Scyrian narrative. But even if Achilles performs a rather clumsy *damnatio memoriae* of the episode (more on this shortly), the description of her intervention as an unspeakable act, in light of the tension between what needs to be retold and the need for silence, cannot simply be disregarded as an ironic twist and as a softening of more martial, epic/tragic tones. By encoding what Thetis has carried out with the expression of *nefas*, the tragic irony of the poem is augmented, as well as Achilles' naivety: he exchanges the motherly *nefas* for another ‘batch’ of unspeakable exploits, balancing the two on an analogous level.

The *Achilleid* is not a mere story of an indecorous, parenthetical episode in a hero’s life, but the tale of a mother who puts in motion the narrative – seen as a disruption for proper epic to continue, as Neptune says, *fata vetant* (*Ach.*1.81) – in order to save her son from certain death. Consequently, this thesis proffers a darker and

---

54 Calchas’ words to Thetis describe her own acts as *scelus* (*Ach.*1.533: *o scelus!*). See Roche (2009) 106-7 on *commune nefas* as universal guilt.

55 For Ovid’s Centauromachy in the *Achilleid*, and its implications for its gender hybridization, see Chinn (2013) 320-42. On *commune nefas*: this phrasing recalls Catullus’ description of the Trojan War, which reminds the readers of what is to come (note the emphasis of another ‘seizing’, Helen’s, seen as cause), cf. 68b.87-90: *Nam tum Helenae raptu primores Argivorum / coeperat ad seae Troia cire viros, / Troia (nefas) commune sepulcrum Asiae Europaeque / Troia virum et virtutum omnium acerba cinis*. In the *Achilleid*, two near-synonyms for *nefas*, *scelus* and *facinus* are employed to describe Helen’s raptus: *en aliat furto scelus et spolia hospita portans / navigat iniustae temerarius arbiter Idae* (*Ach.*1.66-7); and *facinusque relatu / asperat Iliacum* (*Ach.*1.400-1).


57 See *Aen.*8.398: *nec fata vetabant*, but also the more ironic *si fata negent* (*Ach.*1.549). Bessone (forthcoming a) makes room for a ‘dramatic’ and inherent ‘tragic’ reading of Thetis and her anxieties, though the scholar reflects that this foreboding context – a divine mother whose son’s death is about to ensue – is not allowed to affect the text ‘thoroughly’, despite Thetis being used as an *exemplum* of eternal sorrow at *Silv.*5.1.35-6 (a moment that Bessone dismisses as a merely contextual and not relevant for Thetis). For her intertextual rhetoric of failure, see Heslin (2005) 106-44 and Kozák (2013) 250-54. I will return to this gendered reading of *nefas* and Thetis’ actions in the final chapter.
tragic reading of the *Achilleid* through the analysis of epic and tragic leitmotifs that cannot be completely removed from the reality of an epic composition, as they materialize in this seemingly light-hearted poem.

It is imperative to point out that the reading that I advance in this thesis does not demand to be bent to the entirety of the poem and upheld as an all-embracing view of its narrative. As we have seen, the poem does explore many elegiac, erotic and generally more cheerful episodes. Rather, this tragic reading can be perceived in specific moments of the poem, and it works on the premise that these epic and tragic themes can in fact co-exist with the lighter ones. Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to add another standpoint from which the *Achilleid* can be interpreted. The *Achilleid* cannot elude its Ovidian stamp, but in any case, as Heslin justly reflects, ‘few modern readers of the *Metamorphoses* would view it as a light-hearted collection of happy love affairs’.58 These images, patterns and textual echoes intertwine with tragedy as a genre, and the presence of tragic reminiscences also adds to the generic complexity of the poem, a crucial trend within studies of the *Achilleid*, and it re-validates, re-evaluates and adds to the reading of the ‘epic’ genre in the Statian poem as a dynamic concept, ‘open to appropriation’ and in constant engagement with the previous literary tradition.59

1.4 *Unfinished business: the question of the poem’s completion*

No examination of the *Achilleid* can avoid a discussion of its completion. The poem’s unfinished status is a tricky one: in Gibson’s words, ‘we cannot be sure, certainty eludes us’, but it is important to recall its issues.60 The poem is considered by many to be an accidentally unfinished fragment, not only because it fails to fulfil its supposed programme but because it consists of two books of very uneven length: the general scholarly consensus sees the author’s death in AD 96 putting a halt to the composition of the poem.61 Inevitably, we are faced with the question

58 Heslin (2016) 89-94, contra Cameron (2009), who wrongly reads the lighter themes as Ovidian and the darker themes as Homeric. Heslin rightly adduces that the most violent moment is Deidamia’s rape, intrinsically Ovidian, cf. Heslin (2005) 261-76.
59 Hinds (1998); (2000); (2016).
61 For the dating of Statius’ oeuvre, see Coleman (1988) and Gibson’s general introduction (2006) xvii-xviii.
of intentionality: did Statius deliberately leave the poem in its extant unfinished status? This is a thorny matter, and one that ultimately cannot be resolved. There are mentions of the *Achilleid* in the last two books of the *Silvae*; in *Silvae* 4.7, Statius complains about the lack of inspiration for his Achilles (*Silv.* 4.7.21-4: *torpor est nostris sine te Camenis, / tardius sueto venit ipse Thymbrae / rector et primis meis ecce metis / haeret Achilles*). At *Silvae* 5.2, the poet speaks to an absent Crispinus and tells him that his Achilles will be looking for him among the crowd of spectators, as he will be absent from the usual *recitationes* (*Silv.* 5.2.162-63: *tu deeris, Crispine, mihi, cuneosque per omnes / te meus absentem circumspectabit Achilles*). At *Silvae* 5.5, the death of Statius’ father thwarts the composition of the poem hindering the poet’s inspiration (*Silv.* 5.5.36-7: *pudeat Thebasque novumque / Aeaciden: nil iam placidum manabit ab ore*).

The description of the *Achilleid* in *Silvae* 4.7 (‘my poem is trapped at the first turning-post’) matches the state of the poem as we have it now, which suggests that the poet was well aware of the ‘unfinished’ state of the poem, rather than it being enforced by his death. Henderson’s comment implies that the poem was left in the condition of its transmission: ‘Statius is stuck getting past his epic’s first bend into *Achilleid* book 2…stuck there – he already knew? – for ever’.

I perhaps detect another hint of suspicion in Hinds’ words too: ‘Statius publishes no more, and we assume death imposes premature closure on his latest epic project’. The mention of public *recitationes* reinforces the possibility that the poem could have been a poetic experiment, a teaser trailer to entice potential patrons: Heslin sees it as an *epyllion* to be circulated for benefaction. It could well be that the *Achilleid* is an experiment at ‘deliberate incompleteness’, due to the impossibility of continuing. As evidence, Heslin proffers Claudian’s reaction to the *Achilleid* in the

---

62 There is also an earlier mention of the *Achilleid* at *Silv.* 4.4.94: *Troia quidem magnusque mihi temptatur Achilles*. See Nauta (2008) 30-3 for this *recusatio* linked to the proem of the *Achilleid*.

63 Statius is remarkably keen to reiterate the progress of his poem, quite an unparalleled poetic statement.


composition of his own *De Raptu Proserpinae*: by leaving the work intentionally unfinished, he follows in Statius’ footsteps, showing that one of the ways in which the poem was received is that it was purposefully left as it stands.\(^6^8\) The topic of its completion is not a modern issue: when it was included in the 10th century popular medieval school manual, the *Liber Catonianus*, commentators attempted to divide the poem into five parts (beginning at 1.197, 396, 674, 960 and 2.168) to grant cohesion to the whole.\(^6^9\) Far from reconciling the dispute, Italian intellectuals of the 14th century continued the speculation. Dante believed that it was accidentally unfinished (*Purg.* XXI.91-3: *Stazio la gente ancor di là mi noma: / cantai di Tebe, e poi del grande Achille; / ma caddi in via con la seconda soma*), and Petrarch, along with his circle of literary *socii*, took some interest in the matter too, leaning towards the contrasting assessment.\(^7^0\)

Heslin rightly emphasises that the use of the word ‘fragment’ to describe the *Achilleid* is misrepresentative: it has a clear sense of coherence, refinement and narrative symmetry and unity.\(^7^1\) The *Achilleid* does not relinquish its core narrative, the transvestism of Achilles, on a cliff-hanger: Achilles has cross-dressed, has been found and is now on the way to Troy.\(^7^2\) The narrative has a beginning, a middle, and an ending. In even more dual, Aristotelian terms, Thetis’ *furtum* of Achilles is the δέσις, and Ulysses’ recovery of the boy on Scyros is the λύσις.\(^7^3\) The word ‘unfinished’ ought to be treated judiciously too.\(^7^4\) It conjures up notions of deficiency and incompleteness that are hardly true for the extant plot.

---

\(^6^8\) Heslin (2005) 65-70, though he notes that ‘it is unlikely that Statius, as a professional poet, planned that the *Achilleid* should remain forever in its present state of one book and a bit’.

\(^6^9\) Clogan (1968) 1-7, especially 3-4.

\(^7^0\) See Francesco Nelli’s letter to Petrarch, *Ep.* XXVIII: we do not have Petrarch’s reply, but it is generally believed that he upheld the opposite view, as in his *Seniles* he does not include Statius among the poets whose deaths hindered poetic compositions (*Sen.* XVII).

\(^7^1\) Heslin (2005) 57-8, mentioning the *OCD* and *OCCC*’s description by Feeney as a ‘charming, almost novelistic fragment’, see also 62-65, *contra* the view of the *Achilleid* as unrevised, as Dilke (1954) 7 upholds. For a good list of pre-epic descriptions of the *Achilleid*, see Hinds (1998) 136.

\(^7^2\) Note Delarue’s comment (2008) 81: ‘l’action que nous venons de suivre pourrait s’appeller La Ruse de Thétis ou, comme maintes comédies, La Précaution inutile’.


\(^7^4\) For the *Achilleid* as fragment, one can simply turn to the title of Slavitt’s book on the *Achilleid*, *Broken Columns: Two Roman Epic Fragments: The Achilleid of Publius Papinius Statius and The Rape of Proserpine of Claudius Claudianus* (1997).
of the *Achilleid*.\(^{75}\) The poem ends on the marvellously mordant conclusion of *scit cetera mater* (*Ach*.2.167), keeping the narrative of the poem within Achilles’ family/corial tensions, framing the poem within Jupiter-Aeacus-Peleus-Achilles and Thetis herself (*Ach*.1.1: *Magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti*).\(^{76}\)

There also is a great deal of irony in the way the poet has devised the narrative, which in turn might lead to its deliberate ‘incompletion’ (i.e. deliberate in the form we have it). The proem proffers its subject matter in a totalizing manner:\(^{77}\)

\[
\text{quamquam acta viri multum inclita cantu}
\text{Maeonio (sed plura vacant), nos ire per omnem—}
\text{sic amor est—heroa velis Scyroque latentem}
\text{Dulichia proferre tuba nec in Hectore tracto}
\text{sistere, sed tota iuvenem deducere Troia.}
\]

(*Ach*.1.3-7)

As briefly mentioned earlier, Statius swears that he will go through the whole of Achilles’ life (*omnem…heroa*), and that he will not stop at the dragging of Hector’s body: he will lead the young hero throughout the entirety of Troy (*tota…Troia*), up to his death.\(^{78}\) But the irony of this all-encompassing, full-scale claim is not lost on the scholarship, as the phrasing seems to suggest that the poet will take a chronologically linear biography of the hero, but in an Ovidian manner of filling in the gaps, marked out by the pledge of originality (*sed plura vacant*).\(^{79}\)

\(^{75}\) Hardie reads the *Achilleid* as unfinished because of Statius’ death, and only Ovid’s *Metamorphoses, the Thebaid and the Punica* ‘have any claim to represent the considered and polished last thoughts of their authors’ (1993) 139-40. This is a retrospectively unflattering reflection on what survives of the poem.

\(^{76}\) On the ending, see McAuley (2016) 345-47, who argues, *contra* Heslin (2005) 61 n.21, that the *cetera* are the events on Scyros and Achilles’ transvestism, and not those of Achilles’ life before Scyros and the training under the care Chiron.

\(^{77}\) Hardie (1993) 1-10; see also Dike (1954) 8 and most recently, Kozák (2014) 217-18.

\(^{78}\) Defying Aristotelian poetics (*Poet*.1451a).

\(^{79}\) Heslin (2005) 71-2.
This irony is augmented if we look at the end of the *Ilias Latina*, a popular Latin version of the *Iliad* roughly of the same length as the *Achilleid* (1070 lines).\(^\text{80}\) The *Ilias Latina* culminates with Achilles returning Hector’s mangled corpse to Priam, his funeral pyre and Andromache’s lament: the poet urges his poem to end with an abrupt sentence (*IL. 1063-64: sed iam siste gradum finemque impone labori / Calliope*).\(^\text{81}\) Statius ironically picks up an ending scene (*nec…sistere*) in his own beginning, where he is telling his audience that he will *not* stop at the dragging of Hector’s corpse. The programmatic tensions become even more suspicious when read alongside the *recusatio* that follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{da veniam ac trepidum patere hoc sudare parumper} \\
\text{pulvere: te longo necedum fidente paratu} \\
\text{molimur magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles.}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{(Ach. 1.17-9)}\)

The *Achilleid* is envisioned as a prelude for another, higher epic (we think of *maiora* in opposition to Achilles, who is ‘only’ *magnus*) on Domitian’s exploits: \(^\text{82}\) the poet pictures himself as a gladiator in the dust and sweat of the amphitheatre. But if the poet’s wish (*sic amor est*) is that of retelling the whole story of Achilles, why is he labelling his poetic effort with a temporal marker such as *parumper*, suggesting a short span of time?\(^\text{83}\) Similarly, Penwill’s analysis paints Statius as an avid procrastinator with a penchant for promising what he cannot deliver:

‘The encomium [of the *Achilleid*] is also much shorter—indeed, almost perfunctory [...] here, however, it comprises six hexameter lines which could readily be lifted out

---

\(^{80}\) Schetter (1960) 129 and Koster (1979) 191 identify the hypothetical retelling of Achilles’ post-mortem experiences. Coleman (2004) 29 offers a passing comment on the *Ilias Latina* and the *Achilleid*: ‘the Achilleid and its roughly contemporary poem, the *Ilias Latina*, are responsible for the more sentimental picture of Achilles as a warrior whose immense physical prowess is matched by an incomparable capacity to conquer women’s hearts’.

\(^{81}\) On laments, see below fn.783.

\(^{82}\) *Silv.* 4.4.95-6, with Myers (2015b) 188 n.1. See Heslin (1998): ‘Achilles, great though he is, is nothing but a warm-up to the far greater figure of the emperor’. For the metapoetic metaphor, see Chinn (2015) 175-77, but he sees the generic difference to lay between occasional and epic poetry.

\(^{83}\) On the programmatic imagery of *sudor* and *pulvis*, see Nauta (2006) 32-33, Sanna (2007) 207 n.36; McAuley (2010) 41-42; Chinn (2015). Heslin (2005) 80 sees in *parumper* the ‘provisional character of the poem’. Uccellini (2012) 51 believes that this is a standard way of using temporal adverbs in contexts of *recusationes*, using as an example *Ecl.* 4.1, *paudo maior canamus*, but the generic contexts seem to be opposite, for Virgil is excusing himself from bucolic poetry and entering the realm of a higher genre. See also the poem of the second half of the *Aeneid* (7.44-5: *maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo / maius opus moveo*).
without any damage to the surrounds. This certainly gives it the air of an afterthought, a note inserted to beg the emperor’s forgiveness: ‘I’m sorry, I know I promised to write that epic celebrating your achievements, I know I took 12 years on the Thebaid—hell, I’m so nervous about asking (trrepidum)—but could we PLEASE just put it off until I’ve done Achilles—I know I said a few lines back that I was going to fill in all the gaps that Homer left which means something about ten times as long as the Iliad, but I promise it won’t take long (parumper).’

The proem’s programmatic promises do not leave the audience with an easy job of interpreting the Achilleid’s scope and intention, and the programmatic irony conveys the parodic strategy of the ‘spiazzamento delle attese’, the overturning of expectations. Only the mention of Scyros directs to the narrative that we obtain in the poem, and the presence of these ironic claims can be a clue that the poem was not left accidentally unfinished. Furthermore, the totalising standpoint at the beginning of the poem can also allude to a highly polished composition, where the poem’s ‘epic’ characteristics are already inherent and at play in the extant narrative.

The second issue that arises here is a less problematic endeavour, and one we can toy with: interpretability. If we place authorial intent to one side, the polished extant narrative, with its proemial all-encompassing irony, can be the object of successful interpretive attempts. Heslin argues that the brilliance of the poem lies in the way the poet carefully draws the audience in and makes us wonder ‘where could the poem conceivably move on from here?’. He, however, reads the attempt to envision the issue of ‘what next’ as a ‘reductive and stubbornly persistent debate’, identifying this question as perfect testimony of the poet’s own success with the Achilleid. In this thesis, I intend to look at the issue of the continuation of narrative not from a perspective of what’s not there, but rather, from the various hints in the poem itself that are already proleptically looking to

---

86 See Jamset’s afterthought (2004b).
87 Contra Coleman (2004) 24: ‘… fragment such as the Achilleid which, being incomplete, offers only limited scope for self-contained analysis of structure, characterization, diction, and all the other features exhibited by a literary work in its entirety’.
88 Heslin (2005) 86.
89 If indeed a teaser for potential patrons, Heslin (2005) 86.
what can be considered the future of the poem’s characters, relying on the idea of an ultra-condensed narrative. The Achilleid looks forward, but it also presents elements of heightened epic and tragedy compressed within the narrative: the result is a poem where there is, paradoxically, no continuation, as these pathos-filled moments are already at play. In the next section, I continue the analysis of the poem’s coherence and unity from another viewpoint. The impossibility of continuation, in fact, is substantiated by hints within the narrative that showcase the poem’s own clever attempt at writing parts of itself as tradition, offering two narrative levels and undercutting these attempts with great irony.

1.5 Repetita iuvant, but not always: the creation of tradition(s)
The Achilleid’s endeavour to establish itself as ‘alternative epic tradition’ can be considered by modern standards a failure: the text did not become a canonical text. The conceptualisation of the poem as the fruit of a ‘secondary’ inspiration does not aid this classification, as the narrative often conveys a sense of belatedness. Statius begins by requesting a ‘propitious garland’ (Ach.1.9-10: da fontes mihi, Phoebe, novos ac fronde secunda / necte comas), which can be translated as ‘following’, or more literally, as ‘second’. The Achilleid always comes in second place: with respect to Statius’ primary epic, the Thebaid, with respect to Achilles’ Homeric tale, and with respect to the foundational epics of Virgil and Ovid (among others). Neptune is even called a secundus Iuppiter, which conjures up the image of a lesser, secondary god (Ach.1.48-9: ibo tamen pelagique deos dextramque secundi, / quod superest, complexa Iovis). Self-deprecation is inherent to Statius’ self-fashioning, but even if humility is a conventional trope in prefatory moments, we must see past that. The Achilleid’s panoptic statement of intent (omnem...heroa)

---

90 Hinds (1997) 205, later reprinted in Allusion and Intertext (1998) 142-43. See also Edmunds (2011) 74 and 149. See Heslin (2005) 69-70 for a rebuttal of this premise on the grounds of Claudian’s imitation, and because Statius’ previous work, the Thebaid, was never canonical.
92 Statius is fond of the self-fashioning of the follower: see the sphragis of the Thebaid and Myers (2015a) 37. Though the poet asks his composition to follow in Virgil’s footsteps, we can hardly believe that the Thebaid is simply a work of Virgilian imitation; on these two deferential moments read together, see Hinds (1998) 96-8. For the pun behind Iuppiter secundus, see Hinds (1998) 96 and Heslin (2005) 108-9: more in the third chapter.
93 Roman (2015).
seemingly clashes against the claim of secondariness, as the poem is in fact primary in chronology in respect to the narratives of Homer and Virgil, and this paradoxical poetic move feeds into the broader discourse of literary irony at play in the proem. Yet Statius’ self-fashioning is a poetic façade, and the poem itself provides us with hints of its meticulously visualised mirroring design. Furthermore, belatedness, and its anxiety of influence, can be interpreted as a tragic and pessimistic move on the poet’s part, seen in particular in Senecan tragedies: ‘[sic. it] validates its existence (and its novelty) by displaying total awareness of its epigonic nature and by laying bare its internal mechanisms’.  

What I aim to detect here are textual indications that reveal the careful and balanced construction of the poem. I proffer the suggestion that there are two main narrative levels that are in constant, internal dialogue and antinomy between themselves. These narrative levels are best exemplified by the dichotomy between warlike Aulis and unwarlike Scyros, between the masculine and feminine perceptions, between idealised ultra-masculine heroic ideals and Achilles’ shameful transvestism. The result of this examination is, ironically, twofold. First, we see how the text looks inward to extract resources for Achilles’ mythological arsenal. This means that there are parts of the poem where we see an attempt at establishing components of the poem as the authoritative tradition for Achilles’ life. These specific aspects are recurrent and are retold by the characters of the composition in a way that transforms them into the background for understanding Achilles’ heroic character. This analeptic and proleptic conveyance of information across the poem’s narrative levels exhibits an extraordinary level of labor limae. Secondly, these attempts at canonisation are themselves underscored with both 

---

94 See Myers (2015b) 180-82 for Statius’ allusion to Horace’s claims on the recycling of Homeric themes (Ars Poet.128-30), which suggests both an engagement with the cyclic epics and a simultaneous nod to original treatment of well-known Homeric myths (Ars Poet.131-2). Myers also notices that the beginning of the Thebaid shows Statius concerned with the boundaries of his epic (Theb.1.4-17), whereas in the Achilleid, the statement is all-encompassing: I find it puzzling (perhaps ironic?) that Statius inverts his claim.  
95 On the Achilleid as a work of a mature Statius, see Bitto (2016).  
96 Schiesaro (2003) 223; more on this in the final chapter.  
97 Again, I would advance that this can hardly be true for an ‘unfinished’ poem, let alone for a poem that follows Coleman’s designation (cf.fn.87).
ironic and tragic flavour.  

In fact, descriptions and narratorial interjections urge us to look for what is missing, what is being repressed, in order to focus on what the poem is really about. The analysis of these mechanisms of remembrance and repression at play sheds light on the ‘subversive’ elements that, whilst struggling to be suppressed, are magnified. This results in the establishment of the more feminine, less heroic core of the Achilleid, as it stands, as the tradition that ought, paradoxically, to be remembered and forgotten. This section, as we will see, also initiates a programmatic discourse, which ties in with ideas of the poetic vates: I shall return to this examination in the final chapter of this thesis. For now, I put on view the two narrative levels, the ostensibly warlike Aulis and the maternal, feminine island of Scyros, which Achilles must leave in order to become a man.

During the Aulis episode, the window to the ‘proper’ epic, the Greek troops long for the one and only absentee, Achilles. The soldiers recognise him as the only one capable of facing Hector (Ach.1.474-75: et in Hectora solus Achilles / poscitur), but also as the only one who will be able to bring doom to Priam’s Troy (Ach.1.475-76: illum unum Teucris Priamoque loquuntur / fatalem). These Iliadic reminiscences, besides augmenting the sense of belatedness, prompt the question of knowledge-transmission within the narrative. How can the Greeks know of these details, if the poem cleverly positions itself as antehomerica (and antevergilia)? There should be, in fact, no Trojan plot prior to these events. On these verses, Rosati points his readers to a prophecy by Calchas – well-attested in antiquity – where the seer had divulged to Thetis that Achilles’ presence was the necessary condition for the fall of Troy. A post-Statian source, Apollodorus, also pinpoints Calchas as prophesising the boy’s future exploits and his presence

---

98 The former will be examined in this section, whilst the latter will be analysed in the final chapter.
99 For allusion to the Thebaid and the tension between arma and amor, see Parkes (2008) 381-402. For an elegiac, gender-bending reading of the Aulis narrative, see Moul (2012) 286-300. Just as softer themes have intruded on Aulis, in the fourth chapter we will see how martial epic will breach Scyros.
100 And, in a way, they ask for Achilles’ death: Il.18.96-8, underscoring their cries with a tragic tinge.
as essential requirement: this prompts Thetis to hide Achilles among the maidens on Scyros.\textsuperscript{102}

Strictly speaking, in the \textit{Achilleid} there are two mentions of other prophecies linked to Achilles’ future at Troy. The first one is voiced by Thetis, when the goddess sees Paris’ ships sailing with Helen to Troy, and she recognises what she had been told by Proteus to be true (\textit{Ach.1.31-2}: ‘Me petit haec, mihi classis’ ait \textit{funesta minatur, / agnosco monitus et Protea vera locutum}). The subject of this prophecy is not disclosed, but Proteus is mentioned some hundred lines later. Here, however, the narrator quickly flags the mendacious nature of Thetis’ words (\textit{Ach.1.141}: \textit{sic ficta parens}), as she fabricates a story about safeguarding Achilles through purification in far off waters prompted by Proteus (\textit{Ach.1.135-37}: \textit{hos abolere metus magici iubet ordine sacri / Carpathius vates puerumque sub axe peracto / secretis lustrare fretis}).\textsuperscript{103} Here we see the slippage: the \textit{vera} that Thetis has voiced cannot be the \textit{ficta} she is telling Chiron. The \textit{vera} she alludes to is a reference to the \textit{Metamorphoses} (\textit{Met.11.221-28}), where Proteus had prophesied to Thetis herself that any child born to the goddess would outdo his father’s deeds (a threat that relegates the goddess to a mortal marriage).\textsuperscript{104} But again, this cannot be the prophecy that the Greeks are discussing. The focus of the soldiers’ cries is not that Achilles will be greater than his father, but rather, that he is the only one capable of going head-to-head against Hector.

This awareness portrays the Greeks as a learned audience and can be at first interpreted as a move of Flavian poetics. Zissos, writing on Valerius Flaccus’ \textit{Argonautica}, postulates that Flavian heroes display a highly metaliterary awareness: characters are seen to know their traditions and their own places within them.\textsuperscript{105} This ‘metaliterary competence’ could be at play here: the Greeks’

\textsuperscript{102} Apollod.\textit{Bibl.3.13.8}. Apollodorus might also allude to another prophecy about Achilles’ death at Troy, yet it is not specifically referred to. Cf. \textit{Il.18.50-65}, where Thetis suffers more than any other mother. Cf. Pseudo-Euripides, \textit{Rhes.934-80}.

\textsuperscript{103} A story invented for deceitful purposes.

\textsuperscript{104} Statius is the sole author ever to discuss the prophecy of Achilles’ threat as made by specifically Proteus. Other sources have Prometheus (\textit{Aesch.PV.755–68}); the Muses (\textit{Pind.Nem.5.34–7}); Themis (\textit{Isthm.8.26–7}).

familiarity with the Homeric tradition on Achilles allows them to make this faux pas. This becomes evident in Ulysses’ speech in the second book of the poem, where the Greek leader already knows that Achilles will be the mighty vastator of Troy (Ach.2.32: tene...magnae vastator debite Troiae). This is an allusion to Catullus 64 and the song of the Parcae, and we have confirmation with Ulysses’ knowledge that Achilles had already been promised to the Greek army during Thetis and Peleus’ wedding (Ach.2.56-7: dum Pelea dulce maritat / Pelion, et nostris iam tunc promitteris armis). Upon examination, however, we learn that the prophecy of Achilles’ necessary agency and his duel with Hector is actually outlined in the first half of the poem, and then repeated by the Greeks. This process of retelling thus suggests a bid to establish and validate parts of Achilles’ mythological background and ultra-heroic destiny, with the Greeks as witnesses, as the authoritative tradition through the creation of a literary memory. The internal audience is not only ‘metaliterarily’ aware of Achilles as a product of other traditions, but also of parts of his character that derive from the Achilleid itself.

The contest between Achilles and Hector is retold during another pseudo-prophecy made earlier in the Achilleid by Neptune. Replying to Thetis’ plea for a storm to be unleashed against Paris’ ships (Ach.1.79-89), the god responds with the ever-so-stern fata vetant. War is inevitable: fata signposts the previous literary tradition, an articulation of ‘this is not how the story is meant to continue’. Neptune provides Thetis with some consolation, telling her that she will see (aspicies) Achilles the bearer of funerals for Phrygian mothers as her son spills his enemies’ blood on the Trojan plains (Ach.1.86-7). The juxtaposition of the name of Achilles and that of Hector, as Achilles’ chariot is imagined to be delayed because of the weight of the Trojan prince’s corpse (Ach.1.88: et Hectoreo tardabit funere currus), proleptically leaps to the climactic duel between the two, and

106 Note verbal echoes with Catull.64.346: periuri Pelopis vastabit tertius heres. However, whilst Catullus 64 is a crucial source for Statius, there is no mention of Achilles and Hector’s duel.
108 For prophetic reminiscences of Catullus 64 in Neptune’s account of Achilles’ heroism, see Ganiban (2015).
Achilles’ victory.\textsuperscript{109} In the \textit{Achilleid}, it is Neptune who apprises Thetis about Achilles’ future at Troy.\textsuperscript{110} The Greeks are metaliterarily conscious of the \textit{Iliad}’s tale, but they are also gaining their facts from the poem itself.\textsuperscript{111} It is worth pointing out that transmission of knowledge in the poem is not linked to the workings of \textit{Fama}, despite featuring a number of times (\textit{Ach}.1.388; 1.393-94; 1.468; 1.506-7; 1.728-29).\textsuperscript{112} In fact, unlike the personified Virgilian \textit{Fama} (often seen in the \textit{Thebaid}), she does not feature as a direct agent nor does she play an active, personified role in the poem.\textsuperscript{113} The transmission of details of Achilles’ life therefore comes from scattered mentions within the narrative, rather than through the reliance on previous literary accounts.

This inward-looking perspective gains traction if we turn again to the passage describing the Greeks’ desperate cries for Achilles. The soldiers, who ought to be in the dark, appear to be aware of numerous details of Achilles’ life. They know of the hero’s tender years in Thessaly with Chiron (\textit{Ach}.1.476-77: \textit{Quis enim Haemoniis sub vallibus alter/ creverit effossa reptans nive?}), his primitivist education (\textit{Ach}.1.477-79: \textit{cuius adortus / cruda rudimenta et teneros formaverit annos / Centaurus?}), his Jovian lineage, and even the story of Thetis’ attempt to make her child invulnerable (\textit{Ach}.1.479-81: \textit{Patrii propior cui linea caeli / quemve alium Stygios tulerit secreta per amnes / Nereis et pulchros ferro praestruxerit artus?}). These are the reports at the centre of the Greeks’ talks at Aulis, retold by the cohorts themselves (\textit{Ach}.1.482: \textit{Haec Graiae castris iterant traduntque cohortes}).\textsuperscript{114} These are stories, in

\textsuperscript{109} Uccellini (2012) 64, who aptly calls this episode ‘la profezia di Nettuno a Teti’, notes that Statius introduces the theme of the Trojan War through the words of Thetis and Neptune, substituting the oracular words of seers (Nereus, Proteus, Cassandra, etc.) with a discursive narrative.
\textsuperscript{110} The duel reoccurs in a narratorial interjection after Achilles’ reveal, who appears as ready to take on Hector there and then (\textit{Ach}.1.883: \textit{ceu protinus Hectora poscens}). These proleptical references to the \textit{Iliad} can be interpreted as indications that the poem will not continue.
\textsuperscript{111} Despite the two divinities meeting in the depths of the sea (\textit{Ach}.1.52: \textit{Oceano veniebat ab hospite...}), which strikingly echoes \textit{Silv}.4.2.53-5.
\textsuperscript{112} Most interestingly is Thetis’ plea to the island of Scyros to keep Achilles safe in return for fame, as well as her imagining the island ‘teaching’ Rumour to lie about the whereabouts of Achilles (\textit{Ach}.1.393-94: \textit{hic thiasi tantum et nihil utile bellis: / hoc famam narrare doce}). \textit{Fama} does not do a bad job, as the Greeks only know that Achilles is not with Chiron anymore (\textit{Ach}.1.606-7: \textit{nam fama nec antris / Chironis patria nec degere Peleos aula}). See Gibson (2010) 39.
\textsuperscript{113} Valerius Flaccus best exemplifies the influence of Virgilian \textit{Fama} (Val.Fl.2.101-34). On \textit{Fama} in imperial epic, see Hardie (2012) 196-214.
\textsuperscript{114} Note Kozák’s laconic comment (2012) 88: ‘the narrator’s summarizing words imply that this is already some form of tradition’.

32
their totality, which have been voiced *within* the poem: its own characters have woven these tales as the narrative progresses. In her early monologue, Thetis had already mentioned Achilles’ upbringing with Chiron (*Ach.1.38-41: quid enim cunabula parvo / Pelion et torvi commisimus antra magistri? / illic, ni fallor, Lapitharum proelia ludit / improbus et patria iam se metitur in hasta*). The reference to Pelion in Thessaly recalls the contextualisation of Achilles’ education as retold by the Greeks (*Haemonis…vallibus*). The description of Chiron as a *torvus magister* evokes the harsh educational methods (*cruda rudimenta*) that the Greeks know the Centaur had imposed onto Achilles. Moreover, the mention of a Jovian ancestry recalls both the opening lines of the poem (*Ach.1.1-2*), the mention of the papponymic *Aeacides* during Neptune’s speech (*Ach.1.86: tuus Aeacides*), and Thetis’ futile wish of a better marriage (*Ach.1.90-1*).

But it is the Styx episode that constitutes crucial evidence of the internal dialogue and transmission of knowledge within the composition. When Thetis is attempting to persuade Chiron to release Achilles, she recalls submerging the infant hero into the chthonic river to protect him (*Ach.1.133-34*). Not only has the failed attempt at immortalising Achilles been divulged earlier, but the story of Achilles’ invulnerability is not present elsewhere in the canonical literary tradition, only in the *Achilleid*. And, perhaps most importantly, the Greeks denote Thetis’ efforts as *secreta*, self-consciously, betraying themselves. Thus, details of Achilles’ childhood that the Greeks are retelling are contained in the composition.

---

115 Notice the sense of continuity: Achilles follows in his father’s footsteps. See Uccellini (2012) 69 for the image of Achilles literally and metaphorically ‘measuring himself up’ against Peleus’ spear. For *hasta* as a metaphor for phallus, see Adams (1982) 19-22.

116 Worth pointing out is Ulysses’ admission of knowledge once his tricks prompt a superfluous gender-reveal party (*Ach.1.867-69: Quid haeres? / scimus…tu semiferi Chironis alumnus, tu caeli pelagique nepos, te Dorica classis…*).


118 The Styx is further mentioned once Thetis and Achilles arrive at Scyros (*Ach.1.269-70*).

119 Thetis’ dipping in the Styx, as Rosati argues (1994a) 88, was well-attested in figurative art, yet no literary testimony has survived. For other sources on Achilles’ heel, see Heslin (2005) 166-69.

120 But they think Thetis has been successful; again, note how the mention of the dipping in the Styx is missing from Ulysses’ words to Achilles, despite the Greeks’ awareness (cf.p.37). These accounts could have been known to the audience (i.e. the Greeks at Aulis) through the metapoetic means of literary echoes (e.g. the prophecy of Achilles’ greatness in Catullus 64 or Pindar’s account of the hero’s childhood). Nevertheless, we must not overlook the repeated appearance of these subject matters of the Greeks’ discussions in the *Achilleid* before the Aulis window.
The attempt at canonising these stories about Achilles’ greatness finds its apex in the second book. Achilles himself corroborates the reports about him that have been passed on in the poem. From the outset, there is a manifest layer of irony: Diomedes’ request that Achilles disclose tales of his childhood (Ach.2.86-93) is amusingly superfluous, as he is already aware of Achilles’ baggage, being one of the seven warriors mentioned by name among those at Aulis.\textsuperscript{121} Achilles begins with a reference to his *reptantibus annis* (Ach.2.96), recalling his youth under Chiron’s care and mirroring what has been said between Thetis and Chiron, and then repeated by the Greeks (*quis…reptans*). Even the more figurative *cruda rudimenta* could be picked up on again by Achilles where he explains his more tangible diet of raw meat (Ach.2.99-100), and Chiron’s unforgiving didactic manners (Ach.2.125-28). One detail is conspicuous by its absence in Achilles’ account: his dipping in the Styx, conveniently left behind. It would be counterproductive to the teleology of the narrative – a proto-hero endeavouring to make an extraordinary name for himself and live up to expectations – to mention the weakness that will be the end of him. Thus, he himself repeatedly substantiates the Greeks’ suppositions in a paradoxical ‘mixture of recall and foreshadowing’: he recollects what has been previously said of him by other characters (and we, as audience, have seen), but also what has been foreshadowed already by their stories.\textsuperscript{122}

By frequently exchanging and transmitting knowledge in the poem, sourcing it from the poem itself, on the surface, the result is a picture of Achilles as a heroic *Wunderkind*. The recurrent tales all belong to the mythical cache of his life. His future at Troy, his ultra-epic masculine education under Chiron, his lineage that harks back to Jupiter himself, and even his mother’s attempt at making him invulnerable. These stories belong to the realm of grandiose epic proper, and it is not by chance that the characters involved in this act of retelling all have their

\textsuperscript{121} See the ultra-compressed catalogue of heroes (Ach.1.467-72), another indication that the poem cannot continue.

\textsuperscript{122} These are Hinds’ words (1993) 17-9 on Ovid’s treatment of the Medea myth, as the heroine’s appearance in various generic forms (epistolary, epic and tragic) overlaps and intertwines.
place at Aulis, the narrative level that represents a window onto the ‘proper’ epic arena to come. But the main components of the Achilleid, as it stands, are events where femininity and female agency are augmented and take centre-stage: the dishonourable, cross-dressing episode, and Achilles’ infatuation with Deidamia. The imagined portrayal of Achilles recited by the Greeks only exists in the margins of the actual narrative of Achilleid, as the latter’s core converges upon more ‘unepic’ themes.

These conflicting narratives are brought to light at the end of the Achilleid. Achilles’ address ends with an unequivocal damnatio memoriae of the Scyrian chapter.\textsuperscript{[123]} The hero relegates the episode to his mother’s knowledge (Ach.2.167: scit cetera mater), assuring the audience that there will be no place for a feminine hero once at Troy.\textsuperscript{[124]} Yet Achilles’ attempt at self-aggrandisement is underscored by profound irony.\textsuperscript{[125]} First, the narrator directs us towards Achilles’ own maladroitness when he begins speaking (Ach.2.94-5: Quem pigeat sua facta loqui? tamen ille modeste / incohat, ambiguus paulum propiorque coacto […]).\textsuperscript{[126]} Secondly, his own style of narration betrays the presence of the embarrassing episode he attempts to conceal.\textsuperscript{[127]} Achilles dons the role of unreliable narrator à la Nestor in the Metamorphoses, relying on metalinguistic awareness of his characterization of Nestor as the ‘wisdom of our times’ (Met.12.178: aevi prudentia nostri). This Achilles knows his Ovid, and his place in multiple epic traditions: he manipulates it, though unsuccessfully, for his own gain. In his tale of epic heroism, Achilles ends his section on the different combat skills by concisely saying ‘I could scarcely recall all that I did, though I did it well’ (Ach.2.137: vix memorem cunctos, etsi bene gessimus, actus). Achilles acknowledges that memory – his memory – is not

\textsuperscript{123} On Achilles’ obliteration of the events, see Hinds (2016) 314-18 and Bessone (forthcoming a). The damnatio memoriae is signposted by reaction of the Scyrians, who do not dare remembering anything (Ach.2.8-9: prospectant cuncti iuvenemque ducemque / nil ausi meminisse pavent).

\textsuperscript{124} For a different reading, see Kozák (2012) 73-92: he argues that this ‘aetiological’ account of the hero’s life relies on Pindar’s accounts of Achilles’ early life, but at the same time fills in the gaps of the Pindaric epinician tradition in a game of literary one-upmanship, derived from Silv. 4.7.

\textsuperscript{125} Bessone (2016) 203.

\textsuperscript{126} Sua facta ironically reflects on κλέα ἀνδρῶν, but there seems to be a play between singing the deeds of other heroes, which is something that Achilles does quite openly in Il. 9, and speaking of one’s own deeds in the first person (cf. below p.135).

\textsuperscript{127} We already saw a similar irony when Achilles blushes again in front of Ulysses, cf.p.15.
flawless, simultaneously relying on it as a vector for authority. Bessone highlights Achilles’ naivety in disregarding usual forms of praeteritio by adding a concessive clause, casting not only an ironic twist to epic conventions, but clumsiness in the presentation of rhetorical exercises altogether.\(^\text{128}\) Ineptness abounds.

Achilles continues his tale marked out by poetic memory by singling out an episode and opening it with memini (Ach.2.143-45: memini, rapidissimus ibat / imbribus adsiduis pastus nivibusque solutis / Sperchios vivasque trabes et saxa ferebat).\(^\text{129}\) The parallels with Nestor’s role as narrator are numerous. Both are eye-witnesses: Achilles, of his own childhood, Nestor, of the Centauromachy. Furthermore, Achilles’ admission of the shortcomings of memory can be traced back to Nestor’s own confession that his memory is prone to waning whilst still taking pride in their abilities (Met.12.182-84: quamvis obstet mihi tarda vetustas, / multaque me fugiant primis spectata sub annis, / plura tamen memini).\(^\text{130}\) By not remembering everything that he did, but assuring us that he did it well, Achilles is effectively adopting the Nestor role, but the effect is quite different.

Nestor’s vetustas bestows him literary auctoritas and emphasises the temporal divide between the events of the past, the Centauromachy, and the events of the Trojan War.\(^\text{131}\) Yet Achilles, by barely remembering his childhood and acting as an ‘aged’ narrator, despite his youth, actually draws attention to the fact that we are not discussing a muddled memory, but a much more recent achievement. He repeatedly provides temporal markers (Ach.2.96: et in teneric et adhuc reptantibus annis; Ach.2.110-11: vix mihi bissenos annorum torserat orbes / vita rudis), meant to evoke an element of remoteness. But in reality, he has not aged much, let alone reached his three-hundredth year of age (Met.12.187-88: vixi / annos bis centum; nunc tertia vivitur aetas).\(^\text{132}\) Achilles’ authority is thwarted exactly because he is not an aged narrator. The result is an unproductive attempt at presenting his heroic

\(^{128}\) Bessone (2016) 203.


\(^{130}\) See also Nestor’s selective memory when it comes to recounting details (Met.12.461: vulnera non memini, numerum nomenque notavi).

\(^{131}\) Zumwalt (1977) 220.

\(^{132}\) There could be a pun between vix and vixi.
tales of premature martial prowess as the literary tradition, because the *Achilleid* – as it stands – is certainly not about those. The Greeks’ reiteration of these tales about Achilles, and the hero’s failed attempt at establishing and corroborating them as tradition (i.e. what is to be remembered), lays bare the discrepancies between what the poem is really about, the Scyrian episode, and what he, and the Greeks, wish to focus on, creating a layer of irony at the expense of the hero. Moreover, it exacerbates the divide between the two narrative levels, embodied by the martial, heroic world at Aulis and the world of Scyros, the ‘maternal womb-tomb’ that serves both as a safe-haven for Achilles, and as a paradoxical, inevitable prelude of death for the hero.

1.6 *Achilles objectified: a literal scriptus puer?*

The Greeks iterate and hand over stories about Achilles (*Ach*. 1.482). The choice of verbs (*iterant; traduntque*) conveys a sense of repetition and the oral delivery of knowledge for posterity. This choice retraces its steps back to the first verb of the poem, *refer*, with the unnamed Muse in charge of retelling the *Achilleid* (*Ach*. 1.3: *diva, refer*). *Iterare* is used in the context of oral communication: in a more derogatory context, Horace advises his friend Lollius not to parrot someone else’s words, and not to be overly servile (*Epist*. 1.18.12: *iterat voces et verba cadentia tollit*). The nature of orality dwells on the act of repetition of stories that ought to be repeated in order to be understood (*Plaut*. *Amph*. 1.211-12: *haec ubi Telobois ordine iterarunt quos praefecerat / Amphitruo…*). *Tradere* has slightly different implications, denoting the act of retelling and handing down of information. It is a verb usually employed in contexts where information is handed down generation after generation, as a timeless exercise in which traditions, customs

---

133 Poetic memory abounds in the last two lines of the poem, to which I return in the final chapter.

134 See McAuley (2016) 359. Achilles is similar to Elsa Morante’s Arturo in *L’Isola di Arturo* (1957), who must leave the island of Procida that, figuratively, is both the representation of the imagined engulfing and stifling maternal bubble, as well as the embodiment of an unattainable masculine standard that never materialises because of his ever-absent father.

135 The natural question is here ‘which *Achilleid*?’, so which part of the poem.

136 Cf. also *Plaut*. *Poen*. 4.920-1: *nam hoc si ante aedes evocem, / quae audivistis modo, nunc si eadem hic iterum iterem, insciatiast.*

137 Repetition plays a fundamental role in Roman Comedy, both positively and negatively. I employ this example since its context applies fittingly to a messenger-like figure retelling an earlier development in the story.
and life never perish, but are instead repetitively shared. Lucretius, for instance, compares the notion of succession of life and death to a runner passing along the torch of life (Lucr. 2.79: *et quasi cursoris vitai lampada tradunt*). As another example, Pliny the Elder records Fabius Pictor’s act of historiographical recording (*HN*. 10.24.34: *tradit et Fabius Pictor in annalibus suis […]*).

What the Greeks are doing with respect to the stories of Achilles’ childhood, reiterating and retelling them, finds its root in the way oral tradition, especially Homeric tradition, operates. The subject matter of the Greeks’ talk, centred upon Achilles’ mythical biography, ought to be read in conjunction with this oral manner of canonisation. Both Homeric and Statian, the method of transmitting these tales is intertwined with ideas of preservation of (the right type of) κλέος and κλέα ἀνδρῶν (*Il*. 9.189, 525; *Od*. 8.73). In this section, I argue that the use of *tradere* in the poem further adds to the dynamics of establishing a literary tradition by turning the protagonist, Achilles, into the story to be told, the object that must be handed down for the continuation of the narrative. In the preface of *Silvae* 1, Statius uses the verb to define the tangible delivery of his poetic collection to Domitian (*Silv*. 1. ep. 19: *tradere ausus sum*). Similarly, his Achilles will have to be passed on passively to different characters so that he, the composition, can emerge.

In addition to the above-mentioned use of *tradere*, the verb occurs once again in a martial context that immediately evokes the ‘proper’ epic tradition. When Ulysses has arrived on Scyros, he tries to spur Achilles into revealing himself through the recollection of the mustering at Aulis. In typically epic excess, Ulysses describes fields and cities emptied to rush to war, mountains being deprived of their inhabitants, the whole sea covered by a multitude of ships (*Ach*. 1.787-90). Fathers are seen ‘handing over’ weapons to the iuventus, conveying the impression that participation in the Trojan War is a moral, familial duty, but simultaneously

---

138 See Thomas (1992) 29-50. For dynamics of orality in Imperial thought and pedagogy, see Lauwers (2011) 227-44.

underscoring the inescapability and repetitive nature of war itself, referring to the tradition that etymologically originates from the verb itself (Ach.1.791: tradunt patres arma; cf. Ach. 1.423-34). Ulysses is proleptically illustrating Achilles’ destiny, but also the future Homeric epic plot. He is singing of arms, but arma become a metaphorical substitute for the narrative itself: in order for the epic course to advance, he will quite literally provide Achilles with arms, but he also refreshes the hero’s memory with reference to his impending Homeric (and Virgilian) prospect.  

Tradere is found at another cardinal moment. After Thetis’ arrival at Chiron’s cave, she orders the centaur to trade magis! (Ach. 1.141, which can be translated as ‘rather, pass him over [to me’]). Since there is no object of trade, and the word tradere can literally mean to ‘pass x over’ to someone else, we can supply the notion that – quite rightly – Achilles is the object of Thetis’ abrupt request. We can then read Thetis’ demand in a metapoetic light: what she is asking is that Achilles, the subject matter of the Achilleid, be handed over to her, so that she can enact the plot of the poem and be the Pygmalion-esque artifex of the cross-dressing. Koster’s claim of a ‘Thetideid’ acquires a new metapoetic level, as Chiron’s act of handing over Achilles to his mother is what enables Thetis to begin one of Achilles’ uncanonical tales: the transvestism. In response to the imperative trade, Chiron is literally handing over Achilles, but also metaphorically ‘trading’ its main character too, as this exchange constitutes the beginning of those ‘other’ tales of Achilles’ life neglected by the Homeric tradition (sed plura vacant), in a game of concurrent remembrance and suppression.

Tradere is employed at another pivotal stage in the poem. When Thetis successfully cross-dresses Achilles, she presents him to Lycomedes as one of Achilles’ sisters (Ach. 1.350-52: ‘Hanc tibi ait nostri germanam…Achillis / […] / tradimus). The verb employed is the nosism tradimus, with a straightforward

---

140 Arma are metaphorical stand-ins for the narrative (Aen. 1.1: arma virumque cano).
141 On magis, see Heslin (2005) 117-18.
142 The sources for Achilles’ transvestism go as far back as with Euripides’ early play the Skyrioi, see Heslin (2005) 193-95 for an overview of sources on Achilles as a ‘maiden’.
meaning of ‘I am handing [this ‘girl’] over to you’. We appear to be, once again, in the presence of a marker of Statian metapoetics. It is the necessary act of handing Achilles over to Lycomedes that enacts the continuation of another essential part of the Achilleid, the infatuation between Achilles and Deidamia and the conception of Neoptolemus. Yet Thetis makes a mistake in handing over the plot, because it is in her absence that Achilles goes from object to the subject of his own narrative.

The reification of Achilles as a literary element can be glimpsed in other places. Twice in the poem, in fact, he uses dicor (‘I am said [to X]’) to describe himself, personifying himself as poetic substance (as the Silvae had done to him). The first passage shows an Achilles highly concerned with his future fame, apprehensive that he might not fulfil his Homeric destiny (Ach.1.629-31: an desertoris alumni / nullus honos, Stygiasque procul iam raptus ad umbras / dicor, et orbatus plangit mea funera Chiron?). The second passage is the beginning of his aforementioned attempt to create a literary memory about his exceptional childhood (Ach.2.96: Dicor et in teneris et adhuc reptantibus annis…). In this section, I thus have argued that through the employment of tradere at decisive moments of the Achilleid, and Achilles’ own awareness as a sort of scriptus puer, the poet signals the novelties that ensue in the poem, thus implicitly subverting the idea of ‘secondariness’ that he acknowledged at the beginning of the composition. The Achilleid thus exhibits elements of shrewd and thorough structural depth that, together with its multilayered and mirroring narrative levels, display careful attempts to set itself up as a full, self-standing account of Achilles’ life, from all directions. Simultaneously, the constant proleptical leaps to the Trojan War, and in particular the crucially culminating moment of the Iliad, the duel with Hector,

---

143 Heslin (2005) 130 notes that the sentence is abruptly separated by the verb that stands alone in the following line, perceiving that ‘the awkwardness of expression and sudden change of direction reflect the speaker’s embarrassment’. Thetis has not yet managed to give Achilles in female garb a woman’s name.

144 On this personification, see Gibson (2006) 254 with Silv.5.2.163.


146 See Catull.64.2 with dicuntur. See also Deidamia’s fear of being relegated to oblivion (Ach.1.947-48: ast egomet primae puerilis fabula culpae / narrabor famulis aut dissimulata latebo). On the Ovidian Heroidic flavour of this passage, see Bessone (2016) 193-94.
together with Achilles' metapoetic awareness, make the reader feel like there is no narrative that can follow. Achilles' future, and death by proxy, permeates through core moments of the *Achilleid*, turning the poem into an ultra-concentrated chronicle of Achilles' life.

1.7 *Leggere è un po’ morire*: theoretical and methodological frameworks

The darker reading that I propose is an interpretation of the Statian poem framed within the inevitability of the death of its main character, Achilles. The prospect of his eventual demise does not only affect the youth, but has an effect on other characters too, resulting for instance in Thetis' inconsolable grief at the thought of losing her child (*Ach*.1.74-6), and Achilles’ desertion of Deidamia and Neoptolemus, the former relegated to oblivion and the latter to a fatherless coming of age.

The analysis that I extend here initially originates from a dichotomy that already exists in the Homeric epics concerning Achilles' destiny. In the *Iliad*, the hero explains his choice between two different paths of life: the prospect of a short and glorious life overwhelms the alternative, a life consigned to old age and obscurity (*II*.9.410-16). In the *Odyssey*, during Odysseus' νέκυια, the hero regrets his choices, wishing to have been a serf to a pauper rather than a lord of the dead (*Od*.11.489-93). The life of Achilles is an existence centred upon the looming threat of a premature death, which is revealed to have been a sorrowful endeavour.\(^{147}\) Death is present in the *Achilleid*, as some scholars have recognised in the proem the potential for a narrative that includes the death of Achilles. With his totalizing poetic intent (*ommem…heroa and tota…Troia*), there could be enough scope to continue the hero's narrative until after his Trojan exploits, perhaps referring to his afterlife and the various traditions that are dedicated to his post-mortem experiences.\(^{148}\) In its beginning, this thesis was thus configured as a reaction to Achilles' own words bemoaning his humanity.

---

\(^{147}\) Achilles' early childhood and Thetis' trick shows that the hero has in fact had a sort of normalised contact with the Underworld and specifically, the Styx (*Ach*.1.33-5). See Harrauer (2010) 165-75 for the importance of the Styx and Hesiodic narratives in the *Achilleid*.

\(^{148}\) For Achilles' afterlife, see Burgess (2009).
On a preliminary level, death is an important narrative drive for the *Achilleid*. Heslin’s earlier reflection continues to be too narrow and perhaps too reductionist. As we have seen, our own familiarity with previous traditional accounts of Achilles’ life deliberately impels us to look for darker, more ominous, hints that foreshadow the Trojan War and what is to come. Feeney sees the poem’s stifling ‘heightened awareness of its literary heritage’ in the presentation of narrow seascapes throughout the composition (*Ach*.1.28-9; 1.34-5; 1.445-46; 1.790).

There seems to be no escaping Achilles’ demise. Feeney notices that the proemial presence of Apollo (*da fontes mihi, Phoebe…*) and his obsession with Achilles betrays an ulterior sinister hint, for Apollo is the deity who orchestrates his demise at the hands of Paris: ‘the simultaneously destructive and creative god is called upon to begin the process that will carry on until the subject of the poem is dead.’

Creation and origin, death and dissolution go hand in hand and pervade the poem. It is inevitable, as we reach the poem’s conclusion, to frantically ask ‘what’s next’ precisely because we know, or at least we think we know, what is about to come: mortality is inexorable. But what if mortality were to be already there?

In the thesis, I add a tragic level to Achilles’ mortal destiny through the presentation of war as an inevitable and inescapable repetitive process, and through the examination of troubling aspects in the narrative of the *Achilleid*. I trace where, how and why Achilles and other characters are cast in a disquieting

---

149 Which in turn exemplify the Ovidian trope of the poetic creation (and by proxy, its creator) that needs to navigate through the dense sea of the literary tradition.


152 Benjamin (1936) translated by Zohn (1963) 95 discusses the finite temporality of storytelling, adducing that what we hunt for in works of fiction is essentially the knowledge of death, only conferrable with a clear ending. Due to the *Achilleid’s* strong sense of closure, and its superb ending that seals off his mortal destiny through his mother’s knowledge, the *Achilleid* in a sense does end with the death of Achilles. The convincing sense of finality of this poem seemingly contrasts the ending of the narrative in the *Thebaid*, but the lament of Atalanta for her son Parthenopaeus—who shares similarities with Achilles—could easily be abstracted and played by Thetis and Achilles, whose mortality is signed, sealed and delivered from the beginning of the poem. On Parthenopaeus and Achilles, and the cyclicality of their respective epics, see Jamset (2004b) 97-159, though she talks of their martial successes rather than their tragic destiny. See Dietrich (1999) 49 for Statius’ poetic powerlessness that only an endless lament can epitomise, more in the final chapter.
light that simultaneously foreshadows, and analeptically returns to, the Neronian and Flavian treatment of heroic codes of conduct and war, reacting to pointed episodes in the literary tradition. In my pursuit of unearthing these elements in the poem, I treat the plot of the *Achilleid* as a dynamic concept in incessant motion that moves the narrative discourse forward.\(^\text{153}\) In my reading, I have distinguished sections of the narrative that fall outside the standard categorisation of the poem as an idyllic and relaxed fragment, and I have intentionally tailored my discussion of the *Achilleid* within this interpretative frame: I deliberately seek, in my examination, to account for these elements, reading for the particular ‘tragic’ question.\(^\text{154}\)

The conscious *modus* of unearthing these darker and tragic features is fixed within reader-response criticism. Iser postulated the notion of a hypothetical figure of a reader, the ‘implied reader’, who has the right cultural, moral and social mind-sets to set in motion the text and its meaning.\(^\text{155}\) The hermeneutic process becomes removed from conceptions of what the author might have meant, and acknowledges the fundamental supposition that meaning is not a fixed, pre-existing identity, but it is created through the reader’s interpretation. Meaning is activated through the reading practice, but it is by no means a conclusive and categorical endeavour: ‘the essential quality of the act of reading, now and always, is that it tends to no foreseeable end, to no conclusion’.\(^\text{156}\) The present reading of the *Achilleid* is first and foremost an aesthetic reading, meaning that the focus is not necessarily precluded by discussion of strict philological phenomena, but rather, ‘requires the participation of the reader and […] is integrated into the

---

\(^{153}\) I follow Brooks' theorisation (1984) 7-23 of the plot as 'the organizing dynamic of a specific mode of human understanding' and 'the dynamic shaping force of the narrative discourse'.

\(^{154}\) Similarly, see Allen's analysis of gynocriticism and intertextuality (2011) 140-50, where feminist literary criticism becomes an approach to textual criticism that actively reappraises gendered binary ideas and looks to scrutinise the female experience and voice.

\(^{155}\) Iser (1974) and (1978).

\(^{156}\) Manguel (1997) 9, col. 4.
developing meaning of the text being read’. Again, dynamism is the decisive feature of both text and interpretation.

The considerations of my thesis also place themselves within the dauntingly broad term of intertextuality. Kristeva’s original formulation views intertextuality as the process through which the creation of a text is the result of the tessellation, incorporation and transformation of other texts (and meaning becomes a Bakhtinian double). In its specific application to the field of Classics, Edmunds rightly takes from Kristeva the important notion that ‘any poetic text is in principle, not secondarily and occasionally, intertextual’. The text is not a nebulous item that occurs in a confined space, and only read through its own lens for its own sake: rather, it is the by-product of existing traditions, and establishes itself through an incessant literary dialogue. Edmunds’ understanding of intertextuality as an aesthetic device – following in Pasquali’s footsteps – is grounded in the notion of the text as a fertile arena for interpretation, and the implementation of this literary tool must necessarily go beyond what Hinds dubbed strict ‘philological fundamentalism’. Language cannot constrain the reading act. Intertextuality, as a literary tool, must always have as its primary goal the creation of meaning.

Janan’s assessment taps into the potentially boundless nature of intertextuality: if the poetic text is read with respect to the enormous wealth of the literary tradition, ‘the corollary inference is that such a text will richly repay

---

157 Edmunds (2001) 43. Edmunds (2001) xiii: ‘by the ‘aesthetic’ character of poetry, I mean pleasing or intriguing, often unordinary, uses of the language that convey or portend some meaning valuable to the reader’.
158 Fish’s concept (1980) of ‘interpretive communities’ exemplified that meaning lies within the reader: subjectivism does not give a free pass to endless interpretation, because the reader works within a community of individuals who constantly aim to shape the text. See Edmunds (2001) 168-69 on the importance of reading within the Classics community.
162 Edmunds (2001) 18: ‘what reader is there, coming to a book of poems, who believes that he or she will encounter only the phenomena of language?’
intensified inquiry into the wider penumbra of passages it can be seen to reread, but it also means that context is theoretically limitless, not circumscribed either by ‘what the author meant’ or ‘what the contemporary audience could have understood’. When discussing intertextuality in the thesis, I am not attempting to determine the original meaning that harks back to what the author, Statius, meant. Authorial intent is a complex business – one that lies outside the present scope – and it is, for the most part, bound by discourses that concern the historical figure of the poet and his, or her, cultural baggage. Moreover, the poet’s self-fashioning in the proem of the Achilleid, is in itself a construct of the author, and it must be carefully treated as a poetic creation. When we have examples of what Edmunds calls ‘internal intent’, we are witnessing the emergence of a poetic persona, who is by no means in charge of regulating the interpretation of the poem, but rather, it works from, in and only within the narrative. Thus, when I refer to ‘Statius’, I am not discussing the historical author who composed the Achilleid. ‘Statius’ is a shorthand for an extensive and multifaceted system of poetic creation that lies behind the text(s) in question. The consideration of Statius as the historical author, as tempting as it might be, lies outside of the primary scope of the thesis – though I offer scattered pointed considerations – and reflections of deliberate authorial judgments are destined to remain unanswered. My examination will not offer readings that engage, for instance, with the Domitianic socio-political context, despite a ‘darker’ reading might certainly suggest politically aware anxieties, such as those of tyrannical rule.

164 De Jong (2014) on the figure of the epic primary external narrator. Statius the narrator seldom appears overtly in the extant narrative of the Achilleid. All narratological definitions employed are taken from de Jong (2014).
165 See Edmunds (2001) 34-8 for the convenience of naming the author.
166 At times, ‘Statius’ is even how the text presents itself.
167 Political readings of the Achilleid have not been fruitful, but Benker read the poem as a subversive piece of anti-propaganda, (1987) PhD thesis. Despite the criticism received (see Dewar’s 1988 review, 252-53), I tend to uphold this pessimistic reading: see most recently Konstan (2016) 377-86. For Statius as a court poet, see Nauta (2002). The edited volume The Poetry of Statius (2008) is still the unsurpassed publication for seeking political resonances in Statius: in particular, see Dewar, Gibson, Nauta and Rosati (note the editors’ regret that ‘the Achilleid was somewhat underrepresented in the colloquium’). The introduction of Newlands, Gervais and Dominik in the Brill’s Companion to Statius (2015) 1-27 is also excellent, as is Rosati’s input of Statius as a poet of tria corda: Greek, Roman and Neapolitan (2011) 15-34. For politics in the Thebaid, see McNelis (2007); in the Silvae, Newlands (2002). See also the new Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome, edited by Zissos (2016) 275-484.
Along with intertextuality, intratextuality – as we have seen – is fruitful as a theory that looks to unearth a text’s meaning through the examination of the text ‘from different directions (backwards as well as forwards), chopping it in various ways, building it up again, contracting and expanding its boundaries both within the opus and outside it’.\textsuperscript{168} Intratextuality is very useful when analysing the internal coherence of the texts, which is not a feature of the text itself but rather, it originates from a reader-response point of view. In its theorisation, intratextuality is also beneficial as its striving for unity assists the creation of meaning through the delineation of themes, images and other textual elements that are recursive in a text.\textsuperscript{169} Intratextuality’s main undertaking, then, is the process of re-reading, often in chunks. The Achilleid is particularly fond of iteration and reiteration: its diva is in charge of re-telling (refer) of great-hearted Achilles, so the proem actually begins its first action with a reiterative process, inviting us to do the same with the poem itself. And we have already seen how the Achilleid plays with narrative actions of re-reading, repeating and handing down: intratextuality has proven to be a decisive tool in the creation of the plot and various meanings of the poem.\textsuperscript{170}

1.8 Recapitulation: summary of chapters

In the first chapter, I explore how the traditional, leonine characterisation of Achilles is negatively manipulated in the Achilleid, and how it augments Achilles’ liminality between a mortal, a beast, and a god. Achilles’ diet of raw lion meat indicates a tendency of metapoetic self-aggression and destruction. The eating of raw meat also points to the Dionysiac world and the practice of ὀμοφαγία: the Theban similes in the Achilleid further expand on Achilles’ paradoxical fashioning, and, at the same time, add a pervasive tragic tinge to the hero’s portrayal.

\textsuperscript{168} Sharrock (2000) 5. For a theorisation of intratextuality, see 21-39.
\textsuperscript{169} This inclusive approach offers remarkable inputs, as Sharrock (2000) 33 puts it: ‘it is impossible, then, to be irrelevant in a literary text, because even ‘irrelevance’ will in some way be read into the whole by the reader. Unity, therefore, is something which we as readers bring to texts, by seeing them as texts’.
\textsuperscript{170} Repetition is a marker of Ovidian poetry, see most recently Fulkerson and Stover (2016).
Chapter two follows the path of contradictions, as the hints of Gigantomachy that Achilles exhibits in the poem model him onto the Senecan hubristic and tragic hero, with particular attention to Hercules in the Hercules Furens. The identification with Hercules also unveils issues of transgression in the Achilleid, opening up the contradictory issue of Achilles still as a potential son of Jupiter. By reading together the similes in the poem of Achilles as the king of the gods, I highlight problematics of succession: the hero is depicted not only as hypothetical offspring but as a substitute for Jupiter, creating further tensions in his characterisation.

Issues of divine and mortal birth emphasise the absence of paternal figures in the poem, and I analyse how the Achilleid plays with the prospect of a fatherless hero and problematizes the father-son relationship, a traditional marker of epic. In the third chapter, I examine Ulysses’ role in the Achilleid and examine his role as a father-figure in light of Sophocles’ Philoctetes: the difference in outcomes of the Ulyssian rhetoric for the two Achillean figures, Achilles and Neoptolemus, accentuate Achilles’ tragic background. I then move onto a reflection of the use of traditionally tragic hunter/prey imagery for the mission of Ulysses and Diomedes on Scyros, to see how it serves to create a darker layer of interpretation, which culminates in Ulysses’ assumption of a Furial, vatic role.

In the fourth chapter, I continue with an examination of the role of the vates through the analysis of the role of Calchas, the traditional vates in the poem. By reading his agency as a sort of tragic, feminised furor, I then move onto a metapoetic reflection of the poetic strategies in the Achilleid, what does it mean to write a ‘feminine’ epic and what it could mean for the poetic persona of the Achilleid, played by Thetis.
CHAPTER TWO

So, ya wanna be a hero, kid?
Leonine imagery and problematic portrayals

“Uncomfortably, I thought of the Bacchae: hooves and bloody ribs, scraps dangling from the fir trees. There was a word for it in Greek: omophagia.”

Donna Tartt (1992) The Secret History

2.1 I'm thinking about the lions tonight

Galen preserves a fragment of Tyrtaeus: ‘with a tawny lion’s spirit in his (your) breast’ (Gal.fr.13. de plac. Hippocr. et Plat. 3.309 sq.: αἰθωνος δὲ λέοντος ἐχων ἐν στήθεαι θυμόν). This fragment forms part of a larger quotation attributed to Chrysippus, who discusses the way in which Homer and Hesiod are accustomed to representing episodes of utmost violence, and energetic characters, with the aid of lion imagery. Lion similes are common topoi in epic poetry: in the Homeric epics alone, more than forty lion similes are deployed, for the most part linked to heroes’ aristeia. More than twenty-eight of these similes are extended similes where lions are shown encased in a predatory atmosphere, seen attacking cattle or lesser wild animals.171 All the main high-ranking heroes in the Iliad are compared to lions, Menelaus, Hector, Diomedes, Telamontian Ajax, but it is Achilles who is most often identified with the animal. The hero, in fact, seems to cross even the line between simile and reality. During the final duel with Hector, Achilles’ proemial and proverbial rage materialises into a threat against the Trojan warrior.172 Achilles voices the famous quotation ‘there can be no pacts between lions and men’ (II.22.262-3: Ἐκτορ μὴ μοι άλαστε συνημοσύνας ἀγόρευε: / ὡς οὕκ ἐστι λέουσι καὶ ἄνδράσιν ὅρκια πιστά).173 He is consciously identifying

---

171 See Wilson (2002a) 231-32 for a compendium of lion imagery in the Iliad and Alden (2005) 335-36 n.8 for a list. See Podlecki (1971) 83-5 and Scott (1974) 58-62 for lion similes in the Odyssey. The first developed simile in the Odyssey shows Odysseus as a lion and the suitors as fawns at Od.4.335-40. In the Odyssey, similes are almost exclusively devoted to Odysseus, with the important exception of the simile of Penelope with a lion at Od.4.791-93, on which see Turkeltaub (2015) 279-302.
172 Wilson (2002b) emphasises Achilles’ ‘cultural liminality’.
173 This ‘parable’ also features wolves and sheep.
himself with the animal he has previously been compared to, breaking down the conventional barriers of simile versus reality. Unsurprisingly, during his absence from battle, the actions of a lion-hearted Achilles (II.7.228: θυμολέοντα) are not equalled to those of a lion, but when he returns roaring to the battlefield, he is the ‘only warrior to receive lion similes’.174

Here, I survey leonine imagery in the poem, as it often reappears to describe Achilles and other characters around him. The examination of these lion features offers a darker and tragic reading of the hero’s characterisation. I argue that the pervasive presence of both explicit and implicit lion imagery, which encompasses the entirety of Achilles’ epic formation, echoes his Homeric characterisation but problematises his liminal status between a god, a mortal and a beast. I begin the chapter with a survey of leonine imagery in the poem, and I then concentrate on Achilles’ unconventional diet, closely linked to leonine imagery. As we will see, lions are singled out in the second book of the Achilleid as part of Achilles’ nourishment: the young boy feeds on the tough entrails of lions (Ach.2.96-100). The striking element here is that of all the animals he hunts, kills, is compared to and feeds on raw in the Achilleid, only the lion has functioned as a stable comparandum for him, both elsewhere in the tradition and in the Statian poem. In light of Achilles’ characterisation in the poem as a lion, the consumption of the animal’s meat indicates the presence of cannibalistic tendencies: Achilles the lion eats the meat of his own kind. These predispositions problematise and signpost a darker pattern in Achilles’ beginnings: his early developments, and his Homeric beginnings.

The analysis of leonine characteristics and Achilles’ diet gives rise to the second half of this chapter, as the hero’s diet poses another problem: he devours raw meat. This is a complicating feature, as the primitivist act of eating raw meat – ὀμοφαγία – goes beyond the conventional propensity toward aggression and anger. The consumption of raw flesh has ritualistic connections, associated with the world of Dionysiac rituals and Theban tragedy. I thus explore the Bacchic

associations in the Achilleid, as Achilles is also compared to Bacchus, enhancing his imagined, quasi-divine status. But this godlike representation is thwarted by the narrative sequence itself: the hero, before his final anagnorisis, is compared to the other side of the Euripidean coin, Pentheus, which emphasises the issue of Achilles’ mortal birth. I argue that the construction of Achilles’ emergent heroism, achieved through lion imagery, his diet and his Bacchic characterisation, calls attention to his liminal status, and further configures the sombre and disturbing representation of the youth as a problematic, and tragic figure.  

2.2 Hear me roar: lion imagery

In the Achilleid, leonine imagery is repeatedly employed throughout the narrative to designate Achilles. When he first appears, his emergence is framed by such metaphorical imagery. He is paradoxically presented as a hunter of lions, but also as a lion, an association produced through clever ambiguity in the language employed. His advent is marked by a simile with Apollo, who abandons the quiver and picks up the lyre (Ach.1.165-66). At first, the situation appears to be far removed from any aggressive environment, as the god’s weapons are being put down, but Achilles’ own equivocality leaves room for violence, reflected in his savage nature. We focalise his arrival through Thetis’ eyes: Achilles is portrayed as a skilled hunter who has slaughtered a lioness that has just given birth (Ach.1.168: fetam...leaenam); furthermore, he carries the still-alive lion cubs with him (Ach.1.167-70). We find a darker precedent in Ovid’s Fasti for the image of Achilles and the lion cubs: the mythical hunter Hyas being slaughtered by a lioness after attempting to steal her cubs (Fast.5.173-78). Hyas, just as Achilles, is on the brink of adulthood (Fast.5.173: dum nova lanugo est; Ach.1.163: necdum prima

---

175 See Rutherford (1982) 146 on the potential of the Iliadic Achilles to be a ‘classically’ tragic figure.
176 See McNelis (2015a) 190-92 for the Statian reworking of this Virgilian simile.
177 The description of Achilles’ beauty treads on ambiguity (Ach.1.159-66).
178 The number of lion cubs is not specified. The mention of cubs could be interpreted as foreshadowing the lion simile Il.18.316-24 where Achilles’s grief and relentless wrath are compared to those of a lion whose cubs had been stolen.
179 Uccellini (2012) 146; see Fast.5.177: dumque petit latebras fetae catulosque leaenae in conjunction with Ach.1.168-70: ...fetam Pholoes sub rupe leaenam / perculerat ferro vacuisque reliquerat antris / ipsam, sed catulos adportat et incitat ungues. On the image of Achilles stimulating the cubs’ claws, see Uccellini (2012) 147. There is perhaps an echo to Sen.Phoen.161-62: fractum incitatis ictibus guttur sonet / laceraeve fixis uingibus venae fluent.
nova lanugine vertitur aetas), and has moved on from ‘easier’ prey, deer and hares, to wild beasts, as his manly spirit begins to develop. In a tragic twist, he falls as prey himself to a Libyan wild beast (Fast.5.178: ipse fuit Libycae praeda cruenta ferae). Reminiscences to the Hyas myth here enact the tragic dichotomy of hunted and hunter, of the huntsman who in turn becomes prey. The echo to the story of Hyas tinges Achilles’ return from the hunt with a sinister nuance, as we are left with the feeling that it will foreshadow a reversal in Achilles’ own fate.

Achilles is regularly depicted as a lion hunter: in Pindar, the hero brings back to Chiron’s cave wild lions and boars (Nem.3.43-9). The lion cubs, snatched from their mother, become the hero’s trophies, as in the case of the Herodotean king Meles who clutches a lion cub as he walks around the walls of Sardis in the vain hope that the city might be safe (Hdt.1.84). Despite its superstitious nature, however, the type of a king/hero carrying a lion cub is a common artistic motif of the eighth and seventh century BC, and it becomes an instantly recognisable iconographic topos. Achilles’ portrayal carrying lion cubs thus seemingly enhances the image of a triumphant hero’s return.

In the Achilleid, however, Achilles is not only depicted as a hunter of lions, but he is described in leonine terms himself, a poetic move that complicates his initial description. This account of Achilles is striking:

Quos tamen, ut fido genetrix in limine visa est,
abicit exceptamque avidis circumligat ulnis,
iam gravis amplexu iamque aequus vertice matri.

(Ach.1.171-3)

Mendelsohn notices that the term genetrix is consciously deployed in an ambiguous manner, as it can be applied indistinguishably to both Thetis and the lioness. As Heslin reflects, ‘the momentary equivalence between Thetis and the

---

180 Achilles’ hunting, however, is never comprised of small prey (Ach.2.121-25: numquam ille inbelles Ossaea per avia dammas / sectari aut timidas passus me cuspid e lynca / sternere, sed tristes turbare cubilibus ursos / fulmineosque sues, et sicubi maxima tigris / aut seducta lugis fetae spelunca leaenae).
lioness and between Achilles and her cubs is made possible by the poet’s careful stage management’. Both *genetrices* are standing in caves – Thetis is in Chiron’s cave – and the *fido…limine* interchangeably refers to both thresholds. We therefore equate Thetis with the lioness, making Achilles the lion cub(s). Furthermore, Achilles literally ‘throws down’, or ‘casts away’ (*abicit*) the lion cubs as soon as he sees his mother. The focus shifts from the lion cubs to the lion cub: he releases the creatures because he must now take the spotlight. Consequently, lions and lionesses are not simply hunting trophies here, but their characterisation mirrors mother and son in the narrative. But this juxtaposition is an uneasy one. Firstly, the act of killing a lioness that has recently given birth conveys Achilles’ predisposition towards aggression and violence. Secondly, if the lioness embodies Thetis, there is a tense equivalence of the goddess with another ‘mother’ who fails in her duties of saving her offspring. More importantly, Achilles’ killing of the lioness foreshadows the metaphorical slaying of her own mother, Thetis: in order to attain his Trojan destiny, he will have to overrule his mother’s artifices. In association with this imagery, the lioness was presumably in the midst of suckling her cubs, which in turn evokes Thetis’ disclosure of her nightmares to Chiron, during which she envisioned wild beasts tearing and attacking her breast (*Ach.1.131-33: namque modo infensos utero mihi contuor enses, / nunc planctu livere manus, modo in ubera saevas / ire feras*). The association of Achilles and Thetis with lions is therefore heavily tainted by problematic undertones that make the reunion between mother and son a complex moment.

---


184 Uccellini (2012) 147 reads the usage of *fidus* to be focalized though Thetis’ eyes, for Chiron’s cave is the place she chose for her son’s training. Nevertheless, this is tenuous, because Chiron, in reality, had reassured the goddess that his dwelling is only a cave (*Ach.1.125: et admonet antri*, see Rosati’s translation ‘ricordandole che è solo un antro’). See Rimell (2015) 260-61 for the tragic contextualisation of Thetis’ arrival at Chiron’s cave: though the sense of the sentence is not clear, ‘it makes sense that Thetis would be wary of this grotto…it was also the site of the rape during which Achilles was conceived’. In fact, Thetis herself is not happy (*Ach.1.104: Illa nihil gavisa locis*). This is a marker of trauma, and we are repeatedly told that this is not a happily-ever-after matrimony. It is more likely that we are instead focalizing the episode through Achilles’ eyes, for the boy trusts Chiron over his own mother (*Ach.1.197: quamquam ibi fida parens, adsuetaque pectora mavali*).

185 Uccellini (2012) 146: with the killing of the lioness, the dream has come true.
At the end of the first book of the *Achilleid*, leonine imagery is again employed to describe Achilles. This time the equation is pursued through a simile that showcases the materialisation of the traditional hero’s *ira*. The simile is apt for characterising Achilles at this stage, as the hero seemingly embraces his warlike nature after rejecting the transvestism: one of the most important characterisations of the lion in epic is its feral rage, so it is right that lion imagery frames Achilles’ heroic emergence. It is no coincidence that the word *ira*, which encircles the Homeric Achilles and drives the Iliadic narrative from its incipit (*Il. 1.1-2: μήνιν ἀείδε θε'ν Πηληΐάδεω Αχιλῆος / οὐλομένην*) is palpably lacking in the *Achilleid*, but resurfaces during the simile. Whilst King argues that ‘Statius did not live long enough to get his budding hero actually to Troy, and this is perhaps why he does not provide any explicit instance of the familiar Achillean wrath’, the leonine simile shows Achilles’ potential for rage, and its dangerous and darker implications.

"ut leo, materno cum raptus ab ubere mores
accept pectique iubas hominemque vereri
edidicit nullasque rapi nisi iussus in iras,
si semel adverso radiavit lumine ferrum,
 eiurata fides domitorque inimicus, in illum
prima fames, timidoque pudet servisse magistro.

(*Ach. 1.858-63*)

The simile shows a lion, reared in captivity, turning against its master. The immediate model is the Aeschylean simile of the lion in the house (*Ag. 717-36*), as Barchiesi notices. We could also detect an allusion to the incident of the lion...
turning against its keeper in Martial (Sp. 12: *laeserat ingrato leo perfidus ore magistrum*...). In Aeschylus, Helen is compared to a lion cub reared in a foreign house: the animal cannot suppress its nature and brings ruin to those who reared it and to those closely involved. Fantuzzi reads the simile as yet another gender-bending moment in the *Achilleid*, presumably also because of the feminised link to Helen, as the pairing Helen-Achilles is strikingly out of place and almost contradictory: the simile in itself highlights to an even greater extent the difference between what a normal ‘lion’ ought to do (e.g. rage and attack) and this feminised but dangerous lion, who has been tamed and is accustomed to rage on command (*nisi iussus*). But we must not downplay the violence embedded in the Aeschylean lion image, as well as its threatening connotations. The lion’s rage will not be unleashed unless provoked, unless the *ferrum* flashes before its eyes, but the wrath is there. Furthermore, the plural *iras* is employed to denote built-up anger, granting the episode with the image that Achilles’ proverbial wrath has been repressed through the cross-dressing, but is now ready to burst out (*cf. Aen. 4.197*). And this is what exactly happens in the *Achilleid*, when Ulysses holds Achilles’ weapons before him, which prompts his overt transformation (*Ach. 1.852-57*) and the simile above. Moreover, the equivalence of Achilles and Helen might at first embody the feminisation of the hero’s characterisation as a sort of passive, feminised, plunder of war (and we have seen the Greeks playing elegiac lovers calling for their *puella*), but they are also the causes of Troy’s destruction, the former as a foe, the latter as a more literal *causa belli*. In addition to this, the lion cub ‘parable’ in the Aeschylean drama is deployed firstly,

---

190 The simile is puzzling, and precise identification of the threatening lion cub is a matter of debate. Lion imagery runs deep and is intertwined with many of the characters in the *Agamemnon*, but this is a discussion that lies outside the scope of this thesis. On the interpretation of other ‘lion cubs’ in the drama, *Agamemnon*, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and the simile in Aeschylus, see Knox (1952) 17-22, especially 22.
191 Fantuzzi (2012) 81-2. The simile also exemplifies Achilles’ transvestism as an unnatural condition. For the feral (nature) and civilized (nurture) elements of Achilles’ life recapitulated here, see Bernstein (2008) 123.
192 Pease (1967) 225: this is not a poetic plural, but accumulated anger.
193 I say ‘overt’ because the rape of Deidamia can also be construed as a momentary flash of anger, but one that is suddenly repressed.
‘officially’, as an authoritative account of the ‘deserving’ destruction of Troy, but it also signifies, on a deeper level, the foreshadowing of the disasters that will befall the house of Pelops in the rest of the Aeschylean trilogy.\footnote{194} The equation of Achilles with this lion cub through the simile raises tragic reminiscences and nuances of ominous foreshadowing, which again proleptically look to Troy and even to its aftermath.

The narrative continues to promote the equivalence of the hero with the animal; the two lines after the lion similes witness the reaction of Achilles upon glancing at his reflection on the shield: \(\text{(Ach}.1.864-66: \text{ut vero accessit propius luxque aemula vultum / reddidit et simili talem se vidit in auro / horruit erubuitque simul)}\). As Feeney argues, the reflexiveness behind \textit{talem} indicates that Achilles is seeing himself as the lion, in a ‘bold smudging between simile and context, as if Achilles ’knew’ what the narrator’s simile had just said about him’.\footnote{195} I would push this statement further and suggest that Achilles is seeing himself as the lion, adding another interpretive layer.

Achilles in the \textit{Iliad} is paralleled to a lion to the extreme extent that the character refers to himself as the animal, bridging the gap between simile and circumstance. Indubitably, there is a difference between being \textit{like} a lion and being one. But there is indeed a momentary close link between two, as is the case of Ovid’s usage of similes. Often, as Barkan posits, they act as proto-metamorphoses: the tenor metaphorically turns into the vehicle of comparison, often foreshadowing the ensuing transformation that is about to take place.\footnote{196} In the \textit{Achilleid}, Achilles does not undergo a metamorphosis into a lion, as we are far from the content of Ovid’s transformation-centric narrative. But the edge between simile and the ‘real’ narrative environment becomes indistinct, and not only do we see Achilles as a lion, but we see Achilles \textit{seeing himself} as one. What is more,

\footnote{194} Knox (1952) 18.\footnote{195} Feeney (2004) 98; he also reflects on Achilles’ unique blush (\textit{erubuitque}) and the intrusion of Aphrodite here – in another gender-bending twist – for the goddess is represented as using Mars’ shield as mirror. On this, see also Feeney (1991) 70 n.43.\footnote{196} Barkan (1986) 20-1. For a more sceptical point of view, see more recently, von Glinski (2012) 8-11, who upholds the importance of differentiating simile and metaphor.
it becomes evident that the placement of these leonine moments in Achilles’ life is not an arbitrary occurrence; rather, it encases the span of his heroic development: we see him as a lion cub from his advent in the narrative, and the simile of a more mature, daring animal occurs just before the moment of his Aristotelian self-anagnorisis.

There is also figurative language at play. The employment of the word *fulvus* during the first description of Achilles could also be relevant for a leonine sphere (*Ach.1*.161-62: *niveo natat ignis in ore / purpureo fulvoque nitet coma grator auro*).\(^{197}\) *Fulvus* is an adjective connected to animals (in particular, quadrupeds), but even more specifically to lions: in the case of Achilles it is used in respect of his hair.\(^{198}\) The first attestation in which the adjective has been used in the context of lions is in Lucretius, where the philosopher is discrediting the existence of a monstrous beast, the Chimera (*Lucr.5*.901: *flamma quidem vero cum corpora fulvus leonem*). Virgil also employs the adjective to describe the tawny lioness that Proteus might turn into to avoid being seized by Aristaeus (*G.4*.408: *et fulva cervixe leaena*…), the ochre lion skin that Aeneas puts on when fleeing from burning and ruined Troy (*Aen.2*.722: *fulvique insternor pelle leonis*), and the lion that Ascanius wishes to encounter during the hunt (*Aen.4*.159: *optat aprum, aut fulvum descendere monte leonem*.). In Statius, *fulvus* has been applied to Polynices, who in an almost ‘beyond’ simile metaphorically stands for a lion (*Theb.1*.397: *et fulvum adventare leonem*).\(^{199}\)

In the *Achilleid*, Achilles’ famous bright reddish-blonde hair is also compared to *fulvum aurum*, thus portraying the boy in leonine terms, and the word that

---

197 Heslin (2005) 64: ‘his hair shone more pleasingly than yellow gold’.
198 *TLL* 6.1.1534.45. Virgil is the first author to use *fulvus* in connection to a metal, in this case gold, in an animalistic context, where the horses’ gold bridles are bitten by the animals (*Aen.7*.278-79: *aurea pectoribus demissa monilia pendent, / teci auro fulvum mandunt sub dentibus aurum*); *TLL* 6.1.1535.25 and 6.1.1535.30.
199 Whilst Statius in the *Thebaid* displays thirteen similes of singular heroes or groups of warriors with lions (with Tydeus being the most copious tenor of a leonine comparison), Polynices is remarkably not the recipient of a lion simile in the *Thebaid*. Tydeus: *Theb.2*.675-81 and 8.592-96 (and also Tydeus’ corpse as a dead lion symbolising a trophy at 9.189-91); Capaneus: 6.784-88 and 7.670; Pluto at 8.124-26; Atys at 8.572-76; Parthenopaeus at 9.736-43; Oedipus at 11.741-47 and Theseus at 12.736-40; the Argive men at 7.529-32 and 11.23-31; the inverted simile of the hunter (Eteocles) fearing the lion at 4.494-99.
describes his hair, *coma*, is used in some contexts for the description of a lion’s mane, as it is the case for Mezentius’ lion simile before his slaughter of Acron (Aen.10.726: *hians immane comasque arrexit*). When Achilles undergoes his anagnorisis, his hair literally ‘stands out from his forehead’, in the fashion of a lion’s mane (Ach.1.855-56: *et fronte relicta / surrexere comae*), and two verses later he receives the *only* lion simile of the narrative. Furthermore, when Achilles submits himself to his transvestism, Thetis has to ‘tame his hair’ (Ach.1.328: *et inspexos certo domat ordine crines*), where the adjective specifically refers to Achilles’ unkempt hair, as if he were a wild animal.\(^{200}\) Again, we are faced with structural reiteration: the tawny lion’s mane is present both in the first instance where we meet the hero, and also the first time when Achilles realises and presents his real, heroic self.

In light of this narrative movement, and from his characterisation in the *Iliad* to his depiction in the *Achilleid*, there appears to be an equivalence of Achilles as the lion *par excellence* that transcends the rhetorical value of the simile.\(^{201}\) In other words, due to the weight that lion imagery holds for the construction of the character of Achilles in the *Iliad*, further carried into the *Achilleid*, I propose to read Achilles’ identification as a lion as a steady metaphor for the construction of his heroic disposition. This more specifically means that when lion imagery is deployed, it can be seen as a poetic move that echoes Homer’s treatment of Achilles in the *Iliad*, a sort of ‘intertextual’ metaphor that establishes a poetic dialogue particularly with the Homeric presentation of the hero.\(^{202}\)

---

\(^{200}\) Uccellini (2012) 226.

\(^{201}\) von Glinski (2012) 93: ‘in the *Iliad*, the lion simile, the epic simile *par excellence*, is associated with Achilles in particular...[it] symbolizes Achilles’ warrior persona’. See Scott (2006) 103-4 for the idea that the donning the lion mantle is Achilles’ right, and that the other characters attempt, and fail, to become him/it.

\(^{202}\) The term ‘intertextual metaphor’ is a concept that can be applied to numerous fields. For instance, it is employed by Zinken (2003) 507-23 when discussing the emergence of an ideological discourse in headlines of Polish newspapers post-Communism: he recognised the importance of metaphor linked to physical experience that is ‘culturally’ grounded, and these ‘intertextual metaphors’ form part of a semiotic experience that derives, for instance, from stereotypes and ‘culturally salient texts’, both relevant here for Statius’ adaptation of the Homeric lion metaphor for the construction of his Achilles. See also Lovatt’s use of ‘intertextual metaphor’ when she analyses the wrestling metaphor in the *Thebaid*, (2005) 193.
2.3 Hungry like the lion: Achilles’ diet

Lion imagery thus pervades the poem and is deployed throughout the narrative to define certain characteristics of Achilles intrinsic to his traditional representation as a hero. Achilles’ own account of his diet in book 2 of the poem also features leonine qualities, which, as Newlands notes, represent yet another echo of how lion imagery plays a crucial role in Statius:203


dicor et in teneris et adhuc reptantibus annis,
Thessalus ut rigido senior me monte receptit,
non ullos ex more cibos hausisse nec almis
uberibus satiasse famem, sed spissa leonum
viscera semianimisque lupae traxisse medullas.
haec mihi prima Ceres, haec laeti munera Bacchi,
sic dabat ille pater.

(Ach.2.96-102)

In the aforementioned damnatio memoriae, Achilles is urged by Diomedes to retell his childhood, and the hero begins to tell sua facta before the Greeks’ arrival on Scyros (Ach. 2.95).204 Achilles recounts his most tender years (teneris), but there are hints of bestial behaviour creeping behind reptans, a word used for infants crawling but also employed to describe movements of animals (especially snakes).205 Under Chiron’s mentorship, instead of consuming common food and being nurtured through breastfeeding, Achilles used to eat the tough innards of lions and the marrows of a half-alive she-wolf. The mention of unconventional food (non ullos ex more cibos) and the absence of suckling habits, as scholars have

203 Newlands (2011) 199.
204 Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 295 notice the reticence of Achilles, who appears to be emulating Aeneas at Aen. 2.12-3 (quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit / incipiam). But this is surely ironic: Aeneas is in fact retelling the horror of the last day of the Trojan War, whereas Achilles is seemingly glossing over a cross-dressing episode, a baser subject matter. This interpretation is therefore in harmony with Achilles’ failed damnatio memoriae, cf.fn.123.
205 Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 292 bring as examples Seneca, Her.Fur.218 and Theb.9.797, where Parthenopaeus is recalling his own infancy. The example in Seneca concerns baby Hercules (Her. Fur. 217-18: quo contra obvius / reptabat infants igneos serpentium), which is a striking parallel, because Hercules himself treads and crosses the fine line between beast, mortal and divinity, as will be brought out fully in the third chapter. I would also be inclined to add Theb.6.245 (Hyppsiyle Danais, hic reptat flebilis infants). Claudian follows the Achillean passage (Rufin.2.180: teneroque amnis reptatus Achilli). For animals that crawl, see Lucr.2.318. See Bernstein (2008) 122 for ‘predatory’ epithets that describe Achilles, such as saevus and immitis.
noticed, evokes two possible etymologies for the name of Achilles. The first one is a Callimachean supposition, which has the name deriving from ἄχος (pain, as a source of distress to the Greeks, ἄχος ἔλεσσεν). The second source for his name, from Euphorion, stems from a privative α followed by either the word for 'sustenance' (χιλός) or 'lips' (χεῖλος), referring to the remarkable circumstances of Achilles' rearing away from his mother, Thetis. The account above thus abides by the second etymology, pointing out the boy’s extraordinary nurture at the hands of the centaur. There is a bestial, predatory element to the youth, as Barchiesi stresses, and the story of Achilles becomes ‘per definizione quella di un infante svezzato e brutalmente separato dal latte materno’. The description of Achilles' food thus accentuates the boy’s liminality and his unconventional status. It is remarkable how the account of Achilles' diet radically differs from what we find in the Iliad, that is, the heart-warming story of Phoenix carefully feeding Achilles cooked (ὄψου) meat on his lap (Il.9.487-91).

Lions and she-wolves, however, might not be the only animals that constitute Achilles' diet. Later in book 2, Achilles continues his tale:

numquam ille imbelles Ossaea per avia dammas
sectari aut timidas passus me cuspidae lyncas
sternere, sed tristes turbare cubilibus uros
fulmineosque sues, et sicubi maxima tigris
aut seducta iugis fetae speulnera leaenae.

(Ach.2.121-25)

During his 'battles in the woods' (Ach.2.119-20: proeliasilvarum), Achilles tests his fighting skills by slaughtering more challenging prey such as bears and

\[\text{\footnotesize \ref{206} For various etymologies and scholia concerning Achilles' name, see Heslin (2005) 173-81.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \ref{207} Heslin (2005) 180 also sees at Ach.2.98-9 clues of the first etymology where the boy was not raised through breastfeeding.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \ref{208} Barchiesi (1996) 55. For the emphasis that Achilles' food places on the 'fosterer's displacement of his parents', see Bernstein (2008) 122.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \ref{209} In Il.19.347-54, when Athena comes to earth to soothe Achilles after the death of Patroclus, the goddess gives him nectar and ambrosia, so that he does not feel the pangs of hunger. See Sissa and Detienne (2000) 79.}\]
boars, female tigers and even a lioness that has recently given birth. The mention of the lioness clearly echoes the feta leaena that he had killed when he first entered the narrative (Ach.1.168-70), and their setting is mirrored, as the spelunca evokes the antrum (Ach.1.169). In light of the leonine element to Achilles’ sustenance, it is possible to view these hunted animals as part of Achilles' nourishment too. But most importantly, the emphasis is primarily placed on lions: there is a repetition of the imagery of the slain lioness, climactically ending the sequence of cited animals, and the more specific, overt mention of lion meat in Achilles’ tale.

Achilles’ diet is by no means a novelty in the tradition, as the first extensive and extant source is Pindar:

ξανθός δ’ Ἀχιλλεώς τὰ μὲν μένων Φιλόρας ἐν δόμοις παῖς ἐών ἀθυρε μεγάλα ἔργα χερσὶ θεμινά βραχυσίδαρον ἦκοντα πᾶλλων, ἵσα τ´ ἀνέμοις μάχα λεόντεσσιν ἄγρατέρας ἔπρας ἐρφον, κάπρους τ´ ἐναφε´ σώματα δε παρά Κρονίδαν Κένταυρον ἀσθμαῖντα κόμιζεν, ἐξέτης τ´ πρότον, ὅδον δ´ ἐπειτ´ ὃν χρόνων τὸν ἐθάμβευον Ἀρτεμίς τε και θρασεῖ Ἀθάνα, κτεῖνοντ´ ἐλάφους ἄνευ κυνὸν δολῶν θ´ ἐρκέων·

(Nem.3.43-51)

A golden-haired Achilles, embodying the exemplum of innate glory, is being taught by Chiron. Under the centaur’s guidance we learn of his regular killing of lions and wild boars that, still half-alive, would then be carried to the centaur as

210 Thus, unlike Hyas who gradually advances onto more testing prey. Achilles is described in exceptional terms.

211 Achilles’ account displays a learned ring composition structure, as he ends his exploits by mentioning the lioness, picking up exactly where he left off prior to Thetis’ removal.

212 See Kozák (2012) 73-92 for this ode and its influence on the Achilleid. He agrees with Robertson’s interpretation (below), yet he stresses that his interpretation is based on ethnographical evidence and not the particular literary play that might be occurring between Pindar and Statius.

213 The adjective recalls the use of fulvus, a standard way of describing Achilles (Il.1.197; 23.141).

214 This echoes Achilles’ sua facta in the Achilleid, as well as Thetis’ assumption that Achilles is playfully imitating the battle between Centaurs and Lapiths (Ach.1.40-1: Lapitharum proelia ludit / inprobus).
trophies. The main difference, however, between the Statian and Pindaric account is that the latter omits any overt reference to Achilles’ consumption of raw meat.\textsuperscript{215} Yet, there is perhaps a word that casts an uneasy shadow onto the ode: ἀσθμαίνοντα. Robertson argues that ἀσθμαίνειν refers to the ‘gasps of death and the panting of physical exertion’.\textsuperscript{216} This unsettling detail has been seen by the scholarship as an echo of another early and contemporary tradition in which Achilles, after capturing and bringing the beasts’ corpses back to Chiron’s cavern, ‘wished to suck their living marrow in the cave’.\textsuperscript{217} On the one hand, the use of semianimis in Statius could then be solely seen as an example of the ‘macabre embroidery of the Silver Age’, but on the other hand, the inclusion of ἀσθμαίνειν even in Pindar’s ode suggests that there is more to be said (even a conscious choice to exclude this detail perhaps from a different, contemporary source).\textsuperscript{218} Moreover, the σώματα … ἀσθμαίνοντα can be interpreted as encompassing the wild lions of the line before, signalling that these animals are indeed expected to be eaten. Whether explicit or implicit, there are startling implications of Achilles’ savage behaviour, and the act of eating animals’ raw-meat paints an alarming picture of a brutal young Achilles. Statius outdoes Pindar: whilst in Pindar we do not witness the consumption of the slain beasts, Achilles’ choice of food is inserted in the Achilleid within an autobiographical tale almost nonchalantly, unassumingly presented as a normalised, primitivist preference.\textsuperscript{219}

The intake of leonine elements for nourishment is not a Statian novelty. Already in the scholion to Homer (16.37: ὁ δὲ λεόντων καὶ ἄρκτων μυελοῖς τρέφων ἐκάλεσεν Ἀχιλλέας), Achilles used to feed on the marrow of lion and bears, whereas in Statius it is the marrow of she-wolves that the youth consumes. A later source, Apollodorus, records that Achilles was given as food the inside of lions and the marrows of boars and bears (Bibl.3.13.6: ὁ δὲ λαβὼν αὐτὸν ἔτρεψε σπλάγχνοις λεόντων καὶ συών ἀγρίων, ἀρκτῶν μυελοῖς, καὶ ωόμασεν

\textsuperscript{215} Bernstein (2008) 121.
\textsuperscript{216} Robertson (1940) 179.
\textsuperscript{217} Nem.3.52-3: λεγόμενον δ’ ετούτῳ προτίρων ἐπος ἱχώρ allows for a different tradition; Robertson (1940) 180; Robbins (1993) 15.
\textsuperscript{218} On this as a possibility, see Robertson (1940) 178-80.
\textsuperscript{219} Barchiesi (1996) 55 talks of ‘hardcore primitivism’. 
Ἀχιλλέα (πρότερον δὲ ἦν ὄνομα αὐτῶ Λιγύρων) ὅτι τὰ χείλη μαστοῖς οὐ προσήνεκε). This version could have been influenced by the Statian account (spissa viscera).

There is an interesting detail, however, that makes Statius’ account of Achilles’ diet stand out. In the Achilleid, Achilles ingests the entrails (viscera) of lions. The bodily choice of innards, I argue, in conjunction with the animal they belong to, is not accidental.220 Viscera represent the inner parts of the animal body, but also the ‘nobler’ parts (the heart, lungs and liver).221 The Achilleid is the only text in extant Latin literature that has a mortal man ingesting the meat of lions, but there are other examples of lions and characters likened to lions who eat human viscera.222 For instance, the former is the case of Pyramus’ grim – though hypothetical – demand, where the hero, upon discovering Thisbe’s cloak smeared with blood, cries out hoping that whatever lion roaming around the woods would devour his guilty flesh (Met.4.113-4: et scelerata fero consumite viscera morsu, / o quicumque sub hac habitatis rupe leones!).223 But there is another Ovidian intertext that at the outset intensifies the dangerous element in Achilles’ nature, and simultaneously reveals another disquieting layer to Achilles’ diet:

cum super ipse iacens hirsuti more leonis
visceraque et carnes cumque albis ossa medullis
semanimesque artus avidam condebat in alvum;

(Met. 14.207-9)

---

220 The darker, political, implications of viscera are explicit in Lucan’s proem, where the Civil War is described as the people of Rome turning their weapons against their own entrails (BC 1.2-3: populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra), in a perverted twist of Anchises’ prophecy at Aen.6.832-33. Since Ovid (Trist.1.7.20), viscera can metaphorically substitute womb and children, as Bömer reflected (1976) 173. For problematic maternal viscera, and the idea of the womb-as-tomb in the story of Procne and Althaea, see McAuley (2016) 136-39.

221 There is a sacrificial element to innards, connected to haruspicy. For medulla as the stomach/womb and the traditional seat of love, see Uccellini (2012) 218.

222 Even Herakles in Callimachus Hymn 3 prefers to eat oxen over wild animals (3.153-57)! I will return to this passage.

223 This wish opens up the possibility that eating or being eaten raw could be seen as a form of punishment too. This is an echo to the lioness in the story of Ariadne and Theseus in Catullus 64, cf. Mendelsohn (1990) 300.
The episode is part of the exchange between Macareus and Achaemenides, a member Ulysses’ crew thought to have been left behind at Mount Aetna. The passage refers to Achaemenides’ tale of horrors relating Polyphemus’s cannibalism: through his focalization, we receive an account of what happens after Ulysses’ ship has left the isle. This version of events firstly occurs in Virgil (Aen.3.616-54). Polyphemus – unlike his Theocritean counterpart – is described as a shaggy lion crouching over his half-alive victims, as he fills his mouth with their innards and the flesh, their bones pouring forth white marrow. The cannibalistic moment itself derives from the description of the Homeric Polyphemus, where we have entrails and bones’ marrow, and he is characterised by a lion simile (Od.9.292-93: ἠσθιε δ᾽ ὡς τε λέων ὄρεστροφος, οὐδ᾽ ἀπέλειπεν, / ἐγκατά τε σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα μυελόεντα).

The lexical correspondences in the description of Polyphemus’ cannibalistic conduct and that of Achilles’ eating habits are numerous. Polyphemus’ behaviour is described with a lion simile (hirsuti more leonis) that simultaneously harks back to the more general and pervasive characterization of Achilles as a lion, in addition to the lion simile aforementioned and the lion meat. Both the Cyclops and Achilles are consuming the viscera and medullae of their victims, which are described as semianimis. The portrayal of Achilles therefore owes much to the description of the monstrous Cyclops in Ovid, and in turn, Homer. This might appear as a remarkable equivalence, but in reality, it is very suitable for the description of Achilles. Both Polyphemus and the youth are liminal figures who stand at the edges of their own spectra. Polyphemus, if we follow the Homeric tradition, is a semi-divinity (the Cyclopes are thought to have been sons of Poseidon). Nonetheless, his later representations make him akin to the bestial world. Achilles’ own half-celestial parentage, as Heslin points out, in addition

---

224 For an in-depth intertextual and hypertextual study of the Achaemenides episode, and Ovid’s twisting of the tale responding to Virgil and Homer, see Papaioannou (2005) 74-88.
225 There is always the question whether Polyphemus is actually a cannibal, as he is not human.
226 Hesiod has the Cyclopes as the brothers of the Titans: for descriptions of Polyphemus as a Giant, see for instance Aen.3.619-20 (ipse arduus altaque pulsat / sidero), but also as a monster, see for instance Aen.3.658, where he is described as a monstrum horrendum informe ingens; his cry is
to his deficiency of suitable father figures, ‘is an encapsulation of the human condition considered a state of being lying uneasily between the divine and the bestial’. Achilles is the pupil of what Ulysses derogatorily refers to as semifer, half-beast Chiron (Ach.1.868: *tu semiferi Chironis alumnus*), hence converting Achilles into a semifer too, as the youth refers to Chiron as a father (Ach.2.102: *sic dabat ille pater*). Polyphemus’ characterisation in Ovid and Virgil is therefore sifted into the *Achilleid* in order to create an alarmingly threatening image of Achilles, who displays monstrous behaviour.

The hero’s diet is also a consequence of being nurtured by a Centaur. These half-men, half-animal creatures are imagined having been themselves eaters of raw meat (Thgn.541-42: ὤβρος / Ἦ περ Κενταύρους ὁμοφάγους ὀλέση; Apollod.*Bibl.*2.5.4: οὖτος Ἦρακλεῖ μὲν ὁπτὰ παρεῖχε τὰ κρέα, αὐτὸς δὲ ὁμοίς ἐχρήτο). Even though Chiron is depicted as diametrically different from his nefarious brothers (Ach.1.110-3: *at intra / Centauri stabula alta patent, non aqua nefandis/ fratribus*), the poet goes to great lengths to describe the Centauromachy, and Chiron’s cave and its surroundings are described by Statius only in opposition to what they are not (Ach.1.112-5: *hic hominum nullos expera cruores / spicula nec truncae bellis genialibus orni / aut consanguineos fracti crateres in hostes, / sed pharetrae insontes et inania terga ferarum*). Not only is the effort to distinguish Chiron from his fellow Centaurs undermined by Chiron’s best student, Achilles, who is imagined to be re-enacting a battle that has depicted these beasts as savage and uncontrollable half-human, half-animal hybrids (Ach.1.39-40), but the presence of the description cannot but cast a troubling shadow on Chiron himself as trainer of Achilles. Thus, Achilles’ diet of raw meat is framed in a manner that augments

super-human (*Aen.*3.672-4). To complicate things, Polyphemus is also a herdsman, thus adding a mortal element to his presentation, just as Achilles is a hunter too.  

---

227 Heslin (2005) 191. I will return to these two central themes in the following chapters.

228 See Heslin (2005) 191 for brief considerations on the epithet *semifer*, the usage of which is particularly relevant for the construction of the epic hero in the *Achilleid*, as it refers to the monster Cacus in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.*8.267). See Feeney (1991) 159.

229 On this line, see Watt (2000) 525, where he argues that *dabat* ought to be understood not as literally ‘given’, but ‘narrated’, as Achilles is repeating Chiron’s words. Note how Thetis calls Chiron a *torvus magister* (cf.p.37).

230 Heslin (2005) 266-67 has noted this ‘negative definition’ used by the poet to put forward a gendered reading of Chiron’s cave as the background for sexual violence (cf.fn.184).
the boy’s liminality and non-human, bestial behaviour, and its vocabulary echoes a cannibalistic and savage moment in the tradition.

2.4 You are what you kill: practices of omophagy

Achilles’ diet, though extremely unconventional, closely follows Statius’ penchant for depictions of uneasy episodes where heroes are seen to consume atypical food. In the Thebaid, at the height of the nefarious march against Thebes, and only just before his own death, Tydeus, Diomedes’ father, devours the brain of his foe, Melanippus (Theb. 8.751-59). This action of cannibalism destroys the possibility of Tydeus’ immortal fame, as Athena shuns him and walks away, condemning him to oblivion. Scholars have compared Achilles’ diet of raw animal meat to Tydeus’ ingestion of the freshly-slain brain-meat of Melanippus, making the case that the Achilleid’s episode can be another instance of the predilection of post-Classical authors for shocking themes. If we add to this the nefarious element of the presentation of Achilles’ regimen as monstrous behaviour, the hero’s narrative is seen to possess underlying factors that are darker and more dangerous than what has previously been maintained.

On a primary level, the raw element present in both episodes symbolises the bestial component that Achilles and Tydeus share. The eating of raw-meat, the practice of ὀμοφαγία – omophagy from now on – represents the clear demarcation between the realm of beasts and the dominion of men. In structuralist and anthropological terms, Lévi-Strauss first reflected on the irreconcilable difference between the raw and the cooked, drawing attention to the significance of the ‘cooking fire’ for individuals that are undergoing some sort of physiological process (e.g. the child, the woman who has just given birth, or the girl entering womanhood). Various rituals that possess this ‘conscientious cooking’ element to them epitomise the natural creature being born, cooked and

---

232 Heslin (2005) 174 highlights the discordant ways in which the accounts are presented, ‘in a way that jars very strongly with that elegant picture’. What is left untold, however, is the fact that Achilles is the narrator of the story in the second book, and this changes our perception of the passage.
233 Lévi-Strauss (1964) 344.
eventually socialised, so as to form part of a community of individuals, rather than a person still captive in rawness.\textsuperscript{234} Cooking fire is the mediation element between a feral, undomesticated sphere, and the world of civilised men and women. The dichotomy between the ‘raw’ and the ‘cooked’ is not present in the story of Achilles, where there is only emphasis on the consumption of raw meat. The boy’s liminality and his animalistic side intensify, and he becomes at once a character outside the boundaries of normal social conduct.\textsuperscript{235}

In the \textit{Iliad}, the custom of omophagy is mainly found in similes, and the word, in its adjectival form, ὠμοφάγος, ov, is deployed at moments charged with pathos and savagery. For instance, we find flesh-eating lions in \textit{Iliad} 5, where the Argive warriors are compared to ravening (literally, raw-eating) lions (\textit{II}.5.782: λείουσιν ἐνικότες ὠμοφάγοισιν). In \textit{Iliad} 11, an Odysseus who has been compared to a deer is besieged by a pack of vicious jackals (\textit{II}.11.479: ὠμοφάγοι...θῶς), and in \textit{Iliad} 16, the Myrmidons are compared to wolves, eaters of raw-flesh that have slaughtered a horned stag (\textit{II}.16.156-57: οὶ δὲ λύκοι ὦς / ὠμοφάγοι). In book 24, Achilles is compared by Apollo to a lion who goes among flocks of men in order to eat their flesh raw: despite the absence of the word ὠμοφάγος, here the rawness of the victims can be easily supplied (\textit{II}.24.41-43: λέων δ´ ὦς ἀγρια ὀἶδεν, / ὦς τ´ ἔπει ἄρ μεγάλη τε βή καὶ ἡγήσορι θυμῷ / εἶξας εἶο´ ἐπι μῆλα βροτῶν, ἵνα δαῖτα λάβησιν´). Achilles is described as grasping wild things because he ‘belongs rightly to the liminal realm of nature and not to culture’.\textsuperscript{236}

In fact, it is Achilles again the hero who threatens to cross the boundaries between simile and reality. The hero threatens to cut up Hector’s body and to eat

\textsuperscript{234} Lévi-Strauss (1964) 344-45.
\textsuperscript{235} There is no evidence for Heslin’s claim (2005) 188 that the food that Chiron, Thetis and Achilles consume at the beginning of the poem is ‘presumably cooked’. The verse (\textit{Ach}.1.183-84: \textit{tunc libare dapes Baccheaque munera Chiron / orat}) does not allow for speculation (and the mention of Bacchus points again to the diet of Achilles). However, he is correct in pointing out the sacrificial element to this scene (\textit{libare; dapes; orat}), as if Chiron were offering a divine sacrifice to Thetis, playing both with a common dining scene and a theoxeny.
\textsuperscript{236} Wilson (2002b) 126; see the detail that Achilles does attempt to deface Hector post mortem. See Bernstein (2008) 122 n.71 for a list of epic warriors compared to animals who consume raw flesh. It perhaps comes as no surprise that the only instance of this simile in the \textit{Thebaid} is found in the description of the aftermath of Tydeus’ monomachy, foreshadowing his grim demise (\textit{Theb}.2.675-81).
his flesh raw, as the latter is already dying.\(^{237}\) Achilles behaves like a predator, and it is striking that Hector is ἀσθμαίνον himself (\textit{II.}22.346-47: αἱ γὰρ πως αὐτόν με μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἄνειθ / ὃμ’ ἀποταμνόμενον κρέα ἐδμεναι, οία ἔοργας).\(^{238}\) But nowhere does the hero engage in cannibalistic frenzy nor does he indulge in the practice of omophagy, for, again, the food that he eats in his tent, as an adult, is carefully cooked by Patroclus (\textit{II.}9.206-9).

In the \textit{Achilleid}, Achilles does engage in omophagy, and besides, more problematically, his diet is presented as a conventional way of nourishment. The ingestion of raw meat as indispensable nourishment from an early age stands in direct opposition to the standard way of rearing a mortal child. The scholarship has identified two motives behind this choice. First, his alimentary routine has been constructed as the necessary tool ‘imagined to give the hero strength and courage’.\(^{239}\) Frazer refers to this notion as ‘homeopathic magic’, a theory according to which an individual consumes a particular food attempting to absorb certain characteristics of the so-eaten animal.\(^{240}\) In this way, Achilles consumes animal meat and internalises the abstract properties of animals (e.g. strength, speed, courage and anger). Secondly, aside from the acquisition of these inner attributes, the specific choice of raw meat deriving from wild animals implies a proclivity towards aggression and anger, thus exacerbating Achilles’ own savage nature.\(^{241}\) To these motives, one might add a ritualistic reading: the choice of wild rather than domesticated animals serves to separate even further Achilles from common mortal behaviour.\(^{242}\) What is usually employed in sacrifices is farmed meat, whereas Achilles’ eating habits mark once again the hero’s detachment from natural human existence, where men are fixed ‘à la terre qu’ils doivent cultivar

\(^{237}\) For reflections on this behaviour, see Braund and Gilbert (2003) 279, who offer an insightful study on combat trauma, and the state of ‘berserk’. Nikoletseas (2013) 103 even argues that it is of ‘little significance whether Achilles eats the flesh of Hector or not…it is sufficient to know that he considered engaging in this act’: Achilles’ threat reflects a taboo and an underlying desire.

\(^{238}\) Hector is about to die (\textit{II.}22.355-56: τὸν δὲ καταθνῆσκον προσάρῃ κορυθαίολος Ἐκτώρ). This simultaneously foreshadows and serves as the starting point for the later grim detail overlooked by Pindar (cf.fn.217).

\(^{239}\) Bernstein (2008) 121.

\(^{240}\) Frazer (1922) 12-37.


\(^{242}\) Vernant (1974) 146.
par le traival agricole pour en tirer leur subsistance. This, intertwined to the inversion of ritualistic duties that ought to see cooked meat rather than raw meat, stresses to an even greater extent Achilles’ nonconformity.

Adding to the anomalous and beast-like conduct, however, Achilles’ consumption of raw lion meat does not seem fortuitous. In the Achilleid, Achilles is the recipient of three direct animal similes. The first two depict a youthful and softer hero: he is compared to a young horse reluctant to be disciplined when Thetis attempts to cross-dress him (Ach.1.277-82). In the second simile, he is a young bull who yields to the taming attempts of cowherds, exemplifying his reaction to his infatuation with Deidamia (Ach.1.313-17). The third one is the lion simile discussed above. The lion simile, unlike the others, pushes Achilles to travel forward to the facta of the Iliad, proleptically leaping into his future, martially heroic self, as the arena for warriors and lion similes is predominantly the Homeric battlefield. Achilles’ details of his sustenance are also retold in a context that unequivocally looks towards Troy (as they are on a ship en route to Ilium), for this is the chief narrative drive of the Achilleid. The lion is the only animal that Achilles hunts, kills and feeds on raw that has also served as a comparandum for the young hero. Leonine imagery accompanies the hero from his first appearance in the narrative to his final transformation into the warrior. We have been guided through Achilles’ life in the Achilleid following a timescale, from a cub to a more adult lion that has been subjected to a temporal and unnatural condition.

In light of the Homeric quality to his leonine characterisation, however, I further interpret the leonine feature to his diet as cannibalistic, and also, as a statement of poetic artistry. If Achilles consumes lion meat, and this is the only animal that he eats with which he has shared a simile so essential to his traditional

---


244 There is a fourth indirect simile that depicts Ulysses as a hunter in search his prey’s lair, whereby Achilles is depicted as an unspecified prey (Ach.1.764-69). The similes above suggest that Achilles’ nature is easily tamed, because of their domestic context, so it would appear that the stress is on elegiac love and Achilles’ militia amoris rather than on epic imagery, as Bernstein has theorised (2008) 122-23.
characterisation, we move into the realm of cannibalism. Achilles the lion hero is devouring the innards of the same animal, and he is, at the same time, consuming his most symbolically heroic and viscerally Homeric and leonine representation at that. Bernstein rightly argues that Statius continually mobilises implicit narrative continuities between the Achilleid and the leading Achilles tradition, and that Homeric lion imagery is a fundamental part of the Statian representation of Achilles. Bernstein (2008) 122. Heslin ends his monograph by evaluating the relationship between the Homeric Achilles and his Statian counterpart, arguing that through the adoption and overturning of specific Homeric traits, the Achilleid can be read as ‘an invitation to deconstruct the Iliadic hero’. This is certainly accurate, but we ought to push further and analyse the consequences of such implementation, especially if this adoption does not simply preconfigure the poem as an ‘amusing and unproblematic prelude to Homer’. Heslin (2005) 299.

Lion imagery is deployed in a problematic and twisted manner throughout the narrative of the Achilleid, and it is clear that there is a profound connection to Achilles’ Homeric portrayal. The other animal singled out as food is a she-wolf (semianimisque lupae), of which the hero consumes medullae, the marrow, which just as viscera, can metaphorically represent the innermost and quintessential part of something (and even allegorically denote a heart). In Achilles’ words to Hector that began the chapter, Achilles adduces that there are no pacts between lions and men: the second (and last) pair of animals that emblematically exemplify for Achilles and Hector are wolves and lambs (II.22.263: οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν). The direct engagement with Homer is manipulated and applied to a wholly different context, where Achilles is far removed from the battlefield – a detail that augments the brutality of his depiction – whilst he is being reared. The consumption of these animals can be interpreted as weakening –

245 Bernstein (2008) 122. He argues that post-Homeric Roman sources tend to depict an Achilles who is inherently more negative than his Homeric counterpart.
246 Heslin (2005) 299.
248 For examples of the marrow of bones, see Ovid, Met. 14.208. Again, there is a political context to the word, just as there was to viscera (Cic. Phil. 1.14-36: in medullis populi romani ac visceribus haerebant), cf.fn.220.
249 I also detect a hint of gender-bending imagery, because we move from lions to a single lioness.
perhaps even annihilating – his Homeric portrayal. The weight of this statement of originality conveys an indication that this Statian Achilles will be different, new and certainly not trouble free. After all, the features of Achilles’ nutrition had not been covered by Homer, and this is in fact a fulfilment of the pledge of innovation at the beginning of poem (Ach. 1.3-4). Achilles’ bestial behaviour, as a devourer of raw-meat with cannibalistic tendencies, show a hero who is rejecting the tradition by consuming it, as well as a process of normalisation of deviant conduct.250

We also become aware of Achilles’ diet in retrospect, after his triumphant transformation into a lion. This narrative positioning ought not to be overlooked, as we are urged to re-read and re-interpret Achilles’ characterisation as the straightforward Homeric ‘king of the jungle’, who finally discovers his ‘raw’ nature. He is now presented in an animal-like guise, a youth that devours his leonine prey shortly after capturing it. Achilles’ representation as a lion has continually defined his epic curriculum, and we then learn of his diet: it becomes difficult not to intertwine the metaphorical lion with the lion meat in a game of cannibalism. Cannibalism and the eating of raw-flesh are inherent to Achilles’ wild state.251 If Achilles’ actions are animalistic, he is to be read as the lion, and his diet also harks back to the cannibalistic episode of Polyphemus, and the consumption of lion meat undermines his more positive heroic representation in the canonical sources. With this depiction, there could arise the potential to fulfil the threat that Achilles has previously hurled at Hector, thus hinting at a conceivable ‘Tydean’ representation of Achilles.252 Finally, since the cannibalistic elements to his presentation are intrinsically linked to an early stage of his

---

250 Which in turn foreshadow even darker outcomes for the Trojan War, as the war is emphasised to be the first conflict (Ach. 1.446: Prima ratis Danaus Hecateia congregat Aulis; 1.456-457: tun apnum Graecia vires / contemplata suas). The tragic tinge is also given by the bizarre simile of the Greek troops as captured lions at the mercy of cerva (Ach. 1.466: et captos contempsit cerva leones), symbolising the hopelessness of heroic codes during wartime, but it can also further heighten gender-bending imagery in the poem, for Achilles eating lions would side him with the female deer who disdain lions. I am also inclined to see in the mention of a female deer an allusion to the Iphigenia myth. One could also see a twist of the deer simile in Theb. 5.165-69, where Hypsipyle is compared to a deer cornered by a pack of wolves (qualis cum cerva cruentis / circumventa lapis). On the simile in the Achilleid and its more general gender-bending significance, see Moul (2012) 293-94.


252 For a cannibalistic Domitian, see Plin. Pan. 48.3-6.
maturation process, it seems like an attempt to erase Achilles’ ultra-epic curriculum from his beginning (and narrative incipit): the worst menace in Homer becomes a tangible, and likely, reality in the Achilleid.

2.5 Achilles Ὠμηστής: Achilles, Bacchus and Pentheus
Thus far we have seen how the characterisation of Achilles as a lion is far from straightforward: his leonine characteristics portend savagery and ferocity, and hark back to grisly moments in the tradition, such as Polyphemus’ cannibalism, where we verge into feral behaviour. His diet of lions and wolves can also be interpreted as a reaction to various speeches in climactic moments in the Iliad: whereas in Homer we are still in the realm of empty threats, his characterisation in the Achilleid shows him naturally eating the raw meat of the victims he has slaughtered. The seed of epic excess not only is embryonic, but it is showcased as paradoxically ordinary from the early stages of his life.

In addition to viciousness, ferocity and monstrosity, the practice of omophagy is intrinsically linked to the Dionysian world, as we see in the prologue of Euripides’ Bacchae, to which I shall return. In the second half of the Achilleid, particular prominence is given to the Bacchic and Theban dimension: the landscape against which Deidamia is raped is markedly Dionysiac (Ach.1.593-97), and the daughters of Lycomedes and Achilles cross-dressed perform as Maenads in the presence of the Greek embassy (Ach.1.826-27: iamque movent gressus thiasisque Ismenia buxus / signa dedit). Furthermore, Thetis uses Bacchus as an example of divine transvestism when attempting to persuade her son to put on a dress (Ach.1.262-3), Achilles is then compared to Bacchus himself (Ach.1.615-18), eliciting a direct equivalence with the god, as well as being likened to his antagonist, Pentheus (Ach.1.839-40). In the following section, I argue that Achilles’ consumption of raw meat under the orders of Chiron prompts the idea that he has been reared as a divinity, giving particular emphasis to the connection

---

254 On maenadism, sex and gender-inversion in the Achilleid, see Panoussi (2013) 345-51. As Panoussi points out, Ismenia buxus refers to the Theban flute employed by Bacchants. On the latter passage, see Heslin (2005) 229-36, to whose analysis I will return below.
with Bacchus.\textsuperscript{255} In fact, it is after the Bacchus and Pentheus similes that we learn that Chiron has reared Achilles in the manner of a demi-god and a god, which sequentially – and paradoxically – highlights the uncomfortable detail of Achilles’ mortality. I then examine Achilles’ Theban representation through the lens of Euripides’ \textit{Bacchae} and analyse to what extent this depiction is embedded within a tragic discourse that again underscores Achilles’ attempt at self-elevation.

Whilst the Theban element of the \textit{Achilleid} is most conspicuous during the all-female rites on Scyros, Thebes and its literary tradition is singled out in the proem as the successful field (\textit{Dirceaus ager}) for Statius’ poetic endeavours (\textit{Ach.1.12-3: scit Dirceaus ager meque inter prisia parentum / nomina cumque suo numerant Amphione Thebae}).\textsuperscript{256} But Dirce in Statius usually represents a negative omen: in the extended proem of the \textit{Thebaid}, the rivers Dirce and Ismenos both overflow with floating bodies, with Thetis herself as a horrified witness (\textit{Theb.1.38-40: caerula cum rubuit Lernaeo sanguine Dirce / et Thetis arentes adsuetum stringere ripas / horruit ingenti venientem Ismenon acervo}).\textsuperscript{257} Thebes and Dionysus/Bacchus are closely intertwined in tragedy, and the presence of a Dionysiac component prompts a discourse that closely relates, among other elements, to the \textit{Thebaid} and, more generally, to the tragic genre (Eur.\textit{Bacch.}1-2: ἢκῳ Δίως παῖς τήνδε θηβαίων χθόνα / Διόνυσος; 5: πάρεμι Διρκης νάματ᾽ / Ἰσμηνοῦθ᾽ ὑδωρ).\textsuperscript{258}

Evident signs of Dionysiac rites are manifest in the description of the \textit{locus} where Deidamia and her companions – described later on as \textit{Bacchi comites} (\textit{Ach.1.646}) – are celebrating the rituals:

\begin{center}
Lucas Agenorei sublimis ad orgia Bacchi
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{255} See Taisne (1976) 363-79 for Bacchic iconography and Achilles. For a study of Liber/Bacchus/Dionysus in Roman thought, see Bruhi (1953).
\textsuperscript{256} On the two traditions behind this epithet, which stand for Thebes, see Uccellini (2012) 47-8. The queen’s name is used metonymically in Statius’ \textit{Thebaid} to signify the spring and Thebes itself (\textit{Theb.1.38}; 1.152; 2.322; 2.433; 3. 665; 4.8; .374; 4, 447; 12, 115; 12, 610; \textit{Silv.1.4.21} and 2.7.1). On the simultaneous Pindaric imagery of the spring of poetic inspiration here, see Barchiesi (1996) 54 n.22, who mentions the use of \textit{Dircaeus} in Horace (\textit{Carm.4.2.25}) as a reference to Pindar (presumably referring to \textit{Pyth.9.88-9: μηδὲ Δήμαρχον ὑδάτων ὁ ἄγαν ἡμᾶς ἀπεκρυπτάτω}).
\textsuperscript{257} On Thetis as a witness, see the final chapter.
\textsuperscript{258} The mention of Δίρκη appears in Euripides. For usages of Δημαρχος, -ος, -ον, we are still in the tragic realm (Eur.\textit{Supp.} 637; \textit{Phoen.} 730, 1026; Soph. \textit{Antig.} 844; Aesch.\textit{Septem contra Theb.} 306).
stabat et admissum caelo nemus; huius in umbra
alternam renovare piae trieterida matres
consuerant scissumque pecus terraque revulsas
ferre trabes gratosque deo praestare furores.

(Ach.1.593-97)

The use of Agenoreus to denote Bacchus creates a repetition and makes the god the central point of the description, engulfing the reader within a markedly Theban/Dionysiac topography. As Heslin points out, there are immediate traces of Euripides’ Bacchae with the mention of torn-apart cattle and the exhumed trees, and we are transported into all-female maenadic rites (Ach.1.598: lex procul ire mares), celebrated every other year (trieteris).

The mention of scissa pecora recalls both the maenadic practice of σπαραγμός, sparagmos, the tearing apart of animals, and omophagy. The women taking part in Dionysiac rites, the maenads, were thought to have engaged in omophagy, ‘the devouring of the absolutely raw flesh of an animal not led ritually to the altar to be slaughtered, cut up, roasted, and boiled’. This results in the destruction of the boundary that separates man and nature, the distinction between humanity and bestiality. Achilles’ diet of raw food, as we have seen, places him in a similar liminal position, between man and beast, thus mirroring – on a preliminary level – the maenads’ own condition. The modus operandi of Dionysiac rituals embodies both the inversion of the sacrificial procedures, because they seize wild animals to rend them and supposedly eat them raw, and also the reversal of the correct order of behavioural conduct within the community. First, the element of ritualistic perversion is made overt because sacrificial meat needs to be

---

259 Agenor, king of Phoenicia who was the father of Cadmus, whose daughter was Semele, Bacchus’ mother. See Mason (2015) 60-3 for the similarities between Propertius’ account of the Bona Dea scandal in 4.9 and the presentation of this lucus.
260 Bacch.734-36 and 1103-104 with Heslin (2005) 242-44. Though watched over by a verendus dactor (Lycomedes) and a metuenda sacerdos, Achilles laughs to himself as he is equipped, literally, with the perfect cover to trespass (Ach.1.602: tacitus sibi risit Achilles).
261 Quotation from Vernant in Detienne (1994) xxxvi, who then argues that the women engaging in these rituals consume the beasts while ‘life was still warm in it’, a position now disputed.
262 There could also be a cannibalistic connection with the Lemnian women, because in some sources they are depicted as cannibals: but their agent of frenzy is Aphrodite, not Bacchus, and Statius does not mention their cannibalism in the Thebaid. See Detienne (1994) 179 n.112.
butchered and thoroughly cooked in order to be consumed. Secondly, women abandon their duties as mothers and wives in order to partake in rites where wildness and ecstatic frenzy substitute for chastity and order. In relation to the Achilleid, Achilles' diet has prompted comments such as Taisne’s, who reflects that ‘la façon dont Chiron a nourri Achilles dès sa tendre enfance évoque curieusement les ‘omophagies’ de Ménades lors des orgies nocturnes’. Bernstein follows arguing that ‘Achilles chases wild animals and eats raw flesh like a Bacchant’. I juxtapose the details of Achilles’ diet of raw meat and the associations of omophagy with Bacchus, especially in light of the hero’s overt characterisation with Bacchus and Pentheus.

It is imperative to highlight that in Greek literature, omophagy, from the incipit of Euripides’ Bacchae, is a custom performed by Dionysus himself, not the maenads, as Henrichs reminds us. In the Bacchae, the Chorus sings that is Dionysus who hunts, kills and consumes a wild goat, apostrophised a ‘raw-eaten pleasure’, focalized through his eyes (Bacch. 139: ὀμοφάγον χάριν). In a fragment of Alcaeus, the epithet of ‘Eater of Raw Meat’ is bestowed upon Dionysus (fr.129.8-9: τόνδε κεμήλιον ὀνήμασο[α]ν / Ζόννυσσον ὀμῆσταν). Whether this epithet has a connection with archaic cultic omophagy or is deployed hyperbolically in a literary context, it does not diminish its marked presence and

266 Taisne (1976) 370.
268 Bernstein (2008) 118. Panoussi (2013) 149 also believes that ‘Achilles fulfils the role of a Bacchant’, but she interprets Achilles' behaviour as that of a maenad during the Bacchic dances that take place after the Dionysiac rituals in the woods (at Ach. 1.821-40), when really, he is the odd one out (Pentheus). In the latter passage, see the emphasis placed on the Bacchic landscape (Ach. 1.812-13: Bacchea ferentes / orgia).
269 See Henrichs (1978) 150-52 for discussion against scholars who have used a number of quite obscure sources that allegedly show the priestesses of Dionysus consuming raw meat. For present purposes, it is not necessary to identify real cult practice of omophagy or sparagmos in Bacchic and maenadic rites, but the existence, in poetic texts, of the ritual and its possible recovery here. For an analysis of Bacchic mysteries at Rome following the senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus of 186 BC, see Heslin (2005) 245-48, where Pentheus' role is re-considered as that of a dutiful Roman official.
subsequent influence in literature.\(^{271}\) Dionysus’ epithet Ὀμηστής is usually translated with the more literal adjective ‘savage’, but it indicates the consumption of uncooked animals.\(^{272}\) We have already seen how the eating of raw meat on the Homeric battlefield is a topos of savagery and is reserved to pointed moments of feral behaviour. In the \textit{Iliad} too, Hecuba denotes Achilles as Ὀμηστής, using the same word to portray Achilles as a savage and faithless man to the eyes of Priam (\textit{Il.}24.206-8: εἰ γὰρ σ’ αἰρήσει καὶ ἐσώφεται ὀφθαλμοῖς, / Ὀμηστής καὶ ἅπιτος ἀνὴρ ὃ γε, οὖ σ’ ἐλέησει, / οὐδὲ τί σ’ αἰδέσεται).\(^{273}\)

The use of this description to characterise Achilles’ own nature is unsurprising due to his predatory behaviour in the \textit{Iliad}.\(^{274}\) But in the \textit{Achilleid}, as we have seen, we are removed from the battlefield, and the details of Achilles’ food are presented as an ordinary way of nourishing a child. In light of the portrayal of Dionysus/Bacchus as the only god who is said to have consumed raw meat, it would appear that Achilles has been reared by Chiron as a divinity, whose

---

\(^{271}\) This side of Bacchus was a known reality; in Plutarch’s account of the life of Antony, upon his arrival to Ephesus, he was greeted by the people in Bacchic fashion. Some celebrated him as Dionysus Giver of Joy and Beneficent, but for many he embodied ‘Dionysus Carnivorous and Savage’ (\textit{Vit.Ant.}24.4-5: Δίονυσος αὐτῶν [...] Χαριδότην καὶ Μελίλον. ἥ γὰρ ὀμέλει τοιοῦτος ἄνδρος, τοῦ δὲ πολλοῖς Ὀμηστής καὶ ἀγριώνως). The negative connotations are manifest.

\(^{272}\) There are similarities with Ὀμαιός, because of human sacrifices at Chios and Tenedos, see Bierl (2016) 16: this echoes Achilles’ propensity towards human sacrifice in \textit{Il.}23. Other examples of Ὀμηστής include Hesiod’s description of the monstrous Echidna, who consumes raw flesh (\textit{Theog.}300: Ὀμηστήν ἀθέτης ὑπὸ κεύθεις γαῖς, and Cerberus (\textit{Theog.}311: Ἐρέβερον Ὀμηστήν), thus emphasising monstrous elements behind the consumption of raw meat.

\(^{273}\) See also the more animalistic moment at \textit{Il.}22.66-7, where Priam, attempting to dissuade Hector from close combat with Achilles, sees himself as being mauled to death by his own dogs that he used to feed (αὐτῶν δ’ ἐν πίματοι με κόνες πρώτης θύμεθαν / ὀμησταὶ ἔρυγουσιν). O’Brien (1993) 79 highlights that the two typical settings in the \textit{Iliad} in which omophagy is more patent are the similes (cf.p.71), and prophecies. For instance, Achilles’ threat of eating Hector’s corpse is ‘ironically foreshadowed in the lamentations of Priam and Hekabe over their fates’ at \textit{Il.}22.42, 22.67 and 22.82-9, which finds its apex in Hecuba’s words here.

\(^{274}\) It is interesting that O’Brien’s analysis (1993) 77-9 focuses on omophagy as embodied by the warlike actions and theologies starring Hera, whose insatiable amor belli is questioned by Zeus (\textit{Il.}4.34-6). If Hera is the divine epitome of the eater of raw meat (which in the \textit{Achilleid} is conveyed through nurture!), and is the ‘model of inhuman excesses’, then there is an interesting equivalence in the goddess’ words in the argument over Hector’s burial, for she (stirred by an Achillean anger, χολοσμαμένη) says she has nurtured and reared Thetis herself, the mother of Achilles, the child of a goddess (\textit{Il.}24.59-60: αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς ἐστι θεᾶς γόνος, ἥν ἔγω αὐτή / θρέφα τε καὶ ἀτύρνα). It is a woman in the \textit{Iliad} who champions Achilles’ status as a demi-god, just like Thetis does in the \textit{Achilleid}. 

75
fostering of Achilles exhibits elements that are Dionysian in essence (Ach.2.101-2).  

At this point, I digress briefly in order to expand on the choice of food of wild rather than tamed animals: we have seen how this intensifies Achilles’ aptitude to savagery and aggression, as well as the inversion of ritualistic practices, but there is more. The consumption of feral animals seems to suggest that Achilles has been nurtured not only as a god, but also as a demigod and a monster, augmenting his paradoxical dichotomy intrinsic to his characterisation in the Achilleid. In Callimachus’ Hymn to Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, Artemis, is in charge of providing food to the table: Hermes, Apollo and above all, Herakles, are waiting for her (Hymn 3.146-48: τοῖς γαρ ἑι Τιρώνθιος ἄκιμων / ἐστηκε πρὸ πυλῶν ποτιδέγιμενος, εἰ τι φέρουσα / νειαί πιον ἡδεσμα). The goddess is accustomed to bringing back a great bull, or a feral boar (Hymn 3.150: ταῦρον...μέγαν; χλούνην κάπρον), but Herakles resourcefully attempts to make her hunt oxen instead – domesticated animals – thus revealing that he would rather eat those (Hymn 3.157-58: καὶ βόες ἀνθρώπωσι κακὸν μέγα· βάλλε· ἐπὶ καί / τούς). There is no indication that the animals will be consumed cooked, but rather the opposite, as Herakles’ voracious appetite is described according to its speed, leaving no place for its preparation (Hymn 3.158: ὡς ἐνεπεν, ταχινὸς δὲ μέγαν περὶ θῆρα πονεῖτο).

It is striking that in the following lines, Herakles’ gluttony is described in contrast to his newly-bestowed status as a god, as it indicates that perhaps the gods are not accustomed to the eating of meat, and raw meat at that (Hymn 3.159-60: οὐ γὰρ ὃ ἐν Φρυγίη περ ὑπὸ δρυὶ γυία θεωτείς / παῦσατ’ ἀδησφαγίς· ἔτι οἱ πάρα νηδὸς ἐκείνῃ, [...]). In the Hymn, however, the creatures that are used to feeding

---

275 But also, paradoxically, as a semifer as Chiron. Heslin (2005) 79 rightly translates Ceres and Bacchus in this line as the common metonymy for ‘bread and wine’, recalling the Terentian proverb of sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus. Bacchus features again during the meal that Thetis, Achilles and Chiron share (Ach.1.184-85, cf.fn.235. For munera Bacchi, see Silius (Pun.11.285: donec pulsae fames et Bacchi munera durum). Taisne’s comment (1976) 366 on these lines, adding that ‘toutefois il est probable que l’adolescent a goûté au vin, la boisson bachique par excellence’ does not take into account at all the lines before!

276 See the difference between what Calypso and Odysseus eat (Od.5.196–97). See Sissa and Detienne (2000) 74-81 for the food of the gods.
on raw meat are the Cyclopes: a young Artemis defiantly pledges that the rewards of her hunt will be the Cyclopes’ food (Hymn 3.84-5: αἱ δὲ κ’ ἐγὼ τοξοῖς μονιῶν δάκος ἢ τι πέλαργον / θηρίον ἁγρεύσω, τὸ δὲ κεν Κύκλωπες ἐδοιεν). Consequently, the emphasis placed upon on Achilles’ diet of wild animals at the same time distinguishes him as a demigod, but also, again, as a liminal figure belonging to the non-human realm, figures such as the Cyclopes.

Returning to Achilles’ representation as Bacchus, we must begin by reading his appearances in the narrative. The god first features in the poem as an apt *comparandum* listed in Thetis’ catalogue of divinities – Hercules, Bacchus, Jupiter and Caeneus – who have undergone processes of feminisation (or even outright gender-bending transformations). Thetis uses Bacchus and his garment (*aurata…palla*) to attempt to persuade Achilles to cross-dress (*Ach.*1.262-63: *si decet aurata Bacchum vestigia palla / verrere*). It is an apt comparison for Thetis to deploy at this stage because of Bacchus’ overt representation as a liminal, feminised figure himself. Nevertheless, as Uccellini points out, the chief source for the portrayal of Dionysus as a feminine/feminised god is Euripides’ *Bacchae*: at *Bacch.* 353, Dionysus is explicitly referred to as τὸν θηλύμορφον ξένον. Furthermore, the mention of the golden robe harks back to Seneca’s description of Bacchus, employed as an *exemplum* of feminisation that does not equal unmanliness (*Her.Fur.*474-75: *cum parum forti gradum / auro decorum syrma barbarico trahit*).

---

277 There is here surely an element of reflection on Herakles’ ambiguous divine status: if we are told that he feeds on meat – unlike the rest of the gods – and that the Cyclopes are the ones eating wild beasts, then Herakles might not be as dissimilar from them, perhaps attempting to soften his monstrous side by choosing oxen over wild beasts.

278 Achilles’ tale of his rearing bears gender-bending, as it is similar to that of Artemis in the Callimachean text. Both skilled hunters of wild animals from an early age, both in charge of bringing food back to the table. For the details of their respective hunts, see more broadly, *Ach.*2.96-148 and *Hymn* 3.80-109.


280 For the golden robe of Bacchus, see Ovid’s description at *Met.*3.555-56.

281 Taine (1976) 370-72; Cyrino (1998) 236. Statius’ representation of Bacchus in Thetis’ list owes a great deal to the god’s depiction in Ovid, but also the pseudo-Senecan *Hercules on Oeta* (472-76).


283 The tragic connection between Bacchus, Heracles and Achilles is briefly made by Rosati (1994a) 99 n.80: the three figures are also cross-dressers. Bacchus had donned female clothes to escape from Juno’s wrath (*Sen.Oed.* 412-23; *Apollod.* *Bibl.* 3.26-9).
Achilles, the poet draws attention to the importance of the tragic imagery, and we are also urged to read the subsequent juxtapositions between Achilles and Bacchus within this tragic frame.

This tragic equation is made explicit with the climactic moment of the Bacchic rituals, during which Achilles’ towering presence among the women at Scyros is overtly associated with the god:

\[
\text{talis, ubi ad Thebas vultumque animumque remisit,}
\]

\[
\text{Euhius et } \text{patr} \text{n} \text{satiavit pectora luxu,}
\]

\[
\text{serta comis mitramque levat thyrumque virentem,}
\]

\[
\text{armat et hostiles invisit fortior Indos.}
\]

\((Ach.1.615-18)\)

It quickly becomes clear that Achilles does not resemble a maenad: his appearance when he dons the fawn-skin and the garlanded thyrsus in the lines immediately before \((Ach.1.609-14)\) is a terrifying vision for the women, instilling fear into their hearts and focalized through their panic-stricken eyes \((Ach.1.613-14: \text{attonito stat turba metu sacrisque relictis / illum ambire libet pronosque attollere vultus})\).\(^{284}\) This warlike Bacchus is departing from his native land of Thebes to carry out a military campaign against the Indian enemies.\(^{285}\) Ripoll and Soubiran regard this simile as the beginning of a ‘transition to the offensive’, which holds a proleptical force that transports us to Achilles’ martial exploits at Troy.\(^{286}\) The comparison with Bacchus assists the enhancement of Achilles’ dichotomy

---

\(^{284}\) This line also recalls Nature’s reaction at a fearsome Jupiter/Achilles at \(Ach.1.488-89\). See Heslin (2005) 253-57, who discusses the abounding \textit{double entendres}, and reads Achilles’ phallic intervention as ‘aetiology […] for the unveiling of the phallus in the Bacchic mysteries at Rome’, using Ovid \((\text{Fast.}2.303-58)\) as a starting point.

\(^{285}\) For a brief analysis, see Sturt (1982) 835-36, who discusses possible interpretations. He, however, comments (in a simile with Bacchus!) that ‘in the costume of a \textit{bacchante} – although a distinctly feminine outfit – Achilles is able to assume a more manly role’, weakening the divine element of the simile.

between femininity and martial aggressiveness, which is effortlessly embodied by the Eastern god.  

This simile has implications of alimentary nature that can be read in conjunction with Achilles’ diet of raw meat. Line 616 describes a sated Bacchus (\textit{patrio satiavit pectora luxu}), and the verb \textit{satiare} is only employed twice in the narrative, used also to describe Achilles’ own extraordinary hunger in his account of the diet (\textit{Ach.2.99 satiasse famem}). In the simile, Bacchus has sated himself with \textit{patrius luxus}, left undefined, and can be roughly translated in a general manner, as Rosati does, with ‘molli delizie della sua patria’. These ‘luxuries of the fatherland’, however, do not simply embody the Eastern element of the god: they can also be cast in a more negative light, for \textit{luxus} also conveys ideas of Eastern excess and debauchery, particularly in epic poetry. The idea of luxury is also deployed in the second half of the \textit{Bacchae}. In the stichomythia in which the Stranger, Dionysus, and Pentheus, are plotting how to spy on the raging maenads (\textit{Bacch.955-56: κρύψῃ σῷ κρύψῃ ἣν σε κρυφθῆναι χρεῶν, / ἐλθόντα δόλιον μανᾶδων κατάσκοπον}), Pentheus unwittingly replies to the god he is being forced to luxury/to be luxurious:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Δ.} \textit{φερόμενος ἥξεις ...}
\item \textbf{Π.} \textit{ἀβρότητ᾽ ἐμὴν λέγεις.}
\end{itemize}


\footnotesize{288} This phrase also recalls Silius’ Hannibal, who feasts his eyes at the sight of Rome when he arrives to the \textit{urbs} from Capua (\textit{Pun.12.573: spectata duxor satiatus pectora Roma}). Incidentally, Polybius retells of one of Hannibal’s generals prone to cannibalism (Polyb.9.24.4-8), see also Livy (Liv.23.5.11-3) and Rawlings (2007). Statius’ rendition of Bacchus, and Achilles by proxy, as Hannibal is no surprise, and it configures Achilles as the Eastern, dangerous Other. On the latter, see recently Augoustakis (2016b) 195-219.

\footnotesize{289} Rosati (1994a) 127. Dilke’s, Ripoll and Soubiran’s and Nuzzo’s commentaries are silent on the meaning. Luxury and wealth have been identified as underlying themes in Statius’ poetry, depicted in an especially negative light in the \textit{Thebaid}, and as a complex issue in the \textit{Silvae} because of the connection with the Roman imperial elite, as Gibson (2015) 123-38 and Newlands (2002) 124-38 have argued. Incidentally, in the \textit{Thebaid}, Adrastus’ riches are described as \textit{luxus} too (\textit{Theb.} 2.438-39). As Gibson argues, Argos is characterised as wealthy, whereas Thebes is an impoverished land.

\footnotesize{290} TLL 7.2.1935.25.
Δ.
ἐν χερσὶ μητρός.

Π.
καὶ τρυφὰν μ’ ἀναγκάσεις.

Δ.
τρυφὰς γε τοιάσδε.

(Bacch.966-70)

Tragic irony underscores these verses: ‘the luxury is a grim play on the word’s root meaning of breaking’ (θρύπτω). The mention of the motherly embrace foreshadows Pentheus’ sparagmos at her hands, and the luxury of which Dionysus is ambiguously speaking will turn into an episode of excessive depravity. A similar argument can be made for the Latin luxus. On the one hand, its main meaning signifies something extravagant, disposed to immoderation. On the other hand, it can also refer to a more literal ‘dislocation’, a variant etymology deriving from the verb luxo (to put out of place). Achilles is therefore compared to a Bacchus whose feast of ‘luxuries of the fatherland’ can be interpreted in a tragic light, and which bears heavy traces of Euripidean sparagmos. The description of the feeding element as an opulent delicacy also conveys the notion of omophagy, as the slain goat is termed as a χάρις, a delight to be eaten raw.

Perhaps the most direct reference of this Euripidean element is found in the Thebaid, where unusual food habits and omophagy are labelled too as ‘luxury’. At the beginning of the second book, the arrival of Mercury and Laius at Thebes coincides with a festival in honour of Bacchus’ birth (Theb.2.71-88, tener Euhie). As Vessey notes, frenzy, orgiastic violence and inversion of normal order

The dwellers are compared to the Bistones, a Thracian tribe whose savagery was widely known in antiquity:

qualia per Rhodopen rabido convivia coetu
Bistones aut mediae ponunt convallibus Ossae;
illis semianimum pecus excussaeque leonum
ore dapes et lacte novo domuisse cruorem
luxus; at Ogygii si quando afflavit Iacchi
saevus odor, tunc saxa manu, tunc pocula pulchrum
spargere et immerito sociorum sanguine fuso
instaurare diem festasque reponere mensas.

(Theb.2.81-8)

Gathering either on Mount Rhodope or Mount Ossa for their orgiastic rites, they savagely consume half-living sheep, imagined as food taken from the jaws of lions, and they drink blood diluted with new milk, apostrophised as luxus again. In this passage, the word semianimis appears here in an alimentary context of raw eating, with vocabulary similar to Achilles’ diet. If we take into consideration the Bacchic context, the food component behind patrio luxu in the Bacchus/Achilles simile gains considerable prominence. In light of the element of ingestion present both in the simile with Bacchus and the diet of Achilles, the connection with Bacchus, with its divine and ritualistic patterns of omophagic consumption, augments Achilles’ characterization as the god, which transcends the mere similarities of Achilles with Bacchus in terms of their effeminate and androgynous appearances.

293 Vessey (1973) 233.
294 One of their kings, Diomedes, possessed four men-devouring mares: it was Hercules’ Eighth labour to return them to Mycenae (Apollod. Bibl.2.5.8).
295 The detail of the blood mixed with milk also strikingly recalls Achilles’ own description when he falls in love with Deidamia (Ach.1.307-8: lactea Massagetae veluti cum pocula fuscant/ sanguine puniceo...). On the tragic, foreboding symbolism of white and red in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, see Rhorer (1980) 76-88.
296 The word only appears once, whilst in the Thebaid it occurs seven times (Theb.2.83, 3.187, 6.220, 7.597, 10.477, 10.547). It is mostly employed in a warlike context of death/destruction, such as Learchus being half-alive after Tydeus’ slaughter (3.187), Atys’ death (8.597), men dying on the battlefield (10.477) and Antheus (10.547). It is also used to refer to half-alive sacrificial victims for Archemorus’ funeral (Theb.6.220). Finally, it is strikingly employed to describe the Furies-imbued bloodshed that Bacchus’ wounded tigers have begun: Statius highly anthropomorphizes the animals, as Vessey (1973) 276 notices (Theb.7.595-98).
At the outset, Achilles’ Bacchic characterisation demarcates him within a divine mould, and the presence of normalised omophagy points to a divine nurture that aligns the hero with the deity. Chiron is effectively educating Achilles within a markedly Bacchic matrix. However, during the second set of dances, this time in the presence of the attentive eyes of the Greek embassy of Ulysses and Diomedes, Achilles is compared to Pentheus:

\[\text{iamque movent gressus thiasisque Ismenia buxus}
\text{signa dedit, quater aera Rheiæ, quater enthea pulsant}
\text{terga manu variosque quater legere recursus.}
\[
\text{[…]}
\]

\[\text{tunc vero, tunc praecipue manifestus Achilles}
\text{nec servare vices nec bracchia iungere curat;}
\text{tunc molles gressus, tunc aspernatur amictus}
\text{plus solito rumpitque choros et plurima turbat.}
\text{sic indignantem thyrsos acceptaque matris}
\text{tympana iam tristes spectabant Penthea Thebae.}
\]

\[(\text{Ach. 1.827-29; 1.835-40})\]

Heslin believes that the Bacchic role that Achilles plays throughout the second half of the first book of the Achilleid is ‘a much more auspicious role model for the male worshiper of Dionysus than Pentheus’. Yet the fact that Achilles is also compared to Pentheus, a figure diametrically opposed to Dionysus in the Bacchae, is startling and ought to be revisited. First, there is a similar setting for both this passage and that of the Bacchus simile, beginning with a description of the various steps in the dances (Ach. 1.612: \textit{vibravitque gravi redimitum missile dextra}). But whilst in the first simile there seemingly is a triumphant equation with the god, this simulation of Bacchic rituals goes wrong, and Achilles cannot perform. Secondly, the astute narrative arrangement, from Bacchus to Pentheus, casts a tragic light onto his portrayal. In Sturt’s words, the imagery ‘is doom-laden […] Pentheus’ rejection of Bacchus-worship results in his violent death, just as Achilles’ rejection

---

297 See Barchiesi (2005) 60-1 for a brief analysis of the cross-dressing element to Pentheus.
299 Similarly, Bernstein (2008) 118: he argues that just as Pentheus would have survived had he accepted the cult of Dionysus, Achilles would have been safe had he accepted Thetis’ precepts.
of his disguise leads to Troy and death’.

Furthermore, the Greeks at this point have already begun with their undoing of Thetis’ tricks, granting a sense of impending doom and tragic flavour to Achilles’ awkward dance.

The engagement with Euripides, however, is much subtler. The passage above focuses on Achilles as the object of the gaze, as the entity to be seen (manifestus Achilles; spectabant). Achilles is manifestus even before the simile with Pentheus, not only because he is now disregarding the transvestism, but also because he is effectively playing the same role as the mortal man in the Bacchae. In the Bacchae, when the Stranger, the messenger and Pentheus are spying on the maenads, there is a gradual tragic inversion of the object(s) of gaze. To begin with, Pentheus wishes to gain a better viewpoint so that he can see the maenads in action (Bach.1060-62: οὐκ ἐξεκυνοῦμαι μαίναδων ὅσσοι νόθων: / ὡθων δ᾽ ἐπ᾽, ἠμβας ἐς ἑλάτην ὑψαχένα, / ἰδομ᾽ ἄν ὀρθῶς μαίναδων αἰσχρουργίαν). Shortly after, his position granted by Dionysus betrays him: he becomes vulnerable by being perceived (Bach.1075-76: ὡφθη δὲ μᾶλλον ἠ κατείδε μαίναδας. / ὅσον γὰρ ὀσπὸ δήλος ἦν θάσσων ἄνω). In the Statian passage, we are focalising the episode through the eyes of tristes…Thebae, a detail which adds another element of inevitable tragedy to the simile: it is a tragic and hopeless warning tale of the horror that will ensue.

The oblique mention of Agave also fuels the tragic dimension (Ach.1.839-40: thyrsos acceptaque matris / tympana). She stands in stark opposition to her son, for she has recognised Dionysus’ divine status. This representation fits Achilles’ conflictual rapport with Thetis, as he has not accepted his mother’s guidelines. The tragic dimension of motherly concern being marginalised is clear: it is no

---

300 Sturt (1982) 837, and Bernstein (2008) 118 again. Contra Heslin (2005) 253, who argues that the divergent destiny of both men is a factor in Statius’ re-writing of the end of the Bacchae. Achilles restores the violence of these poetic maenadic female rites to the male sex, and his determination to act like a man through the rape of Deidamia saves him from the ‘sparagmic’ ending.

301 De Jong (2014) 207-12. The following line (1077: καὶ τὸν ξένον μὲν ὧκέτ’ εἰσορᾶν παρῆν.) inverts the gaze, for Dionysus is now nowhere to be seen. The distinction between the mortal who is being seen and the god that is not could be another indication of Achilles’ mortality, as he is not aligned anymore with Bacchus.

302 Barchiesi (2005) 60: ‘the simile with Pentheus makes us pause’.
coincidence that, in book 11 of the *Thebaid*, Statius deploys a Theban simile comparing Jocasta attempting to save her children to Agave bringing the severed head of Pentheus to Dionysus (*Theb.*11.315-23).\(^{303}\) Achilles’ characterisation therefore shifts from divine to mortal, the Theban king dismembered by his own mother. Lion imagery also further expands the tragic layer to Achilles’ characterisation. Maddened Agave sees Pentheus as a mountain lion, and she impales his head on a thyrsus, carried by his mother through Mount Cithaeron (*Bacch.*11.319-42).\(^{304}\)

### 2.6 For never was a story of more woe than this: conclusion

In this chapter, I have expanded upon the identification of Thetis with the dead lioness and Achilles with the lion cubs, generally accepted by scholars, and I have examined how lion imagery continually describes Achilles throughout the narrative. Ariadne’s famous rebuke to Theseus (Catull.64.154: *quaenam te genuit sola sub rupe leaena*) is echoed by Statius when describing Achilles for the first time. Yet, additionally, the lion imagery combines these episodes together, and carries the ominous words of the Chorus into the representation of Achilles and Thetis as lions. Agave ironically represents the λέαινα that has given birth to Pentheus, in the same way that the slaughtered lioness in the *Achilleid* stands for Thetis.\(^{305}\) Cleverly deployed, narrative placement is again fundamental: immediately following the lion simile, Achilles sees himself (*Ach.*1.865: *simili talem se vidit in auro*) reflected on the shield, and he *horruit* (shivered) and *erubuit* (blushed).\(^{306}\) His lion simile, the focal point of the initiation of his manhood and the climactic moment of *anagnorisis*, evokes the wretched destiny of Pentheus, and makes him shudder.

---

\(^{303}\) The simile feeds into the *nefas* theme that drives the Thebaidic narrative: see Voigt’s analysis (2015) 1-16.

\(^{304}\) Prior to Pentheus’ gruesome dismemberment, the Chorus had foreseen his fatal destiny, adducing that Agave would be the first in mistaking Pentheus for a lion; the woman would cry words to the other maenads that the mortal was born from a lioness or a Lybian Gorgon (*Bacch.*988-90).

\(^{305}\) Statius’ fascination with Agave is found in Juvenal (*Sat.*7.82-7): he wrote a pantomime for the actor Paris under the same title.

\(^{306}\) Cf.Val.Fl. 2.514, where a semi-divine Hercules is afraid of the size of the task.
I have argued that the collective employment both of leonine and Theban imagery augments the tragic irony of Achilles’ destiny. He does not, and will not, achieve a divine status. His first-person account in book 2 of the *Achilleid* is aimed at self-aggrandisement and evokes the nurturing of a divinity, but the previous narrative casts a wretched light on his glorifying tale, as ultimately, we are compelled to read him as Pentheus. He is portrayed as a liminal figure, prone to epic and tragic excess. The engagement with Euripides’ *Bacchae* intensifies his paradoxical nature and brings to light the tragic degree to his mortal birth, and presents an Achilles, on his way to Troy, who is not as triumphant and heroic as previously maintained.
CHAPTER THREE
Sub Herculea Umbra
Epic and tragic transgression

“E tu, o Lettore, se uno non sei di coloro che esigono dagli altri quell’eroismo di cui non sono egli stessi capaci, darai, spero, la tua compassione al giovine infelice dal quale potrai forse trarre esempio e conforto”

Ugo Foscolo (1802) Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis

3.1 And then a hero comes along
So far, I have explored the ways in which Achilles is constructed as an intrinsically tragic, liminal hero, who is constantly fluctuating between divine, mortal and bestial status. In this chapter, I continue the examination of the subtleties of Achilles’ heroic construction. The first half of the chapter focuses on the analysis of the transgressive elements present in Achilles’ heroic portrayal, however embryonic at this stage. I begin with a scrutiny of his aptitudes displayed during his rearing under Chiron. Achilles, I argue, exhibits disquieting proclivities towards heroic immoderation that cast him in the mould of an excessive and theomachic epic hero. This depiction reveals echoes of epic and tragic mortal excess that evoke the portrayal of problematic warriors in the Flavian tradition, especially in Statius’ own Thebaid. Above all, I claim that we can identify a pointed tragic exemplum for Achilles’ transgressive portrayal: Hercules in Seneca’s Hercules Furens. I illustrate how Achilles perilously treads under the shadow of a maddened Hercules, as he demonstrates elements of excessive transgression.

The second half of the chapter builds on this Senecan intertext: I bring the figure of Jupiter into the spotlight, as his character reveals issues of mortality and paternal succession that emphasise the tragic element to Achilles’ presentation. In the Achilleid, in fact, the presentation of Achilles as the ‘potential’ offspring of Jupiter undercuts the narrative and is ever-present. I thus revisit the role of Achilles as successor and son of Jupiter, adding an element of transgressive, potential substitution of the Jovian role. This will result in a discussion of Achilles’ mortality and the failure of both a Herculean and a Jovian model.
3.2 Looting the club from Hercules: the hero as a Flavian exemplum

Before we begin the discussion of the Herculean features to Achilles’ characterization, it is worth briefly analysing the figure of Hercules. Hercules represents the epic hero in all of its glory: his dangerous tendencies towards the extremities of excess and his multiform identity between a man, a beast and a god, as Hardie explains, create a threatening and timelessly alluring subject matter, despite not starring as the main protagonist in any surviving epic.\(^{307}\) Feeney’s words capture the intemperate versatility and polyvalence of his figure, for he becomes ‘the most ambivalent creature in myth’.\(^{308}\)

In some sources, Hercules is represented as the civilising hero, ‘héros puissant et bénéfique, tueur de monstres et libérateur de l’humanité’: this is most notably the case, at first read, of the mythological digression of the Hercules and Cacus episode in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 8.184-306).\(^{309}\) In other sources, his behaviour gradually evolves from buffoonish to heroic, as is the case of Euripides’ *Alcestis*, whilst in others he is effectively presented as a brute, most notably in Aristophanes’ *Birds*, the first half of the narrative of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, and Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*.\(^{310}\) The incongruity of the hero’s characterisation is even present in a seemingly positive portrayal: in the *Aeneid*’s episode itself, the lines are blurred between the hero and the *semifer*, Cacus.\(^{311}\) Hercules’ heroism is mocked by Ovid, who reacts to Virgil in his representation of Hercules: whereas the hero had served as an *exemplum* for Aeneas and Turnus, Ovid twists Vergil’s construction of Aeneas as a second Hercules. When fighting the river Achelous (*Met.* 9.1-88), in

\(^{307}\) Hardie (1993) 66-7. Pisander wrote a *Heraclea* (ca.7th century BC), retelling the Labours of the hero (fr.2 West). In Latin literature, according to Ovid, Carus wrote a *Herakleidae* (*Pont.* 4.16.7-8: *et qui Iunonem laesisset in Hercule, Carus, / Iunonis si iam non gener ille foret*).

\(^{308}\) Feeney (1986) 52. See also Rebeggiani (2018) 135.

\(^{309}\) Quotation from Ripoll (1998) 86. See Galinsky (1966) 18-51 for a study of this episode. A Greek source that deals with Hercules as a positive hero is Pindar’s *Isthm.* 4.57.


\(^{311}\) Perkell (1999) 155; see also Morgan (1998). Due to space constraints, I do not dwell on the ambiguous role that Hercules plays in Cynic and Stoic philosophy, but see Höistad (1948) 22-73; 151-4; Gale (1994) 34-6 and Ripoll (1998) 87-8. Commentators have perhaps placed too much emphasis on the Stoic interpretation of Hercules in texts that are not strictly philosophical (e.g. Pseudo-Seneca’s *Hercules on Oeta*), but Hercules’ presence is intrinsically linked to ideas of heroic ethics.
fact, Hercules ‘is seen as a second Aeneas’ himself, subverting Virgil and thus de-heroizing his *aristeia.* All of these Virgilian and Ovidian ambiguous representations of Hercules pave the way and influence the later writers in their own depictions of the hero.313

Following this Herculean heroic exemplarity, used at authorial discretion for different purposes and in different ways, the study of Hercules in Flavian literature has naturally gained a considerable amount of traction, and scholars tend to recognise again Hercules as an overall positive heroic *comparandum* in Flavian epic.314 In Statius and Silius, he is seen as becoming a symbol of *virtus,* and ‘he is used as a standard by which to assess other figures in the poem who may be seen as inferior or successful followers’.315 In Valerius’ *Argonautica,* he features more prominently as a character who plays a role in the narrative, but, following his Apollonian counterpart, moves to the side-lines of the action, and his absence determines more than his presence.316 But there is also a darker side to Herculean imagery, especially prominent in Statius’ own *Thebaid.* As Rebeggiani has recently explored, the model of heroism that is embodied in the figure of Hercules has negative connotations and inherent dangers due to its unfavourable associations to Nero: the characters of Polynices, Tydeus, Capaneus and Thesus (among

---

314 For a compendium of the Hercules theme in Flavian epic, see Ripoll (1998) 88-163; Rebeggiani (2018) 132-35. In Ripoll, strikingly, the *Achilleid* does not feature among the epics discussed, despite Hercules’ presence. Hercules is also linked to Imperial power: for his importance in Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis,* see Braund and James (1998) 285-311. For Herculean comparison in Imperial panegyrics, see Rebeggiani (2018) 130-32.
315 Parkes (2009a) 476. See Tipping (2010) 14-22 and Asso (2009) 179-92 for the Herculean paradigm in the *Punica,* and its Domitianic implication. Lovatt (2005) 207-9 analyses Hercules’ figure in the backdrop of the wrestling match between Tydeus and Agylleus. Parkes (2009b) 246 n.2 and 2.3 lists scholarship that has analysed how main characters such as Jason, Regulus, Fabius, Scipio and Hannibal are represented in conjunction with Hercules. Parkes’ own discussion examines the issues that arise from the identification of the *Thebaid’s* own heroes to the Herculean model. Yet in the nefas-imbued world of the *Thebaid,* all fail when striving to fulfil the Herculean model. Manuwald’s forthcoming publication in *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epics* looks to explore Herculean motifs in Greek and Roman tragedy and Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica.*
others) are configured as a warning to Domitian not to follow in Hercules’ monstrous footsteps.\textsuperscript{317}

In the \textit{Achilleid}, Hercules appears in the list of mythological \textit{exempla} that Thetis puts forward in her attempt to cross-dress Achilles: Hercules had famously cross-dressed in order to be with the Lydian queen Omphale (\textit{Ach.1.260-61}: \textit{Si Lyidia dura / pensa manu mollesque tulit Tirynthius hastas}).\textsuperscript{318} It is this association of Achilles with Hercules through their respective elegiac cross-dressing episodes that has been the main object of recent scholarship on the poem.\textsuperscript{319} In this chapter, however, I aim to look beyond the episode of transvestism that these two heroes share, and I instead intend to read Hercules as a negative \textit{exemplum} for Achilles, where Achilles is likened to a Herculean standard that is problematic and transgressive, and ultimately tragic.

\section*{3.3 Somebody that I used to know: a ‘Herculean’ aposiopesis}

Parkes’ analysis of the Herculean exemplar in the \textit{Thebaid} begins with a brief reflection of Herculean tropes in the \textit{Achilleid}, in order to show how this comparative strategy is deployed even in Statius’ last epic poem.\textsuperscript{320} I expand on this exemplar Herculean model by attempting to answer Ripoll’s reflection of ‘en quoi Hercule peut être un modèle, et pourquoi’.\textsuperscript{321}

Hercules features indirectly in Chiron’s report of Achilles’ progress to Thetis. In lines 156-58, Chiron explains to Thetis that Achilles reminds him of a \textit{iuvenem Alciden}, a young Hercules on his way to the Argonautic expedition, but interrupts his train of thought when Achilles arrives on the epic stage (\textit{Ach.1.156-58}: \textit{olim equidem, Argoos pinus cum Thessala reges / hac veheret iuvenem Alciden et Thesea vidi /})

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{317} Rebeggiani (2018) 123-52, esp. 62-3; 123-35; 152-53. Rebeggiani, however, does not discuss Hercules in the \textit{Achilleid}.
\item \textsuperscript{318} For the Ovidian version of the story, see \textit{Ars Am.2.215-22}; \textit{Fast.2.303-58}; \textit{Her.9.55-118}, where Deianeira complains about Hercules’ love affairs, and attempts to blemish Hercules’ heroism by recalling the \textit{recens crimine} of his transvestism with Omphale.
\item \textsuperscript{319} Most importantly, see Cyrino (1998) 207-41; Uccellini (2012) 193-96; McAuley (2010) 44; McAuley (2016) 360-61; Fantuzzi (2012) 76 n.150.
\item \textsuperscript{320} Parkes (2009a) 476-78.
\item \textsuperscript{321} Ripoll (1998) 87.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The effective aposiopesis of *sed taceo* implies, momentarily, that in Chiron’s eyes, the boy has shown certain aptitudes that either ‘match up or surpass the hero [Hercules] in some sense’. Chiron falls silent, and one could advance two possible interpretations of this. It could be because, as Heslin and Uccellini argue, Achilles has ‘suddenly come into view’, therefore abruptly interfering with Chiron’s speech: the centaur’s pause thus comes from an external interruption. But Chiron’s laconism could also be intentionally aposoieic in another sense of the stylistic figure, simulating ‘the impression of a speaker so overwhelmed by emotions that he or she is unable to continue speaking’. In other words, Chiron is unwilling to continue the explanation of how exactly Achilles reminds him of Hercules and Theseus, and that interruption of *sed taceo* originates internally.

Chiron’s words also recall a passage in the *Aeneid* where remembering and speaking of Hercules and Theseus is not necessary. During Aeneas’ prayer to the Sybil, Aeneas attempts to make a better case of himself by disregarding other heroes who have descended into the Underworld, Orpheus, Pollux, Theseus and Heracles (*Aen*.6.122-23: *quid Thesea, magnum / quid memorem Alciden? Et mi genus ab Iove summo*). The same way in which Aeneas does not wish to dwell on Theseus or Hercules, but rather on himself, the narrator of the *Achilleid* halts Chiron’s speech to bring back the focus on Achilles.

Whether halted by Achilles’ arrival or by his own reticence, however, the suspension of Chiron’s sentence invites the audience to speculate on ways to...

---

322 Parkes (2009b) argues that the *Achilleid* and the *Thebaid* position the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus as a recent event, mirroring Statius’ own position as successor of Valerius. For the fashioning of the Argive expedition as an Argonautic endeavour, see Parkes (2014) 778-86. Nevertheless, the use of *olim*, which usually analeptically indicates a past event, tends to refer to remote past (*TLL 9.2.556.80*).


324 On silence in Latin literature, see Bardon (1943); Laird (1999) 183-205 on Virgil. For Greek literature, see Montiglio (2000).

325 Although the reader does not know this, cf. Heslin (2005) 182 n.65; Uccellini (2012) 128. On the latter, see Briguglio’s (forthcoming) on silence and aposiopesis in Statius as markers of programmatic *loci*. By using the comparison with a young Hercules, here we could have at play another Herculean *exemplum* that makes us think of Domitian: as Rebeggiani (2018) 132 argues, in iconography Domitian is repeatedly associated as a *young* Hercules.

326 ER under ‘aposiopesis’.

327 The mention of Jupiter being an ancestor of Aeneas is quite striking, and contextually relevant in the *Achilleid*, as we will see below.
complete his thought. The centaur's unwilling or willing secrecy encourages a comparison between Achilles and Hercules (as well as Theseus).\textsuperscript{328} The scholarship has accepted the challenge, and has suggested what could have been left unsaid by Chiron: ‘perhaps the centaur was going to compare Achilles to the Argonauts and to say that he is an even greater hero’, Kozák argues, or ‘perhaps he bears similar youthful good looks or strength’ to those of Hercules, Parkes reflects.\textsuperscript{329}

I propose, instead, to look back to the description of Achilles’ attitudes and actively look for traces that bear resemblance to the description of Hercules in the tradition. I argue that there is a cluster of equivalences between Hercules and Achilles that finds its apex during the conversation between Thetis and the centaur, which the well-timed aposiopesis urges us to look for. To begin this line of enquiry, I turn my attention to the scrutiny of the passage in question:

\begin{verbatim}
‘Duc, optima, quaeso,
duc, genetrix, humilique deos infringe precatu.
nam superant tua vota modum placandaque multum
invidia est. non addo metum, sed vera fatebor:
nescio quid magnum—nec me patria omina fallunt—
vis festina parat tenuesque supervenit annos.
olim et ferre minas avideque audire solebat
imperia et nostris procul haut discedere ab antris;
nunc illum non Ossa capit, non Pelion ingens
Pharsaliaeve nives. ipsi mihi saepe queruntur
Centauri raptasque domos abstractaque coram
armenta et semet campis fluviisque fugari,
insidiasque et bella parant tumideque minantur.
olim equidem, Argoos pinus cum Thessala reges
hac veheret, iuvenem Alciden et Thesea vidi-
sed taceo.’
\end{verbatim}

(Ach.1.143-58)

\textsuperscript{328} Parkes only concentrates on Hercules, not on Theseus. Kozák (2013) 258-59 sees in the recalling of the Argonautic mythical past an active comparison between the \textit{vis festina} that Achilles has shown in the \textit{Achilleid} (1.148) and the words of Peleus to Chiron in Valerius (Val.Fl.1.267-70: \textit{…tu cetera, Chiron, / da mihi! Te parvus litois et bella loquentem / miretur; sub te puerilia tela magistro / venator ferat et nostrum festinet ad hastiam}). Here, Peleus is pleased Achilles’ premature interest in heroes and their tales, and he orders Chiron to educate Achilles in his own footsteps (which he is doing, Ach.1.41).

\textsuperscript{329} Kozák (2013) 258 and Parkes (2009a) 477.
Thetis’ arrival is marked by her maternal concerns, as she is anxiously looking for her son (*Ach.* 1.126-27: *iamdudum tacito lustrat Thetis omnia visu / nec perpessa moras*). She asks Chiron for Achilles’ whereabouts (*Ach.* 1.127: *ubinam mea pignora, Chiron!*), and theatrically tells him of her nightmares, before devising an excuse to remove Achilles from Chiron’s care. The passage above immediately follows Thetis’ deceitful plans, as Chiron falls for her story and urges the goddess to take her son, there and then, to safety, articulating a hopeful wish for Thetis to ‘break the gods with humble pleas’, though the audience knows that Neptune has already sternly vetoed her begging requests (*Ach.* 1.81).

Chiron is disturbed at Thetis’ entreaty that he hand Achilles over to her, but the centaur has fears of his own. He confesses that he does not wish to add to her worries, but he must speak the truth as well (*Ach.* 1.146: *non addo metum, sed vera fatebor*). Chiron’s attentiveness prompts him to notice that there is something great, unknown to him (*nescio quid magnum*) about Achilles and his precocious strength (*vis festina*), which exceeds the expectations for someone as young as he is now. There is a palpable sense of anticipation here. Telò has argued for this particular line to be a sort of ‘terrified prophecy…which functions as a metaliterary announcement’ of the looming Trojan War; nevertheless, Telò argues for Chiron’s fears to have been produced in response to ‘Thetis’ anxious queries about her son’. Telò’s former argument can be pushed further to highlight the cyclical implications of Chiron’s speech. It echoes a Virgilian moment imbued with prophetic weight that rings to the tragic inevitability and

---

330 Thetis’ state of mind is marked by anxiety.
331 As she believes that Chiron would have not handed over Achilles if she had told him the transvestism trick (*Ach.* 1.141-43). See Rimell (2015) 261 again for Thetis’ quasi-frenzied conflation between her rape and the loss of her son.
332 *Nescio quid* is a standard way of meaning ‘something’, especially something of a strange or remarkable nature. cf. Plautus, *Amph.* 82; *Merc.* 723; Terence, *Andr.* 735; and it is used frequently by Ovid, as we shall shortly see (*Epist.* 12.212; *Met.* 8.467). Kozák (2013) 257-59 sees here a clear reference to *Val.Fl.* 1.267-70, where Peleus orders Chiron to raise Achilles according to the epic code, thus adding a strong interpretation to the debate about the ambiguous line *nec me patria omina fallunt*. Therefore, Kozák proffers one interpretation: what Chiron was going to tell Thetis is the re-telling of the behaviour of baby Achilles at the departure of the Argo, since she was not present at the time.
cyclicality of strife, even during the period of this new Golden Age: there will always be a Troy, and a great Achilles to send to the war (Ecl. 4.35-6: erunt etiam altera bella / atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles).\footnote{The links between Hercules and Achilles are overt with the mention of the Argo (Ecl. 4.34-5: alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae veheret Argo / delectos heroas), see above veheret. See also Ecl. 4.1: Paulo maior canamus and the elevation of the genre. War is a process subjected to endless repetition.} Most importantly, however, the fact that Chiron does not want to ‘add’ to Thetis’ fears (addo, but eventually does) indicates that the centaur’s reservations predate those of the anxia mater. In other words, what he is saying regarding Achilles’ behaviour is not in response to what Thetis has said, but it is rather something that has played on his mind even before the goddess professes her own concerns. The nescio quid magnum might be foreboding the great exploits of Statian Achilles, but it is not, by all means, a straightforwardly positive answer.\footnote{Mason (2013) 20: ‘this great thing [of which Chiron speaks] is not necessarily a good thing’. Bessone (2016) 182-83 takes nescio quid magnum to mean the great epic future that awaits Achilles, who is almost ready.}

The periphrasis has been the object of Heslin’s discussion in relation to its heightened programmatic importance: in fact, it harks back to the words of the ‘critic’ Propertius on the Aeneid (2.34.65-6: cedite, Romani scriptores, cedite, Grai! nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade).\footnote{Heslin (2005) 296, taking on Koster’s suggestion (1979) 201 n.34 that Achilles is growing up with the strength (vis) that will make him the greatest hero of Greek epic (i.e. the Iliad); Uccellini (2012) 133-34.} When juxtaposed with the Achilleid, Heslin sees a metaliterary and referential allusion to both Propertius and Statius himself here, as the author is discussing a ‘great’ (magnum) unexplainable, intangible je ne sais quoi to Achilles, though carefully avoiding the Propertian utterance of a ‘greater’ epic poem (maius).\footnote{Interestingly, in Silv. 2.7.79-80 (following Van Dam’s edition), Statius talks of Lucan as something ‘greater’ (quid? maius loquar: ipsa te Latinis / Aeneis venerabitur canentem) \footnote{Heslin (2005) 296. He associates Statius’ statement of intent here with the sphragis of the Thebaid, cf.fn.31 and 92.} Even though this ‘Iliadic’ part never comes, again, fulfilling the promise of retelling the plurality of Achillean stories not covered in the Homeric epics (sed plura vacant).} Achilles is training for the Trojan War, meaning that the hero is preparing for the Iliad itself, yet his story will not be superior to the Homeric poem.\footnote{Heslin (2005) 296. He associates Statius’ statement of intent here with the sphragis of the Thebaid, cf.fn.31 and 92.} Thus nescio quid magnum becomes a marker for the epic to come on Achilles’ life, as Statius refers to his own poem as ‘great’.\footnote{Even though this ‘Iliadic’ part never comes, again, fulfilling the promise of retelling the plurality of Achillean stories not covered in the Homeric epics (sed plura vacant).}
Referencing Propertius, Barchiesi reflected on Ovid’s heavily allusive Heroides 12, when a poetically self-aware Medea abandons the epistle preparing herself for what is to come, as in the last line she talks about her mind deliberating over something greater (Her.12.212: nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!). The heroine follows her Euripidean counterpart, where Medea starts the play contriving ‘something new’ (Med.37: δέδοικα δ᾽ αὐτήν μή τι βουλεύσῃ νέον), yet, she also stands for the author, who is reserving these ‘greater’ things for a loftier genre than the epistolary one, tragedy. What is to come is Ovid’s own lost tragedy, the Medea, so this is a clever game of self-referentiality. Statius is therefore adopting an Ovidian mantle, as he refers to his new composition as ‘something or other’, which is an adequate description of the state of his last poem.

Barchiesi notes that nescio quid…maius, with the exception of Propertius’ comment, does not appear elsewhere in Augustan poetry. Therefore, such a close adaptation in the Achilleid ought to be carefully handled, especially since it signifies an Ovidian ‘buzz-word’. Furthermore, Heslin’s interpretation of the sentence as a firm statement of poetic intent stands, but the considerable ‘baggage’ of generic diversity and of tragedy’s intrusion into elegy and epic that is made available through Medea’s suggestion (and certainly the issues that are raised with it) must not be overlooked. Barchiesi’s own analysis pinpoints the deeper inferences of such a sharp literary consciousness on the part of a text’s character: the literary figure becomes fractured, behaviourally fluid and different according to which genre he or she features in.

---

341 Barchiesi (1993) 343 n.15 discusses tragedy as the only adequate genre for Medea’s actions. See 344 for a list of Roman tragic characters, like Atreus and Seneca’s Oedipus, ‘destined’ to carry out greater deeds.
342 Heslin (2005) 296: ‘it is not going to be ‘greater than the Iliad’ (maius…Iliade) perhaps, but ‘something great’ (nescio quid magnum) nonetheless’.
344 Its rarity follows into post-Augustan literature, see Hinds (1993) 25. See the introduction of Eumolpos in Petronius’ Satyricon (83.7: intravit pinacothecam senex canus, exercitati vultus et qui videretur nescio quid magnum promittere), also in Martial, Ep.3.72.2 (nescio quod magnum suspicor esse nefus), but the mss. tradition is shaky (quod in β, quid T γ; magnum T β; maius γ). The context is different as Martial discusses an elderly woman with an elongated clitoris.
345 Achilles’ own diverse characterisation in epic and elegy has been ably analysed by Basile (2014) 195-214.
Chiron’s eyes, is described as something ‘great’, and in fact *magnus* is used as a word to denote Achilles’ own nature (*Ach*.1.276-77: *et cruda exordia magnae / indolis; Ach*.1.513: *si magnum Danais pro te dependis Achillem*). It also seems to encompass the whole scope of Statius’ narrative, as *nescio quid magnum* seems to recall the very first word of the poem (*magnanimum*), as well as the proem’s last line (*Ach*.1.19: *molimur magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles*).

At first sight, Achilles is *magnus*, and so is his story as told in the *Achilleid*, but there are aspects to his characterisation that seem to indicate that there is more to be said about him, as the aposiopesis and the hint to tragedy appear to suggest. Chiron’s words can be interpreted as a warning to the audience of something at play here. One interpretation for making sense of this periphrasis can be brought forward through Ovid. The locution, in fact, seems to be foreshadowing Achilles’ own death. In the *Metamorphoses*, the end of Achilles’ life can be read through the juxtaposition of the *magnus/parvus* theme, as Papaioannou has argued. Ovid’s reflection on the hero’s death in book 12 of his *magnum opus* has a bittersweet tinge: Achilles is now dust, and although once a great hero, his remains would scarcely fill a small funerary urn (*Met*.12.615-16: *iam cinis est, et de tam magnno restat Achille / nescioquid, parvam quod non bene compleat urnam*). Though not grammatically linked, the closeness of *nescioquid* with *parvam*, whilst referring to an again *magnus* Achilles, appears to have been reworked in the *Achilleid*. Ovid provides Statian Achilles with a powerful consideration on his profound dichotomies, as the man stands between his enormous heroic stature and the tragic inevitability of death, the lingering symbol of a mortal man. Achilles might be perceived as *magnus*, and possesses an inexplicable, great quality to him, yet his death will eventually re-size the grandeur of the hero, though his *fama* will be

---

347 As well as often employed more literally to describe his considerable size, high status and renown (*Ach*.1.604; 1.743-44). Also found elsewhere in Latin poetry (*Ecl*.4.35-6, as above; *G*.3.91: *Martis equi biuges et magni currus Achilli; Aen*.11.438: *vel magnum praestet Achillem; Ars Am*. 2.711: *Fecit et in capta Lynneside magnus Achilles*). Cf. Papaioannou (2007) 148 n.314 for the Ovidian usage of this epithet.

348 Categorically denied in Valerius’ *Argonautica*: Thetis grieves because her son will not be *maior* (*Val*.Fl.1.133: *nec Iovem maiorem nasci suspirat Achillem*).


350 Following Papaioannou’s text (20017) 147, who in turn follows Tarrant’s OCT edition. The Loeb reads: ‘[…] *nescio quid parvum, quod non bene compleat urnam […]*. [95]
everlasting. The usage of *nescio quid magnum* in the *Achilleid* thus proleptically signals not only his exploits at Troy, but the hero’s own demise.

Chiron might not be able to describe Achilles’ impalpable ‘something’, but is something formidable (*non addo metum, sed…*), and the association that he makes with Hercules and Theseus at the end of this passage is not devoid of issues. In Seneca’s *Phaedra*, in fact, it is Theseus who professes scepticism towards concealment and silence, as the nurse hides from the hero the reason for Phaedra’s mourning: ‘Theseus’ words, highlighting his naivety, menacingly foreshadow the tragedy (*magnum…nescioquid*) that will ensue (*Phaed.858: perplexa magnum verba nescioquid tegunt*). Similarly, Chiron’s words disguise, yet simultaneously betray, the centaur’s uneasy feeling about his mentee. The centaur’s fears, in fact, seem to gravitate toward a more tragic interpretation of Achilles’ growth, foreshadowing both an engagement with tragedy and with the hero’s own death.351

### 3.4 Crush Zeus! Freeze Zeus! Melt Zeus! A Herculean Achilles

Building on this tragic tinge, in this section I draw out previously unnoticed elements to the representation of Achilles through the engagement with Hercules’ characterisation in Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*. It is worth digressing briefly on two important matters. First, it is paramount to reiterate the interaction between the *Achilleid* and Senecan drama in more detail.352 In the introduction, I touched upon Fantham’s work that brings Seneca to view: Thetis and Achilles mirror Andromache and Astyanax in the *Troades*, revealing profound maternal anxieties that cross factions and generic boundaries.353 Despite the deterrent effect that generic conventions might have had on the scholars tackling the *Achilleid*, there are numerous verbal echoes, similar formulations in the language, thematic

---

351 Aposiopesis, then, can be seen as a metageneric marker.
352 The reading of Senecan drama against the works of Statius is an undertaking that has gained a lot of traction in recent years. See Sacerdoti (2008) 281-89; Setaioli (2015) 262. Augoustakis’ contribution (2015) 377-92 shows how the grotesque depictions in Seneca’s *Oedipus* and *Thyestes* have influenced the Tydean episode in the *Thebaid*. Parkes’ contribution (forthcoming) on the relationship between the *Hercules Furens* and the *Thebaid* (as well as other Senecan drama) will be a welcome addition.
allusions and instances of borrowing an image that link the Senecan world to this
poem. Rimell reflects that ‘there has been little discussion of Statius as a post-
Senecan poet’, and this is where I want to position the present section. With
these considerations in mind, I intend to see how Achilles’ aptitudes ring to the
Senecan representation of a maddened Hercules. Moreover, I explore the results
for this engagement in the construction of the Statian Achilles.

Secondly, a disclaimer concerning the main influence for Seneca’s tragedy,
Euripides’ Herakles Mainomenos, and why my discussion concentrates on the
Roman drama instead. Seneca innovates and departs from Euripides in a central
aspect of the tragedy: the perpetrators of Heracles’ madness in Euripides, Iris and
Lyssa, fuelled by Hera, are removed. This results in a more profoundly
psychological and ambivalent drama in Seneca, as Hercules’ descent into madness
comes gradually from within his own mind. This particular interpretation is
contextually similar to the description of Achilles in the Statian poem, precisely
because we are in a context of nurture where Achilles’ real nature and potential,
which distress Chiron, are being showcased. Seneca’s Hercules is a figure of
‘superhuman power who is betrayed by that very characteristic, by the grandiose
nature of his thinking and his modus vitae’, and, as I argue, we can apply the same
statement to Achilles’ representation of potential transgression. In other words,
both Hercules and Achilles have and reveal the seeds of epic excess that, in
Hercules’ case, result in tragedy, and in Achilles’ case, portend notions of
dangerous transgression following in Hercules’ footsteps.

---

354 Uccellini (2012) 285; Note Fantham’s remark (1979) 481: ‘Senecan tragic diction can be
 glimpsed in so many places in the Achilleis’, but also Rimell (2015) 253: ‘Statius’ stunning sample
 owe[s]…to the parallel Neronian pyrotechnics of Senecan tragedy’, see fn.51.
356 Heracles is also marginally present in another Euripidean drama, the Heracleidae.
358 This is the reading of, among others, Galinsky (1972), Shelton (1978) and Fitch (1987). For
these two different streams of interpretation on the agency of the madness, see Papadopoulu (2004)
359 Cf. Rimell’s reflection (2015) 259 with n.72 on the use of premere in the poem, which, deployed
six times in the poem, ‘seems to contain all this poem’s Lucanian, Senecan, about-to-erupt
potential’. Again, I see this potential as already present in the poem.
Returning to the *Achilleid*, Chiron the narrator discusses Achilles’ proto-warrior tendencies, and he employs the imagery of the hero in the making as out-growing his surroundings (*Ach.* 1.151-52: *nunc illum non Ossa capit, non Pelion ingens / Thessaliaeve nives*). Achilles engages in violent behaviour against the rest of the centaurs dwelling on Mt. Pelion; Chiron’s brothers have approached him in order to voice their disapproval of Achilles’ conduct. The young boy has plundered their homes and raided their cattle (*Ach.* 1.153-54: *raptasque domos abstractaque coram / armenta*), a ‘dangerous overstepping of boundaries’, and a bestial conduct that recalls the Hercules/Cacus episode in Virgil (*Aen.* 8.263: *abstractae boves*). Achilles is not playing the role of the Virgilian Hercules as the civiliser, but rather, he is cast as the monstrous *semihomo*, Cacus, who engages in semi-feral behaviour (*Aen.* 8.194: *semihominis Caci facies*). Achilles carries out his pillage openly (*coram*), suggesting that he has become much more daring in his actions. The Centaurs in response prepare ambushes and wars against the child (*Ach.* 1.155: *insidiasque et bella parant tumideque minantur*). The vocabulary here is very violent, as it recalls the image of Thetis ready to wage war against the Trojan ships carrying Paris and Helen (*Ach.* 1.96: *ratibus bellare parabat / Iliacis*), as well as the even more threatening image of Agamemnon and Menelaus preparing for war (*Ach.* 1.467: *Sed quamquam et gemini pariter sua bella capessant / Atridae*).

With these more-than-precocious elements to his figure, Achilles is also described by Chiron in epic terms: the hero is portrayed as exceedingly large for

---

361 See Dilde (1954) 96 for a discussion of the variant reading *Thessaliaeve*. I too retain the reading of P.
363 See also the simile with the Amazons (*Ach.* 1.758-60: *subeunt, quales Maetide ripa, / cum Scythicas rapiuere domos et capta Getarum / moenia, sepesis et pulantur Amazones armis*). These Amazons, and Achilles in particular, are returning from raiding (raipuer) Scythian houses and seizing (captare) the forts of the Getae. This would aid Hinds’ hunch (2000), (2016) that the simile of the Amazons – deemed unnecessary and out of place – has been deployed because Achilles’ presence among the girls has tainted their collective femininity. The link to Cacus also adds to the more general discussion of the Cacus episode, above with Heslin (2005) 190-91.
364 Thus, these monstrous elements also tie in with the discussion of Achilles’ animalistic behaviour. The use of *abstraho* for stolen cattle occurs only in Virgil and Statius, so the latter is drawing from the Virgilian account.
365 Note the subsequent change that retroactively endows this moment with a much more serious tone: during Achilles’ seduction of Deidamia, we witness *new* ‘traps’ being set, traps of love rather than martial ones (*Ach.* 1.567-68: *blandeque novas nil tale timenti / admovet insidias*).
366 For *tumidique*, the manuscripts differ, see Uccellini (2012) 136-37.
his own surroundings. Mt. Pelion is *inges* itself, but this implies that Achilles is physically greater than a mountain, recurring to the common trope of epic hyperbole, as the spatial environment becomes too tight for the character.\textsuperscript{367} The trope of a hero who cannot be contained within the settings provided is famously employed to describe Apollo’s prophetic words about Ascanius’ future, where the god’s theophanic appearance foretells the greatness of Aeneas’ son, who will not be contained by Troy (*Aen.*9.644: *necte Troia capi*).\textsuperscript{368} We can perhaps extend this overstepping of boundaries to a more metapoetic sphere: Achilles cannot be contained within the boundaries of Thessaly, with his potential being thwarted by his surroundings, just as the poetic boundaries of the *Achilleid* are becoming too small to restrain the hero.\textsuperscript{369}

Numerous examples of something or someone who cannot be limited using the same phrasing occur frequently in Senecan tragedy: Andromache’s lament (*Tro.*992: *inclusa tellus non capi tumulos meos*), Eurybates’ account of the storm that spared Agamemnon (*Ag.*489: *aestum revolvit. non capi sese mare*), or Thyestes’ reflection on power (*Thy.*444: *Non capi regnum duos*).\textsuperscript{370} In the *Hercules Furens* we have another incidence of *non…capit*, which, as I propose, sheds some light on Chiron’s words on the dangerous display of Achilles’ hurried progress.\textsuperscript{371} This is the passage in question:

\[\text{\ldots}\]

\textsuperscript{367} The quotation of *non capi* applied to a character, or a character’s emotions, is for instance found in Ovid (*Met.*6.609-10: *ardet et iram / non capi ipsa suam Procne fletumque sororis*). Procne is inflamed by an uncontainable anger, and her subsequent vengeance against Tereus is aptly exemplified with *magnum quodcumque paravi; / quid sit, adhuc dubito*. (*Met.*6.618-19, is it *magnum* because it is already tragedy?). See Schiesaro (2003) 81-3 and Filippi (2015) 209-10 for this Ovidian story as the fuel for the cannibalistic elements in Seneca’s *Thyestes* (267-70), and Atreus’ characterisation.

\textsuperscript{368} Dilke (1954) 96; Barchiesi (1996) 48 talks of Achilles as a potential ‘superhuman’, Uccellini (2012) 135 also mentions Alexander in Plutarch (*Vit. Alex.*6.5). I would also be inclined to see the description of Antony’s hubris (*Vit. Auth.*24-25), cf.fn.271. Uccellini highlights that the sense in Statius, in comparison to Virgil’s usage of the image, is reductive, as Ossa is not enough for Achilles because only Troy will be the ‘right size’ for him. Ascanius is still a boy, so it is an apt image for Achilles’ own situation.

\textsuperscript{369} On shrinking landscapes and spatial paradoxes in the *Achilleid* linked to poetic anxiety and Statius’ all-too familiar sense of belatedness, see Rimell’s excellent chapter (2015) 252-70.

\textsuperscript{370} Andromache’s lament is particularly apt for the *Achilleid*, as Chiron’s words of Achilles’ erupting potential will end with his death, and the endless suffering of his mother (cf. *H.O.*266: *Parem dolori: non capi pectus minas*).

\textsuperscript{371} Independently, Chaudhuri (2014) 133 n.49 touches upon the link between the *Achilleid* and the *Hercules Furens* through the use of this sentence, but there is no discussion proffered.
Similarly to the Achillean context, the phrase *non capite terra Herculem* means that the terrestrial world ‘ist nicht gross genug’ for the hero.\(^{372}\) There is a nefarious twist to this imagery: Hercules’ size, as Ripoll argues, is usually described as mighty when meant to preconfigure his rightful apotheosis, whereas here his ascent to the heavens is designed as a Gigantomachy.\(^{373}\) Throughout the second half of the *Hercules Furens*, after Lycus’ slaughter, Hercules gradually descends into madness and the delusions of grandeur, originating from within his psyche, further fuel his claim to godhead (*Her. Fur.*927-28: *Ipse concipiam preces / Iove meque dignas*).\(^{374}\) In the Senecan tragedy, Hercules has only entered the tragic stage sixty-five lines before the passage above: the hero is now showing clear signs of the frenzy that will destroy him and his family, as Amphitryon notices (*Her.Fur.*953-54: *Quod subitum hoc malum est? quo, nate, vultus huc et huc acres refers / acieque falsum turbida caelum vides*?). Hercules replies to his mortal father with the accustomed image of Jupiter’s promise of immortality (*Her.Fur.*959: *astra promittit pater*), a line

---


that clearly shows Hercules voicing his desire to become a god himself, as he believes he deserves.\footnote{I will return to the issue of immortality in the second half of the chapter.}

In his psychosis, Hercules envisions himself as the leader of an uprising against his father, a new Titanomachy that will challenge the cosmic order (\textit{vincla Saturno exuam / contraque patris impii regnum impotens avum resolvam. bella Titanes parent / me duce furentes}).\footnote{Or Gigantomachy, as we have the \textit{Gigantes…pestiferi at Her.Fur.976. The two cosmic wars were often conflated by Roman poets, see Hardie (1986) 95. The \textit{bella…parent} might recall and invert the \textit{bella…parant} (Ach.1.155). In the \textit{Achilleid}, the Centaurs are the ones ‘waging wars’ against a formidable Achilles, placing him in the role of Hercules the monster.} Hercules’ megalomania culminates in an explicit reference to Gigantomachy.\footnote{See more broadly Hardie (1983).} He firstly threatens to carry rocks and whole forests (in an exaggeration of the Ovidian centaur Demoleon at \textit{Met}.12.356, who only tries to uproot a pine-tree), besides grasping with his right hand entire ridges packed with Centaurs (\textit{saxa cum silvis feram / rapiamque dextra plena Centauris iuga}). The use of \textit{rapiam} recalls the \textit{raptas…domos} that Achilles has plundered: Hercules sees himself as pushing physical boundaries, as the hero’s gigantic arm is able to seize at once the mountainous hills: Achilles’ situation is analogous, as he appeared more \textit{ingens} than the mountain itself.\footnote{In the \textit{Achilleid}, these hills are those of Thessaly, which are made of Mt. Pelion and Mt. Ossa, the standard dwelling of the Centaurs.} Moreover, the climax of the passage occurs when Hercules imagines waging an attack against Chiron, as he threatens to pave his way to Mt. Olympus by piling up Ossa on Pelion (\textit{videat sub Ossa Pelion Chiron suum}). The mention of Chiron further connects the two texts: Chiron is worried because the threats of a maddened Hercules are coming true and materialising in this young Achilles. With the mention of Chiron in his imagined Gigantomachy, Seneca’s Hercules departs from his Euripidean counterpart, as the centaur does not feature in Euripides’ \textit{Herakles}. According to some versions of the myth, Hercules, like Achilles, had been Chiron’s pupil, and had undergone a similar training.\footnote{\textit{Fast}.5.379-414. Papaioannou (2007) 134 discusses the nature of these two students of Chiron in Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} 13, and how paradoxical is that they have become more like the uncivilised Centaurs rather than the tame Chiron. Boyd (2001) 67-80 discusses the triad as presented in Ovid’s \textit{Fasti} 5, where during Achilles’ training, Hercules kills Chiron. Could this be a potential outcome hinted in the \textit{Achilleid}, hence Chiron’s fears?} In Seneca’s tragedy, the Centaur has become
a hypothetical witness to Hercules’ madness. The passage acquires an even darker layer, as another surrogate father is both the spectator and the receiver of his theomachy.

Now, the Gigantomachic associations in the passage of the *Achilleid* (*Ach*.1.151-52: *nunc illum non Ossa capit, non Pelion ingens / Pharsaliaeae nives*) have not gone unnoticed.380 Though devoid of an explicit mention of the threat of a cosmic war, the Thessalian landscape that Chiron describes, with the allusion to Mt. Ossa and Mt. Pelion in such close proximity, rings back to the infamous climbing of the Giants.381 Not only is Achilles hyperbolically larger than Thessaly, but his behaviour worryingly threatens to overturn Jupiter’s rule.382 It is difficult not to evoke, for instance, the frightening image of the Mezentian Capaneus scaling the walls of Thebes in the *Thebaid*, as he is compared to the Giants beginning their ascent to Olympus (*Theb*.10.851-52: *nec adhuc inmane veniret / Pelion et trepidum iam tangeret Ossa Tonantem*).383

In the *Achilleid*, just as Amphitryon, Hercules’ surrogate father, is helplessly watching his son yield to frenzy, as well as Chiron, Achilles’ mentor, and surrogate father himself, appears to be alarmed for a valid reason: the actions of Achilles during his training hark back to the threats once uttered by his heroic model in Seneca. Furthermore, we know that Achilles is familiar with Hercules’ story, as the first song he sings in Chiron’s cave is the tale of Juno’s persecution of Hercules (*Ach*.1.189-90: *quot tumidae superarit iussa novercae / Amphityoniades*). This is why Chiron begins his story to Thetis with a concurrent hint to epic and tragedy (*nescio quid magnum*), and the incipit of his tale is the image of an Achilles

---

380 Barchiesi (1996) 47-8 (cf.fn.361): ‘l’accostamento Ossa e Pelio suggerisce quale potrebbe essere la mossa successiva: Ossa + Pelio + un terzo monte famoso, ed ecco pronta una scala verso il cielo...’; Barchiesi also detects the hints of Civil War encapsulated within *Pharsaliaeae nives*, and on this line see Uccellini (2012) 134-35.


382 Chaudhuri (2014) 133: ‘the Gigantomachic associations of Ossa and Pelion, however, clearly mark Achilles as being in the mound of Hercules [in the *Hercules Furens*] rather than Iulus, all the more so given the theomachic note’.

383 He is the *superum contemptor* (*Theb*.3.602). For the relationship between Caneus and Mezentius, see Chaudhuri (2014) 260. For Caneus, see Pontiggia (2018) 165-93.
who was easy enough to ‘tame’ (olim et ferre minas avideque audire solebat / imperia et nostris procul haut discedere ab antris). Now (nunc illum…) Achilles has become uncontainable, and his once playful games are gradually becoming more and more dangerous. Yet this is not the behaviour that reminds Chiron of a young Hercules and a young Theseus on their way to Colchis (olim equidem, Argoos pinus…), as olim recalls both the more positive vision of the beginning of the Argonautic journey and Achilles’ more governable nature. We would instead expect a second nunc, proleptically referring to a tragic story that revolves around a more mature Hercules and a more mature Theseus: the Hercules Furens. Instead, we are presented with the perfectly timed aposiopesis of sed taceo. Achilles’ epiphany on stage seals the fulfilment of Statius’ engagement with tragedy.384 But it is no coincidence that, when the hero arrives, he appears to be made ‘greater’ by the sweat and dust of his missions (Ach.1.159: ille aderat multo sudore et pulvere maior), and Thetis is transfixed by fear (Ach.1.158: figit gelidus Nereida pallor).385 Maior programmatically links Achilles to another dangerous theomach too: moments before Capaneus’ own demise, Statius the poet interjects and pleads for a ‘greater madness’ to recount Capaneus’ attack on the gods (Theb.10.829-30: non mihi iam solito vatum de more canendum; / maior ab Aoniis poscenda amentia lucis).386 Thus, Chiron’s anxious, tragic worries (nescio quid magnum) about his surrogate son materialise right in front of the audience’s eyes, and they portend a greater, maior threat.388

384 Chiron’s worries can be interpreted as a warning of potential tyrannical behaviour.
385 This reading is in harmony with Briguglio’s (forthcoming), where he sees silence and aposiopeses as markers of generic interactions and literary memory. But whereas Briguglio seems to argue that silence hinders this cross-generic discourse, ‘where these contaminations would not be suitable’, I see them as signals to the reader that this dialogue is already at play in the passage.
386 Of course, Achilles as a threat is quickly stifled by the mention of his ephebic appearance (Ach.1.161-66). Nevertheless, the embryonic potential of Achilles is there in the poem, and is a cause for collective anxiety, as we focalise his arrival though both Thetis and Chiron.
387 Parkes (2015) 475. Just as he had done before, on the second day of battle (Theb.8.373-74: sed iam bella vocant: alias nova suggere vires, / Calliope, maiorque chelyn mihi tendat Apollo). Note Hypsipyle’s ‘greater appearance’ as a tragic epic narrator (Theb.5.40-1: maiorque et honora videri / parque operi tanto) and Walter (2014) 223.
388 For Statius’ careful stage management of Achilles’ arrival, see Heslin (2005) 182. Rimell (2015) 255 notices the ‘spatial genesis of manhood’, how Achilles has turned into a hero ‘within a reduced frame’, cf.fn.359. The metapoetic importance of maior is left unexamined, cf.fn.83.
3.5 δαίμονι ἵσος? A Jovian simile

Achilles’ characterisation during his training with Chiron echoes Hercules at the climax of his madness in Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*: reverberations of transgressive Gigantomachy and epic excess link both characters, thus casting a worrying cloud over Achilles’ seemingly innocuous rearing in Thessaly. Through the employment of elements from the depiction of a megalomaniac and maddened Hercules, Achilles’ characterisation exhibits and highlights the perils that are an integral part of the epic hero. In the second part of this chapter, I begin with an analysis of a Jupiter simile in the *Achilleid*, to see how, on the surface, Achilles is actually configured as a hero destined to fulfil a Jovian role. This is problematised, however, when we look at the different focalizers through whom we see Achilles’ characterisation. I then unearth similarities between the figure of Jupiter between the *Hercules Furens* and the *Achilleid*. Achilles, by striding under a Herculean shadow, is again presented in a paradoxical manner, not only as a hero who ‘longs to be Jupiter’s son and successor’, but effectively as someone who has the nascent potential to embody a monstrous usurper. This extreme paradox creates, again, the figure of an Achilles who is torn between (denied) divinity and theomachy, drawing attention once more to a dangerous and tragic element to his character. This will be an attempt to answer, from another perspective, Konstan’s question about Achilles’ depiction from the incipit of the poem: ‘why note, however obscurely, that the hero of the epic was denied access to Olympus and immortality?’.

As we have seen, Hercules and Achilles share common traits: both have been reared by the centaur Chiron, they have surrogate and mortal fathers, and they are allocated numerous parallels in the previous literary tradition. Most importantly, they share a half-mortal, half-divine status, which, however, ultimately sets them apart. Whilst Hercules can attain immortality through his

---

391 Konstan (2016) 379-81 argues that Statius is denying Achilles immortality as an act of anti-propaganda against Domitian, who will be denied immortality himself. On the figure of Domitian lurking behind the use of Jupiter *Tonans*, see also Myers (2015b) 187-88 (cf.fn.406 below).
392 On the similarities between Hercules and Achilles in the *Iliad*, see Papaioannou (2007) 132-33 and Rabel (1997) 163-69, they are the only Iliadic heroes that are called θυμολέοντες.
divine father, Jupiter, as his actual son, Achilles is precluded from a divine status because of Thetis' marriage with a mortal, Peleus. This idea evokes the incipit of the Achilleid: I have reflected that the first three lines of the highly refined proem refer to Achilles’ complex network of familial relationships, whereby Achilles is portrayed as Jupiter’s theoretical progeny. It is worth returning to these lines:

Magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti
progeniem et patrio vetitam succedere caelo,
diva, refer.

(Ach.1.1-3)

The great-souled grandson of Aeacus is referred to as the ‘feared offspring’: feared, that is, by Jupiter.\footnote{Penwill’s translation (2013) 43.} Tonanti is tricky: Konstan renders the phrase in its predicative sense, ‘feared as [i.e. were he to be] a child of Jupiter’.\footnote{Konstan (2016) 379.} The same ‘contrary to fact proposition’, which result in a ‘falsa apoteosi’, also occurs in the following line with patrio vetitam succedere caelo: the so-called ‘paternal’ heavens are in fact those of Jupiter, had Thetis not married a mortal and had Achilles truly been the son of Jupiter.\footnote{Konstan (2016) 380.} The ambiguity of these lines even prompt slippages in translation, such as Heslin’s, which renders it with the genitive: ‘goddess, tell of great-hearted Aeacides and offspring feared of the Thunderer’.\footnote{Uccellini (2012) 31; Heslin (2016) 92, which contrasts his previous translation: ‘Goddess, consider Achilles, great-hearted son of Aeacus, the offspring who was feared by Jupiter the Thunderer’.} These lines are an explicit reference to the prophecy that aligns Achilles’ birth with a threat to his paternal figure. And if Thetis’ son had been born by Jupiter (or Neptune, as we shall see), Achilles would have eventually posed a threat to the cosmic order, as he would have become greater than his father.\footnote{Ovid’s Proteus formulates this prophecy at Met.11.216-27. Themis is the prophetic agent in Pindar (Isthm.8), cf. fn.104. Achilles is similar to Athena, swallowed whole by Zeus for a similar reason (Theog.866-900). Achilles’ mortal father, and Athena’s female birth are, in Heslin’s words, the ‘price of cosmic stability’ (2005) 159. For the prophecy’s tradition, cf. McAuley (2016) 351 n.2.} Thetis thus marries Peleus. In the first lines of the poem, however, Achilles’ own mortal status undercuts his presentation, and it foreshadows his immortality \textit{and} his death.\footnote{Heslin (2005) 86.} Mortality and
immortality are presented simultaneously; moreover, just as in Hercules’ own case, the proem of the Achilleid also offers a child with two fathers, a divine one, Jupiter, and a mortal one, Peleus.

But this is not the only paradoxical dichotomy present in the first line of the poem. The strong Homeric, Virgilian and Ovidian epicizing flavours of the adjective that begins the composition, magnanimus, are undeniable (Aen.1.260: magnanimum Aenean; Met.13.299: magnanimo…Achilli). Nevertheless, the hints of Gigantomachy creeping beneath the surface do not go unnoticed by Barchiesi, who reads here ‘accordi da Gigantomachia’, as Achilles would have been a threat to Jupiter’s rule. These clues of a potential Gigantomachy are intrinsically related to a threat to the cosmic command, whereby two competing factions are created: Olympian gods versus monstrous Giants. Even more specifically, it is the ‘primeval struggle of giants versus Jupiter’. The presentation of Achilles as a threat to Jupiter’s rule then complicates matters. Furthermore, I here propose to elicit further these Gigantomachic elements in the use of magnanimus. A favourite adjective of Statius – deployed eighteen times in the Thebaid alone – is used to designate heroism, but also to denote transgressive and excessive figures, such as Tydeus, a problematic character who fluctuates between man and beast (Theb.2.564; 4.112; 6.827; Ach.1.733), and Capaneus, the theomach par excellence (Theb.9.547; 11.1). Boundaries between noble and dangerous heroism are muddled again, and Achilles’ magnanimity bears echoes of transgression and heroic excess. Moreover, magnanimum is placed in direct opposition to Tonanti, which closes the line. Jupiter’s imposing presence is signalled by the god’s ultra-

---

400 Barchiesi (1996) 47.
403 For the relationship between Gigantomachy and poetics in the Thebaid, see Lovatt (2005) 115-39.
404 See Vessey (1973) 332.
405 See Gervais (2015) 62 n.24 for the tension between ‘hero and monster’ intrinsic to Tydeus’ characterisation. The association of magnanimum with a character that exhibits theomachic elements could be a Virgilian reworking, bearing in mind Mezentius’ depiction on this, see Lovatt (2005) 137, n.16 and fn.31.
epic epithet, *Tonans*, elevating the tone to reflect on the god’s most solemn representations: Zeus ὑψηβρεμέτης. Méheust duly emphasises that this epithet ‘rappelle la victorie de Jupiter sur le Géants’: we are then faced with a *magnanimus* Achilles who is denied immortality, who shows early signs of heroic immoderation, and whose status as a potential Giant-like figure is identified in contrast with that of Jupiter *Tonans*, whose task is the annihilation of these creatures.

The representation of Achilles as an nearly still-active threat to Jupiter clashes with a simile where he is associated to the king of the gods (*Ach. 1.484-90*). This simile has not received scholarly attention, despite its importance in the narrative: the direct correlation between a hero and Jupiter far exceeds the conventional norms of similes. Comparisons of heroes to gods and the adoption of godlike heroic paradigms is standard practice, but an equation with Jupiter is striking and almost unparalleled. Only at the end of the *Thebaid*, after the Olympian divine apparatus abandons the battlefield, Theseus is likened to Jupiter, where the hero’s aggressive march on Thebes to face Creon is paralleled to Jupiter’s power of

---


407 Méheust (1971) 62 n.3

408 Rimell (2015) 255 n.58 notices that, although Peleus has fathered Achilles, the boy’s closeness to the king of the gods is a near-threat to which other characters allude, cf.fn.28. There is another Jupiter simile, more elegiac (*Ach. 1.588-91: sic sub matre Rhea iuvenis regnator Olympi / oscula securae dabat insidiosa sorori / frater adhuc, medii donec reverentia cessit / sanguinis et versos germana expavit amore*), where Achilles is compared to Jupiter committing incest with Juno, which reiterates the Jovian role that Achilles is preconfigured to play. This passage recalls Byblis’ justification at *Met.* 9.497-99. Gärtner (2010) 96 sees an echo of *Theb.* 10.61-4, where an inexperienced Juno lies with Jupiter for the first time, but there are already hints of the god’s nature (10.64: *et nondum furtis offensa mariti*).

409 The chorus of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* presents a similar notion: Zeus is incomparable to others, and by proxy, others are incomparable to Zeus (*Ag.* 160-66). Cf. Ready (2012) 57. There could be a parallel at *Arg.* 2.38-40: during the match between Polydeuces and Amycus, the latter is likened to a son of Typhoeus (or the Earth itself), whilst the former is a stand-in for the gods. This is later reworked in Valerius, where Amycus is Typhoeus himself, even expecting to be fought by Jupiter instead of Polux. See Fucecchi (2013) 110.

410 See the more general Iliadic expression δαίμονι ἱος of heroes (Achilles, Diomedes and Patroclus) at the climax of their struggles against gods (e.g. *Diomedes*’ *aristeia at Il.* 5.438; Achilles himself at *Il.* 20.493), which could be paralleled to the Greeks’ adoration of Achilles (*Ach.* 1.504: *ceu numen amant*. Cf. Nagy (1979) 142-44.
creating harsh wintry conditions on Earth (Theb. 12.650-55). McNelis refers to this as a ‘complicating moment’ in the narrative. The uneasy feeling of the simile – ‘that presents a positive portrait of neither Jupiter nor Theseus’ – stems from Jupiter’s depiction in the poem as a savage and autocratic divinity. A comparison with Jupiter, and his role in the Thebaid, does not proffer an optimistic view, as both Jupiter and Theseus are depicted as ‘harsh and unremitting in their manner, and they encourage the perpetration of violence…in executing their plans’. Thus, the simile in the Achilleid is puzzling:

\[
\text{sic cum pallentes Phlegraea in castra coirent} \\
\text{caelicolaes iamque Odrysiam Gradivus in hastam} \\
\text{surgeter et Libyces Tritonia tolleret angues} \\
\text{ingentemque manu curvaret Delius arcum,} \\
\text{statab anhela metu solum Natura Tonantem} \\
\text{respiciens, quando ille hiemes tonitusque vocaret} \\
\text{nubibus, igniferam quot fulmina posceret Aetnen.}
\]

(Ach. 1.484-90)

The simile occurs immediately after the Greeks at Aulis have called out for Achilles in vain, and the commanders are left feeling inferior to the hero, perhaps overpowered by notions of epic grandeur that Achilles’ past literary shadow has cast onto the audience at Aulis (Ach. 1.483: cedit turba ducum vincique haud maesta fatur). It exemplifies the Achilleid as a poem of expectations: the Greeks anticipating Achilles’ arrival are compared to fear-stricken Olympians gathered on the Phlegraean fields at the outbreak of the Gigantomachy. It must be noted,

---


413 McNelis (2007) 161. He further suggests that, even if Jupiter has by now abandoned the narrative, this simile can be interpreted as furthering his involvement with human matters in absentia. See Feeney (1991) 390-91 for Statius’ innovative idea in the Thebaid of the necessity on the mortals’ part to take over the roles of the gods (e.g. Theseus as Jupiter brings the narrative to a much-expected, but not total, conclusion).

414 When Achilles departs from Scyros, the nature of gaze of those looking upon him purports fear and respect, thus perhaps linking Achilles to Jupiter even further (Ach. 2.8: prospectant cuncti iuvenemque ducemque). The image of the gods coming together to battle against the Giants might also ring back to Lucan (BC 7.144-50), as the preparations for Pompey’s army are paralleled to those of the gods before Phlegra, cf. Chaudhuri (2014) 169-71 for the reshaping of the motif of Gigantomachy here; yet as he himself argues, in another Gigantomachic reference (BC 3.312-20),
for its contextual significance, that the Trojan War is imagined as a second Gigantomachy/Titanomachy: in Ulysses’ words, this is a trux bellum (Ach.1.729: fama trucis belli), which in turn evokes the description of Jupiter’s Titanomachy in Valerius (Val.Fl.1.564: Iapeti…bella trucis).\(^{415}\)

Jannaccone argues that the dwellers of Olympus are pallentes ‘per l’ira e forse anche per il timore’: judging by the terror of Nature’s gaze (anhela metu), the conjecture of dismay is sustained.\(^{416}\) The role of Nature in the passage follows that of the Thebaid (Theb.12.607; Theb.12.645) as governor of the physical world and what it contains, as opposed to the divine world.\(^{417}\) This concept is influenced by Senecan drama, but it is altered: in Seneca, Natura reigns over the physical realm in direct conjunction with Jupiter, whereas here (as in Silv.4.3.135-36), Statius considers her to be inferior to the gods.\(^{418}\) Jupiter alone (solum) will be the saviour of the cosmic order, just like Achilles is the only hope for the Greeks’ victory at Troy (Ach.1.474: solus). The mention of the Phlegraean castra in the first line of the simile immediately brings the reader back to the battleground of the Gigantomachy: the Phlegraean fields in Thrace are often identified as the location of the battle between Olympians and Giants.\(^{419}\)

\(^{415}\) See also the description in Prop.2.1.19-22. Achilles is trux puer at Ach.1.302.

\(^{416}\) Jannaccone (1950) 112; Bitto (2016) 268. Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) identify Val.Fl.3.93-4 as a potential echo. There could be a further distinction made between the Olympic gods: the caelicolae might be referring to all of those divinities that dwell the heavens (cf.\(\text{Aen.10.116-17: solio tum Iuppiter aureo/ surgit, caelicolae medium quem ad limina ducunt}\)), and that the gods that are mentioned by name are primarily the canonical ones at the forefront of the battle. Pallens is also a word closely connected to dead and the Netherworld altogether, as it brings the apophatic denial of colour to corpses, as Horsfall (2013) 356 highlights, which elicits darker undertones here. Cf. the inversion of the terror that conquered Jupiter at the sight of the Giants in Horace (\(\text{Carm.3.4.49-50: magnum illa terrorem intulerat Iovi/ fidens iuventus horrida bracchiis}\)), and Pseudo-Virgil (\(\text{Aetna 54: Iuppiter et caelo metuit}\)). In the Achilleid, Natura and the gods fear Jupiter himself.\(^{417}\)

\(^{417}\) Méheust (1971) 91.


\(^{419}\) Str.7 frag.27; cf. \(\text{Her. Fur. 444-45: Phlegram impio / sparsam cruore, Prop.2.1.39-40 (on the contrast between high epic and Callimacheanism): sed neque Phlegraeos Iovis Enceladique tumultus / intonet angusto pectore Callimachus; Met.10.150-51: cecini plectro graviore Gigantas / sparsaque Phlegraeis victoria fulmina campis; Tydeus’ slaughter in book 2 is also compared to the Gigantomachy, with Phlegra as the battlefield (Theb.2.595-603).}\)
This simile finds a parallel in the *Thebaid*. In book 11, Capaneus’ death at the hands of Jupiter’s lightning bolt is received by the rest of the gods as if it were Jupiter overcoming the Giants and Enceladus (*Theb.* 11.7-8: *gratantur superi, Phlegrae ceu fessus anhelet / proelia et Encelado fumanten impresserit Aetnen*). McNelis describes this as a ‘virtual Gigantomachy from the Roman literary perspective’. Jupiter is wearily panting after conquering the Giants, whereas in the *Achilleid* it is Nature herself who is gasping for air at the sight of Jupiter (*respiciens*), and the accusative of *Aetna* ending the line links the passages together. Though thematically interconnected, at first sight these passages offer contrasting views of the mortals they represent. Capaneus is a Giant, whilst Achilles plays the role of Jupiter. Not only that, but he takes on the Jovian mantle just before his most monumental and defining accomplishment.

This moment of expectation, however, is doubly unsettling. Nature’s distress betrays hints of insecurity, which is marked out by *quando* (when will Jupiter call storms and thunders from the clouds) and *quot* (how many lightning bolts will he ask Vulcan to provide him with), which remain unanswered. The emphasis on fear (*metu*) highlights the seriousness of passage. The narrative placement of the simile on the temporal level of Aulis, as opposed to Scyros where we have just left Achilles cross-dressed, could supplement the irony of the passage. But there are linguistic parallels between the representation of Theseus and Achilles as Jovian figures that augment the dark and violent undertones of the simile in the *Achilleid*. In the *Thebaid*, Jupiter is described as the god of lightning traditionally sat among the clouds (*Theb.* 10.650-51: *qualis Hyperboreos ubi nubilus institit axes / Iuppiter*), whose competence is able to generate a winter storm (653: *hiems*) so

---

421 There could be one link between Achilles and Jupiter: their rage. The phrase *ira Tonantis* and similar paraphrases recall Jupiter’s rage in Val.Fl.4.474: on this line, see Murgatroyd (2009) 236. There is also a striking moment in the *Thebaid*, which shortly follows Capaneus’ demise: the Argives scatter, panicking, as they are confronted with Jupiter’s seething rage, and they fear and hear thunder within their helmets (*Theb.* 11.23-5: *omnibus ante oculos irae lovis, omnibus ardent / arma metu galeaque tonant, visusque paventes / ipse sequi et profugi opponere Iuppiter ignes*). The strikingly details of visuality, and the fear that both Achilles and Jupiter instil, further intertwine the two and add weight to Achilles’ representation as a Thebaidic Jupiter.
422 *Pace* Bitto (2016) 268.
423 Cf.fn.376.
powerful that the blind clouds (654-5: caecis / nubibus) become the backdrop of aerial combats (654: proelia), where thunder and mad lightings are effectively rejoicing at the events (655: tonitrus insanaque fulmina gaudent). Correspondingly, Jupiter’s epithet Tonans (1.488) preconfigures the god as the ‘Thunderer’, and his job constitutes in calling up (1.489 vocaret) both storms (hiemes) and thunder (tonitrus) from the clouds (490: nubibus), as well as asking lighting (fulmina) from Aetna.

Both Jovian figures in the Thebaid and in the Achilleid hold utter dominance, and they are in the midst of ultra-epic endeavours. But what is most remarkable, perhaps, is that, whilst Theseus’ agency is the final act that will bring the poem to an end, in the Achilleid, Achilles has not performed yet anything worthy of a Jovian simile, only his intrinsic nature of being born as someone with the potential of overthrowing his father. Surpassing and overthrowing, however, bear different connotations. The simile, and Achilles’ Jovian role, are by no means accurate portrayals of Achilles in the poem; rather, they stem from the Greeks’ expectations of the youth. The Greeks might be assuming that Achilles will perform the ultimate Olympian role, that of Jupiter against the Giants, but the youth exhibits also dangerous aspects of Jupiter himself as the over thrower of Saturn, as well as the behaviour of a potential Giant. The simile thus simultaneously conjures undertones of Gigantomachy and bestows upon Achilles the most powerful position in the divine pantheon, but one that is not devoid of excessive, ultra-epic destructive tendencies. When read in conjunction with Achilles’ emergent heroism, shaped by Hercules’ perilously unstable heroic power, as well as these nefarious undertones, precise interpretation of how Achilles can merely fulfil a Jovian role escapes the reader.

3.6 Oh Father, Where Art Thou? A (Senecan) absence of Jupiter
I have thus far reflected on the usage of the figure of Jupiter in the Achilleid as a complicated and paradoxical comparandum for Achilles, but the god’s presence in the poem is also quite striking. From the first line in the narrative, Jupiter’s
character embodies a perpetual presence in the poem. McAuley argues that Achilles’ identity is similar to a ‘Freudian family romance’, where the drive to identify a divine parentage as the ‘real’ form of paternity surpasses the actual veracity of the familial tie (i.e. Achilles’ mortality through Peleus). As the present section develops, we see that the weight of Jupiter triggers anxieties of succession that are not only self-contained in the proem but will crucially linger, uneasily, on these Jovian moments. In the Achilleid, Jupiter’s most striking feature is that he is entirely absent from the development and advancement of the narrative. He does not appear as a character in the text, nor does have an active voice (unlike Neptune and Thetis, or even Apollo). Rather, Jupiter remains silent throughout the extant part of the poem, and I argue that this feature poses problems for the development of Achilles’ character.

In the first book, Jupiter is mentioned twice by name by Thetis: firstly, among the exempla to persuade Achilles (Ach.1.263: virgineos si Iuppiter induit artus, as in Callisto’s seduction Jupiter took the guise of Diana), and then indirectly during the Thetis’ speech to Neptune as secundi…Iovis (Ach.1.49). Neptune then mentions him twice, firstly when explaining that the Trojan War has been decreed by Jupiter (Ach.1.82-3: consultaque belli / Iuppiter edixit caedibus annos), and secondly when he reprimands Thetis for her anxiety, ironically saying that Achilles would be thought to be Jupiter’s actual son if she continues complaining (Ach.1.91: crederis peperisse Iovis). When Achilles has raped Deidamia and boasts about his ancestry, he constructs Jupiter to Deidamia as almost his own father (Ach.1.650-51: genitum quem caerula mater/ paene Iovi). Jupiter is also referred to through his epithet Tonans in the proem and in the simile (Ach.1.1 and 1.488), with a further mention during Ulysses’ voyage to Scyros, with a description of their ship securely crossing the sea thanks to Jupiter’s fixed, Homeric orders (Ach.1.684-6: it pelago secura ratis: quippe alta Tonantis / iussa Thetin certas fatorum vertere leges / arcebant),

---

424 A welcome addition to Flavian studies will be Stocks’ monograph on the god (forthcoming).
427 For a sort of lex Iovis that grants unmovable, fixed decrees from the king of the gods and its importance for the end of the Titanomachy, at play in Valerius’ Argonautica, see Stover (2016) 20-2; Murgatroyd (2009) 64.
and finally once in the second book, when Ulysses recounts Agenor’s tireless search for Europa and his denial of Jupiter as a son-in-law (*Ach*.1.74-5: *aspernatusque Tonantem est/ ut generum*). Jupiter is therefore mentioned a total of eight times in the narrative, either through direct references or similes, yet he never actively participates in the *Achilleid*’s events.

It is Neptune who takes on the role of main divinity, embodying the Homeric Zeus in the first book of the *Iliad* and the Virgilian Neptune in *Aeneid* 1, who calms the storm that Juno had asked Aeolus for, and *Aeneid* 5, when Venus approaches Neptune. Neptune becomes the keeper of the epic tradition, as he is the god who reminds Thetis that Achilles’ destiny has already been written and sealed: in light of this role, he delivers an epic prophecy of Achilles’ glorious and short future. Neptune’s role as primary god is exemplified by his description as *secundi…Iovis*, an odd, unparalleled pseudo-epithet that points us to his Jovian characterisation. Neptune’s role is also analogous to that of Jupiter on a metapoetic level: the god promises Thetis that there *will* be a storm against Ulysses, introducing the *Odyssey*’s motif here in just one line (*Ach*.1.94: *et dirum pariter quaeremus Ulixem*). Neptune’s words betray not only a literary memory, but also poetic creation: according to the literary timeline, the *Odyssey*’s events have not occurred yet. Moreover, Neptune is able not only to recall that poem, but he also adds to it: he sides with another player, Thetis, who otherwise does

---

428 The triad Jupiter-Europa-Agenor can be contrasted to the triad Achilles-Deidamia-Lycomedes, as the king of Scyros favourably accepts the union between them.
429 For an overview of Neptune’s role in the *Achilleid* and his literary precedents, see Heslin (2005) 106-14.
430 Heslin (2005) 108; *Ach*. 1.81, cf.fn.57. On *fatum* in the *Achilleid* and the *vetor fatis* of *Aen*.1.39, which opens the comparison between Thetis and Virgilian Juno, see Mulder (1955) 123.
432 On this passage’ intertextual echo in Valerius’ *Argonautica*, see Kozák (2013) 251-54.
not play a role in the Homeric narrative.\footnote{Of course, Neptune could be here stacking motives for his hate against Ulysses, making an even stronger case for his persecution.} To add to Neptune’s characterisation as Jupiter, the adjective used to describe the god, arduus (Ach.1.57) is frequently employed to designate Jupiter (Aen.10.3; 9.53; Theb. 1.201-2).\footnote{See Stover (2012) 144.}

The phrase secundi…Iovis is also a reminder of the casting of the lots for the distribution of the three realms of the cosmos, with Neptune in charge of the sea.\footnote{See Rosati (1994a) 80. As examples of this, cf. Met.4.532 and 8.595, more directly we have Lucan’s prayer to the gods (BC 4.110-11: sic, o summe parens mundi, sic, sorte secunda / aequorei rector, facias, Neptune tridentis). Incidentally, as Leigh (1997) 42 argues, this prayer is ‘recognised as one of the classic instances of the narrator’s intervention as an agent in his own drama, seeking to reverse the course of history, uttering the futile prayers of a character in a Senecan tragedy’, which is appropriate here: Thetis’ plea attempts to change the course of her son’s destiny yet is futile in itself. There’s no reference to the play that Leigh is discussing.}

In Seneca’s Phaedra, the god is said to hold sway over the second realm with his waves (Phaed.904: qui secundum fluctibus regnum moves). In the Medea, Neptune is portrayed as the angered lord of the ‘second kingdom’ (Med.598: regna secunda). In the Hercules Furens, Neptune is depicted with his ‘second’ sceptre (Her.Fur.597-600: tuque, caelestum arbiter / parensque, visus fulmine opposito tege; / et tu, secundo maria qui sceptro regis, / ima pete undas).\footnote{Jannaccone (1950) 48-9 points out that ‘di rado si trova comune ai figli di Saturno il nome di Giove’, but Pluto/Dis, in Senecan tragedy, is referred to as an ‘infernal Jupiter’ at Her.Fur 47: effregit ecce limen inferni Iovis; 608: diro...Iovi).} In a slip which reveals how instinctive it can be to associate Jupiter’s figure to Neptune’s, Fantham attributes Achilles’ prophesied heroic prominence to Jupiter, when in reality is a conversation between Neptune and Thetis.\footnote{Fantham (1979) 458 on Ach.1.87-8: ‘Jupiter foretells Achilles’ greatness to Thetis, as Catullus’ Parcae had foretold the future of their unborn child to Peleus and Thetis at their wedding’.} Thetis’ address to Neptune, which denotes the considerable extent of the Neptune’s authority, places him in the role of the primary god.\footnote{Thetis’ following address could be read as a captatio benevolentiae, but this explains neither Neptune’s heightened power nor Jupiter’s absence from the events in the Achilleid.} He is apostrophised as genitor rectorque profundi (Ach.1.61), yet Jupiter generally fulfils the role of arbiter and parens.\footnote{See also Domitian at Silv.4.2.14-5: regnator terrarum orbisque subacti / magne parens.} In the Aeneid Jupiter is divum tu maxime rector / Iuppiter (Aen.8.572-73), in the Metamorphoses he is ille pater, rectorque deum (Met.2.848), in the Tristia he is genitorque deum rectorque (Trist.2.37), in the Hercules Furens as caelestium / rector parensque (Her.Fur.516-17). Jupiter even
refers to himself, during Hercules’ apotheosis, as ‘ruler and father of the people’ (Met.9.245: quod memoris populi dicor rectorque paterque). Additionally, Neptune’s control over the sea (profundi) becomes more general, as he is simply called rex when Thetis sees him arriving from Oceanus’ banquet, with his realm left unspecified (Ach.1.51-52: dixit magnunmque in tempore regem / aspicit).

Neptune’s power is augmented in the Achilleid, equated to that of Jupiter. But if Neptune’s kingly status is augmented, and he takes on the role of a Jovian-like figure, the silence of the real Jupiter becomes increasingly disquieting, and Jupiter’s absence in the text is felt even more sharply.

The phrase secundi…Iovis can also assume a further meaning. In earlier sources, Zeus and Poseidon were rivals for their marriage with Thetis, until the prophecy of Thetis’ offspring as potential overthrower of the established cosmic balance (as Jupiter had done himself with Cronus). Pindar places Zeus and Poseidon on the same level, as they both desired Thetis as their future bride (Isthm.8.27-9: Ζεύς ὅτε ὁμφι θέτιος ὑγλαῖος τ᾽ ἔρισαν Ποσειδᾶν γάμῳ, / ἀλοχον εὐειδέ’ ἐθέλων ἐκάτερος / ἕιν ἔμημεν ἐρως γὰρ ἔχεν); Themis then warns the immortal gods that the son of Thetis would eventually wield in his hand weapons more powerful than the thunderbolt and the trident, thus equating once again Zeus to his brother Neptune through levelled weaponry imagery (Isthm.8.34-5: ὃς κεραυνοῦ τε κρέσσον ἄλλο βέλος / διώξει χερί τριόδοντός τ’ ἅμαμακέτου, Ζήνι μισγομέναν ἢ Δίος παρ’ ἀδελφεοῖσιν). With Pindar in mind, we therefore see Thetis’ phrase of Neptune as a second Jupiter assuming an even more profound meaning: Neptune is canonically one of Thetis’ own suitors, who had been once enamoured with the goddess. In the Achilleid, Thetis’ rather paradoxical choice of going to Neptune instead of Jupiter or Aeolus, as in the Virgilian paradigm Neptune calms the storm rather than creating one, has further implications. Thetis is pleading for help not to any god, but one of her old admirers, bringing in a more personal, manipulative, hidden agenda to the conversation between her and

440 Rosati’s (1994a) 81 translation of ‘il re potente del mare’ is not justifiable.
441 Heslin (2005) 158.
442 Incidentally, Bessone (forthcoming a) touches upon the fact that Neptune is an old suitor of Thetis.
Neptune, in the vain hope of achieving her goals through the aid of someone who once had had an overt interest in the goddess. This can indeed be a possible interpretation, especially in light of Neptune’s answer to the goddess’ pleas:

\[\text{Pelea iam desiste queri thalamosque minores:}
\text{crederis peperisse Iovi;}\]

\[(\text{Ach.1.90-1})\]

Neptune tells Thetis to stop complaining about her inferior marriage with Peleus and that Achilles ‘will be thought to be the son of Zeus’,\(^443\) overruling Peleus’ status as the biological father and as a father figure for Achilles altogether.\(^444\) Nevertheless, the scholarship has observed that Thetis has been complaining about the Argonauts in a traditional vituperation of sea faring, but she has not mentioned Peleus once.\(^445\) Neptune, however, reminds Thetis of her mortal husband and her inferior marriage, and this admonition is perhaps contributing to present Neptune in the role of a once disappointed suitor holding a grudge. In light of Neptune’s own periphrastic characterisation as a second Jupiter only a few lines earlier, the god’s reply (\textit{crederis peperisse Iovi}) can be doubly interpreted. It could be that Neptune is indeed referring to Jupiter; yet, considering that he is outstandingly spoken of as a \textit{secundus Iuppiter} and that traditionally he was one of Thetis’ old suitors, it could be plausible that the \textit{Iovi} in line 91 can be read to represent Neptune instead, and that Statius is purposefully leaving it openly ambiguous. In this way, Heslin’s claim that Neptune’s suggestion of Thetis as having ‘personal reasons surpassing the conventional, rhetorical ones to regret the voyage of the Argo’, is further sustained, as not only is the goddess acting on a more private agenda, but Neptune is doing so too.\(^446\) The ambiguity that arises from Neptune’s fault of specifically identifying Jupiter could also be introducing a further hypothetical potential father figure for Achilles, thus corroborating

\(^{443}\) In Lombardo’s most recent translation (2015): ‘you will be thought to have borne a son to Jupiter’. Statius is here playing directly with Ovid’s stern denial: \textit{Met.11.224: ne quicquam mundus Iove maius haberet, cf.fn.348.}\n
\(^{444}\) Harrauer’s translation (2010) 170.


\(^{446}\) Heslin (2005) 111.
Thetis’ choice of Neptune as her helping god, as well adding to the now-familiar familial tensions of the poem.

Returning to Jupiter’s presence, the poem opens with a firm reference to Jupiter, so his subsequent absence in the narrative is highly remarkable. The only other literary composition that has the epithet Tonans in its incipit is the Hercules Furens. In a highly programmatic prologue, Juno begins the drama with a strong self-identification as a ‘sister of the Thunderer’, soror Tonantis (Her.Fur.1). Schiesaro describes Juno as a double for the creative power of the author: throughout the prologue, she proleptically imagines the challenges that Hercules will face, and the plot that she envisages materialises and occurs shortly after, turning her speech into a sort of ‘super-structure’ that encompasses the whole play. The drama’s incipit does not merely outline the reasons behind Juno’s hatred of Hercules, but it also clearly defines certain issues in the tragedy as programmatic. At the heart of her monologue, we find Juno’s concern that Hercules might usurp Jupiter’s kingdom through a path of destruction (Her.Fur.64-5: caelo timendum est, regna ne summa occupet / qui vicit ima; sceptra praeripiet patri; 67-8: iter ruina quaeret et vacuo volet / regnare mundo…; 74: quaerit ad superos viam). The line between rightful apotheosis and the usurpation of Jupiter’s power are blurred, and the Hercules Furens is therefore set up as a tragedy profoundly concerned with issues of succession. As we have seen, the first three lines of proem of the Achilleid redirect us to analogous issues, where there is an explicit reference to Gigantomachy and echoes of a neutralised – but very much present – threat that Achilles poses to Jupiter’s rule.

Jupiter’s striking absenteeism brings us back to the Hercules Furens. The presence of the king of the gods in the Senecan tragedy has been dubbed as that of

---

447 Familial relationships are being showcased here. Riley (2008) 65 highlights how this is a tragic twist on the more formulaic soror et coniunx of Aeneid 1.46-7, and the more ironic and resentful Ovidian version in Met.3.265-66 (si sum regina, Iovisque / et soror et coniunx, certe soror).


450 Cf.fn.28 and fn.348.
'el convidado de piedra’, the Stone Guest. As Li Causi argues, Jupiter’s figure remains in the backdrop of the Senecan drama, never uttering a word, yet it configures itself as ‘a sort of white noise’ that in a way or another ‘obsesses all of the characters of the drama, but that persists dull, inactive and unarticulated throughout the narrative’, and that most importantly, never obtains a tangible body of a *dramatis persona* who dynamically intervenes on scene. This evokes in turn the Euripidean treatment of Zeus in the *Herakles Mainomenos*, but as Li Causi argues, the characters of the Senecan tragedy appear to be conscious of the enormous gap between them and the gods, as even Amphitruo’s own suppliant prayer to Jupiter is cut short by Hercules’ entering the scene (*Her.Fur.*516-23). Amphitruo’s prayers can be at first perceived as futile, but the timing of Hercules’ appearance are to be interpreted as answers to his supplications. Is Hercules displacing Jupiter? In fact, after a choral intermezzo, Hercules first arrives on the scene, almost as if he were summoned by his surrogate father, thus placing a sort of ‘divine expectation’ upon Hercules. This proves Juno’s anger in the initial act of the play, where the goddess is complaining that Hercules is imagined as a god (*Her.Fur.*39-40: *indomita virtus colitur et toto deus / narratur orbe*). But Hercules’ claim for deification is sustained by his semi-divine birth status on his male side, and although premature, even Amphitruo believes that Hercules will find a ‘correct’ path to immortality (*Her.Fur.*276: *subitusque ad astra emerget*), and Theseus refers to Hercules as *Iove natus* (*Her.Fur.*792).
It is my argument that Jupiter’s presence as the Stone Guest is a configuration also at play in the *Achilleid*: not only does Jupiter’s presence underlie the entire narrative from the beginning, but the motif of Thetis’ denied marriage to Jupiter is something that has effectively obsessed her throughout the poem (*Ach.1.252-3: Si mihi, care puer, thalamos sors aequa tulisset / quos dabat*). Thetis’ regretful and somewhat bittersweet conversation with Achilles is filled with notions of foiled immortality for her son (but also her own augmented projection in the future): she regrets not marrying a god, as that would have meant Achilles’ successful achievement of an immortal status (*Ach.1.253-54: aetheris ego te complexa tenerem / sidus grande plagis*), but correspondingly he would have replaced Jupiter as the king of the gods, making her the woman who would have given birth to the sky itself (*Ach.1.254: magnique puerpera caeli*).

Achilles’ claim of ‘almost being born’ by Jupiter not only serves the purpose of self-aggrandisement but emphasises what could have been yet was not (*Ach.1.650-51: ille ego – quid trepidas? – genitum quem caerula mater/ paene Iovi*). Even Achilles voices this missed opportunity, which he believes so narrowly (*paene*) distances him from Jupiter. Nonetheless, Achilles is considered to be a god by the troops, and he is the recipient of the strikingly odd and out-of-place Jupiter simile at the height of the Gigantomachy. Yet, whilst in Seneca Hercules demands his promised immortality after his Twelve Labours and his subjugation of the Underworld (thus conquering both the terrestrial and the infernal realms), Achilles is compared to Jupiter and he is envisioned by the Greeks as becoming the martial god that the troops need for the Trojan War (*Ach.1.503-4*) before he actually accomplishes anything worthy of mention. Jupiter’s absence thus simultaneously creates of a ‘divine vacuum’ in the *Achilleid*, whilst, as in the *Hercules Furens*, his own ‘paradoxical’ absence hauntingly consumes the characters in the poem. The expectations that the Greeks hold of Achilles as a divine figure, expressed through the Jovian simile, intertwined with the vacancy left by Jupiter in the *Achilleid* and the choice of Neptune as the traditional embodiment of epic continuation, would urge us to read Achilles as a suitable figure to fill that precise

---

\[^{456}\text{Heslin (2005) 119.}\]
divine gap. Yet the troubling aspect that pervades the Jupiter simile, jointly with the construction of Achilles’ proto-heroic deeds in the mould of a maddened Hercules suggest that Achilles’ future behaviour could not be Jovian, but its opposite, portending dangerous and tragic echoes.

The process of creation of Achilles as a potential ‘divine’ figure on par with Jupiter leaves the reader wondering how exactly like Jupiter will he be.\textsuperscript{457} Furthermore, the simultaneous presentation of Achilles’ aptitudes as Herculean betray an underlying tragic irony: by configuring Achilles in relation to Senecan Hercules, whose claim to immortality is supported by the appropriateness of his semi-divine status, we receive a tacit admission that Achilles’ dangerous potential of overthrowing his imagined father-figure, Jupiter, will only end up in failure, never deification. In the \textit{Hercules Furens}, Hercules jeopardises his chance at immortality because of his \textit{furor}-induced Gigantomachic craze, and, despite the negative ending of the Senecan drama – ‘Senecan tragedy denies…any meaningful softening of intransient attitudes’ – Theseus’ interjection at the end provides a glimpse of redemption (\textit{Her.Fur.1344-345: illa te, Alcide, vocat, / facere innocentes terra quae superos solet}).\textsuperscript{458} His apotheosis is not rejected. Achilles’ parental status, though complex, prohibits any claim to godhead, thus configuring him through a tragic mortal lens: his only route to Olympus can now be in the footsteps of a theomach, who will likely fail if following a Thebaidic pattern.

With the identification of Achilles as Jupiter on the edge of another Gigantomachy, when Achilles has not had a chance to prove himself yet, Achilles’ short-lived, glory-filled but ultimately mortal destiny is contrasted to a god’s immortal existence, as the hero will never compensate for his \textit{inpar genus} (\textit{Ach.1.255}).\textsuperscript{459} This is why, in answer to Konstan’s question, the \textit{Achilleid} begins with Achilles’ hypothetical Jovian paternity and consequent failed immortality. Achilles is constructed as a potential successor of Jupiter, but his propensities

\textsuperscript{457} Pace Kozák (2007) 383.
\textsuperscript{458} Fitch (2002) 42-3.
\textsuperscript{459} The ultra-compression of the narrative is of particular force here: the \textit{Achilleid} is a story of Achilles as a young boy, yet this is a significant proleptical jump to an über-climactic moment of the epic battlefield.
towards nefarious theomachy betray the exposure of his mortality and the tragic revelation that the hero will not supplant Jupiter and will die in the attempt. Not only that, but the Herculean exemplum proves to be misguided too: only those with a rightful claim to divinity might successfully master the dangers of transgression.460

Thus, both Herculean and Jovian models fail for Achilles too. We become witnesses of another heroic spectacle that will inevitably end in death, and the attempts at elevating the hero within the poem are a double-edged sword, for they evoke his mortality. Thus, the first lines of the poem showcase Achilles tangled in a disarray of familial relationships. In the last line of the poem (scit cetera mater), Achilles constructs his own mother as the ‘keeper’ of the shameful cross-dressing episode he has had to endure.461 But Thetis’ attempts are, after all, a foiled motherly attempt to change the course of her son’s destiny, namely death. By enclosing the Achilleid within the triad of Achilles-Jupiter-Thetis, Statius effectively highlights the tragic paradoxes intrinsic to Achilles’ representation.

3.7 Problematic fence-sitting: conclusion
In this chapter, I have argued that Achilles’ heroic aptitudes bear strong echoes of Gigantomachy: he is configured as a giant who threatens Olympian rule. We have seen how this potential usurpation of power finds a model in the maddened Hercules of the Senecan Hercules Furens, where the proper epic path is turned on its head, and Achilles’ actions portend an engagement with a tragic atmosphere. The second half of this chapter has explored the simile of Achilles with Jupiter that, at first read, preconfigures expectations for the youth to fulfil a Jovian role. Nevertheless, in light of Jupiter’s absenteeism in the poem – following a Senecan frame – and the theomachic elements present in his descriptions, Achilles is not only a paradoxical successor of Jupiter, but he is envisioned as a potential usurper of Jovian power. In the end, however, these representations do nothing but augment Achilles’ paradoxical complexity in the Achilleid, as well as underscoring his mortality throughout the poem and adding to the dense and entangled network of his familial relationships.

460 And even then, as is the case of the Hercules Furens, this matter is left ambiguously.
461 I will return to Thetis’ knowledge in the final chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

Tradunt dolos patres
The role of Ulysses

“Headstrong mortal, proud of that short dream which you call a lifetime, enamoured of your weaknesses and your miserable sins, and fascinated by death. Against such obstinacy even the gods have no power. Go then, if that’s your choice: the sea is awaiting you!”

Circe/Silvana Mangano (1954) Ulysses

4.1 El siempre invencible griego, el nunca vencible Ulises

While the last chapter examined the role of Achilles both as a ‘filial’ successor to Jupiter and as his hubristic opponent, this chapter turns to another potential father figure for Achilles, Ulysses. His character features prominently in the second half of the narrative of the extant Achilleid, but it has not been the object of systematic study in recent years. Most scholars of the poem construct Ulysses’ agency in aiding Achilles’ anagnorisis as a necessary intermediary for the revelation of the real, masculine identity of the epic hero. I wish to expand on this analysis, but instead of interpreting his intervention as positively channelling the inner hero of Achilles, I interpret it from the opposite standpoint, by arguing that Ulysses’ expedition, the manifestation of ‘proper’ epic themes bursting openly, and his subsequent trick can be interpreted in a darker, more pessimistic light.

In particular, I challenge the accepted scholarly view that presents Ulysses as a ‘father’ figure for Achilles. I provide an alternative reading of the hero’s arrival on Scyros and his subsequent donning of the mantle of the ‘father-figure’ as a complicated move for the construction of Achilles’ heroism, re-examining Ulysses’ trickery on Scyros not as a triumphant moment for Achilles but a more problematic one. This reading builds on the examination of Odysseus as a father

462 Ripoll’s contribution to Coffee, Forstall, Milič and Nelis’ volume, Intertextuality in Flavian Epic Poetry (forthcoming) will explore Ulysses’ figure as an inter (and meta-) textual hero in the poem. I thank François Ripoll for kindly sharing a draft of the paper.

463 Ripoll (forthcoming) suggests that Ulysses as father-figure for Achilles can also evoke in turn his role as alter-ego for the Statian poetic persona as paedagogus of Achilles. I will return to this below.
figure in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, a drama that I propose as an important intertext for the configuration of the figure of Ulysses and Achilles in the *Achilleid*. The engagement with the *Philoctetes* will add to the wealth of intertextual models of the poem, and it will cloak Ulysses’ agency on Scyros with a foreboding and darker layer, which, as we shall see, has important tragic connotations for Achilles’ heroic identity.

The aim of the first part of this chapter is to collect and examine instances where the heroic code of conduct of Neoptolemus and Achilles diametrically opposes that represented by Odysseus in the *Philoctetes* and Ulysses in the *Achilleid*. I see Ulysses as a dangerous and undesirable model with foreboding aspects for Achilles to follow. I will proffer this by juxtaposing two very similar portrayals of Odysseus/Ulysses, which show that his paternal attitude towards Neoptolemus and Achilles exemplify an inadequate model of heroism. In the *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus will eventually reject the Odyssean model, in favour for the one that Heracles embodies and supplies at the end of the tragedy: a third model of ‘father’ is introduced, more attractive to the young hero in the making. In the *Achilleid*, however, Achilles, due to the absence of his paternal figure and the distance from his foster father, Chiron, tragically accepts Ulysses’ *praeeptae* as his own heroic *exemplum*, as he is not presented with an alternative model to follow. In a text such as the *Achilleid*, where paternal (and parental) influences construct and deconstruct Achilles’ own heroic identity, it is crucial to delve into the issues that originate from Ulysses’ identification as another surrogate father for Achilles by comparing these two texts together. In the *Philoctetes*, Achilles’ figure and the ideals that forge it loom over the narrative: Neoptolemus’ heroism has to be viewed jointly with that of his father. In the *Achilleid*, although Peleus is conspicuous by his absence, Achilles has to measure himself – literally and metaphorically – against the paternal spear (*Ach. 1.41: et patria iam se metitur in hasta*).

464 Which is complicated further, as one of the models that Achilles is following in the extant poem is that of his mother, in itself an antithesis to heroic conduct. Thetis’ metapoetic agency will be analysed in the next chapter.
This analysis results in a broader discussion, where I consider Ulysses’ portrayal in the *Achilleid*. I scrutinise in depth two similes (*Ach.1.704-8; 1.742-49*) that show a more ‘negative’ and violent side to the mission of Ulysses and Diomedes in the poem, which further problematize the scholarly reading of Ulysses as a father figure for Achilles. I treat the two similes as a pair of intertwined moments, where Ulysses’ presence looms over Achilles and represents a danger to the youth that appears almost irreconcilable with his ‘paternal’ role. The final section builds on the darker tinge to Ulysses’ portrayal, as I read the description of Ulysses’ ‘descent’ on Scyros focalised through Diomedes’ eyes as modelled onto the description of Virgil’s Allecto and Silius’ Tisiphone, thus portraying Ulysses as a duplicitous threat to Achilles. The conclusion draws out the main points of this chapter: I reflect on a more dangerous and sinister side to Ulysses that complicates his characterisation; Ulysses’ mission, and his *modus operandi*, raise some problematic issues.

4.2 The Ulysses *stat(i)us quo*

Scholars who identify Ulysses as a father figure for Achilles abound.\(^{465}\) Trimble dubs Ulysses as Thetis’ ‘rival sculptor of gender and destiny’, thus juxtaposing her with Ulysses, a mentor.\(^{466}\) Heslin reads Ulysses’ intrusion on Scyros as the arrival of a role model to guide Achilles to his heroic destiny, interpreting Ulysses a suitable substitute for Achilles’ absent father, Peleus.\(^{467}\) Heslin argues that the introduction of a youth into the martial world is only valid if attained through the help of ‘the right kind of father figure’, namely Ulysses.\(^{468}\) Bernstein adheres to Heslin’s argument, declaring that Ulysses is the last of Achilles’ surrogate fathers: he construes the employment of the traditional Ulyssian persuasion to his exchanges with Achilles as a necessary stepping-stone in order to bring the young man to ‘full manhood’.\(^{469}\) More recently, both Bessone and McAuley advance an analogous claim, rendering Ulysses as a father figure who manages to restore

\(^{465}\) See Ripoll (forthcoming). Note Barchiesi’s comment (2005) 68: ‘in a story where a mother is the driving force and the father a surprising absence, Ulysses tries to set things right’.

\(^{466}\) Trimble (2002) 238.

\(^{467}\) Heslin (2005) 191.

\(^{468}\) Heslin (2005) 293-94.

\(^{469}\) Bernstein (2008) 112.
Achilles to his ‘epic curriculum vitae’,\(^{470}\) as well as pinpointing Ulysses’ agency in the *undressing* of Achilles as a sort of ‘metaphorical birth’ (perhaps re-birth, I would say).\(^{471}\)

Two main overriding objections can be levelled against this reading. The first is Ulysses’ own reputation within the corpus of Greek and Latin literature. Numerous sources depict him as an entirely negative hero, as opposed to the more multifaceted, equivocal and ambiguous hero (πολύμητις and πολύτροπος) that lies and functions, for instance, at the heart of the *Odyssey*.\(^{472}\) Pindar’s words already bear these unflattering traces, as Ajax’s loss in the judgment of arms is because the ‘greatest prize for honour was awarded to deceitful falsehood’ (*Nem.* 8.25).\(^{473}\) In Roman times, Ulysses continues to develop an infamous reputation: although not actually appearing ‘in the flesh’ in the *Aeneid*, his status precedes him, as the tale of the Trojan horse is introduced with a snappy, rhetorical question (*Aen.* 2.44: *sic notus Ulixes*), which sets the tone of treachery and guile that pervades the Virgilian episode.\(^{474}\) In the same book, Ulysses is then the *scelerum inventor* (*Aen.* 2.164); in book 6, Deiphobus renames Ulysses as the *hortator scelerum Aeolides* (*Aen.* 6.529), adapted by Seneca’s Andromache (*Tro.* 750: *machinator fraudis et scelerum artifex*).\(^{475}\) Dante places the hero alongside Diomedes, in a twin flame in the eighth ditch of the Malebolge, among the fraudulent counsellors: Hagedorn argues that Dante’s brief description of Deidamia’s suffering alludes to the *Achilleid* (*Inf.* 26.61-63: *piangevisi entro l’arte per che, morta / Deidamia ancor si duol d’Achille / e del Palladio pena vi si porta*). Ulysses’ agency is the root of her abandonment, and Dante’s first presentation seemingly casts Ulysses in a negative light and retrospectively re-reads Ulysses’ appearance in

\(^{470}\) Bessone (2016) 175.

\(^{471}\) McAuley (2016) 365.

\(^{472}\) Which in itself is not without its problems.

\(^{473}\) See Park (2013) 32 for Pindar’s *apparent* criticism of Homer here.

\(^{474}\) Fenik (1959) 11-2; (1999) 369.

\(^{475}\) Ovid’s *Her.* 1 augments this negative portrayal from the perspective of a resentful and elegiac Penelope; see also his cunning, self-serving rhetoric, well exemplified in the judgement of arms in *Metamorphoses* 13. The full quote from the *Troades* continues down the slandering path (*Tro.* 750-54: *O machinator fraudis et scelerum artifex, / virtute cuius bellica nemo occidit, / dolis et astu maleficae mentis iacent / etiam Pelagi, vatem et insontes deos / praetendis? Hoc est pectoris facinus tuis*). For an overview of Odysseus/Ulysses in the sources up to Dante, see Ghiselli (2014).
Achilleid. The positive, paternal role of Ulysses must therefore be questioned. We must consider the ‘fuller’ picture of the hero that derives from these previous sources.

The second issue is that the Ulyssean heroic paradigm, based on rhetoric rather than valiant deeds, can be placed exactly at the other end of the epic range of heroism that is represented by Achilles. This is a tension already present in early Greek literature, and it filters down to the representation of Ulysses in Latin literature more generally. This anxiety proves to be a crucial concern for the future development of Achilles’ heroic individuality in the Achilleid, since considerable weight is traditionally consigned to the distinction between the Achillean and Ulyssean models of heroism. By assigning Ulysses a potential ‘father’ role for the youth in the making, we attribute to Achilles a martial identity based on a model that is canonically the opposite of his. His epic anagnorisis continues to be disassembled.

Sophocles’ Philoctetes is the archetype for this tension. The drama showcases an arena where the struggle of Achilles’ son Neoptolemus to follow in the footsteps of his father is partly exacerbated by Odysseus’ attempt to ‘adopt’ the

---

476 Hagedorn (1997) 19-43. I build my argument from Hagedorn’s work, although it is a rare and non-classical example of scholarship that pessimistically interprets Ulysses in the Achilleid.
477 Especially bearing in mind the sort of father he was for Telemachos (admittedly because of his absence); Heslin (2005) 293-94 uses Telemachos to argue that only once Odysseus comes back to Ithaca, his son manages to ‘come into his own’.
478 Ripoll (forthcoming) argues that the way that Ulysses is characterised is sort of über-Ulysses, readily identifiable due to a number of his exemplary characteristics.
479 This might have already been clear to an ancient audience when turning to Homer. The Iliad is about martial excellence and concentrates on the rage of that man Achilles. The Odyssey is not about martial pre-eminence, as Hardie rightly points out (1993) 4, but about an excellence that relies on the mind, rather than force. On the attainment of kleos in the Odyssey, see Segal (1983) 22-47.
480 See Olson (1991) 269-83 for a discussion on the lost Euripidean and Aeschylean Philoctetes and the differences with Sophocles’ account. Sophocles innovates in having Odysseus accompanied by Neoptolemus instead of Diomedes. This makes the link between Sophocles and Statius even stronger. See Vidal-Naquet (1971) 625, as in the Little Iliad. Ulysses is joined by Diomedes (Procl. Chr. ii); cf. Dugdale (2017) 78-81; Gantz (1993) 459; 589-90; 635-37. Perhaps the most well-known Roman Philoctetes is the lost tragedy of Accius, of which few fragments remain, but it is generally agreed that again it is Ulysses and Diomedes who fetch the Greek archer, see Schein (2013) 44 and Warmington, frs. 522-70.
youth and persuade him to perform guileful deeds against his Achillean nature.\footnote{Roisman (1997) 127: ‘Sophocles’ Philoctetes presents the struggle between Odysseus and Philoctetes for the ‘paternity’ of Neoptolemus, as each tries to mould the young man in his own image’.}

The Philoctetes paints two radically different sides of martial identity: Achilles’ \textit{virtus}, based on strong actions over words, and Odysseus’, which relies on wit, cunning, persuasion and trickery. The Philoctetes must therefore be flagged as a fundamental parallel for the poem. Their highly similar thematic frame for the second half of the Achilleid joins them together: both texts feature Odysseus/Ulysses bringing a young man forward into adulthood, and one text’s victim is the child of the other’s. Neoptolemus is the child who has just been conceived in the Achilleid, an idea that constructs a strong, albeit inverted, narrative continuity between the two texts. Playing with the tradition, the Achilleid posits itself as chronologically anterior to the Greek tragedy, a strategy that suggests the adoption and reworking of the Philoctetes in the Statian poem.\footnote{It is Odysseus/Ulysses who fetches Neoptolemus on Scyros after the death of Achilles. Christ (2006) 78-9 argues that ‘Sophocles apparently treated the story of Neoptolemus’ recruitment, with Odysseus and Phoenix as embassy in his lost Skyrioi; we do not know if, as in his Philoctetes, he deviated from tradition in making the recruitment of Neoptolemus precede that of Philoctetes…if Neoptolemus was eager to participate in the expedition from the start, as Lloyd-Jones (1996) 277 suggests, there would have been little tension in the drama. It is preferable, therefore, to suppose that Neoptolemus – like his father, Achilles, as a young man in the same locale under similar circumstances (Cf. Eur. Skyrioi) – required some persuading before he agreed to embark’. What we do not know is whether Neoptolemus himself could have been deceived by Odysseus during his retrieval from Scyros: there is a mention of the retrieval at Od.11.506-8, but no further information of whether there was a fraudulent \textit{modus operandi}. In the Philoctetes, Neoptolemus leaves this detail ambiguous (Phil.345: εἶτ᾽ ἀληθῶς εἶτ᾽ ἄρ’ οὖν μάτην). Webster (1970) 6 argues that Sophocles’ Philoctetes and the Skyrioi were perhaps a part of a trilogy that also encompassed the Philoctetes at Troy. For sources on the fetching of Neoptolemus from Scyros, see Frazer (1921) n. 121 on Apollod.\textit{Epit.} 5.11.} The juxtaposition of these two texts seems to provide the audience both with an atemporal interpretation of Neoptolemus’ own characterisation in the Philoctetes, as well as with the issue, yet again, of Ulysses’ influence on Achilles in the Achilleid. Ultimately, the comparison serves the purpose of highlighting why Ulysses is not a suitable as a father figure, and further accentuates the absence of a paternal figure for Achilles.
4.3 I’ll make a man out of you: Odysseus’ nature in the Philoctetes

Both successful and failed relationships between fathers and sons are crucial pivots of the Philoctetes. Odysseus’ first words target Neoptolemus’ father, Achilles, who has recently perished (Phil.3-4), and Philoctetes is epically introduced in the play by means of his patronymic, ‘son of Poeas’ (Phil.4-5: τὸν Μηλιᾶ/ Ποίαντος υἱὸν).

Similarly, Philoctetes’ emotive plea as a suppliant to Neoptolemus begins with Achilles (Phil.468: πρός νόν σε πατρός), and ends with an appeal to Neoptolemus so that he might be returned to his own father (Phil.492: πατρί μ’ ὡς δείξῃς φίλω). This father-son relationship, however, is undermined with the negative portrayal of Odysseus, whose questionable morality is also essential for the development of the narrative. From his introduction in the drama, Odysseus appears anxious to present his own conduct as morally sound, as he tells Neoptolemus that he was simply following orders from ‘those in command’, downplaying his agency in the abandonment of Philoctetes (Phil.6).

Odysseus’ eagerness not to be identified by Philoctetes, nevertheless, betrays the more prominent role in his initial mission to Lemnos. From the beginning of the drama, the premises of his mission are problematised, and Odysseus is cast in a suspect light (Phil.46-57).

Odysseus begins the manipulation of Neoptolemus through an appeal to his juvenile enthusiasm and impatience, anticipated in the etymology of the boy’s name. Odysseus offers Neoptolemus an arena where both his physical strength and moral standards will be challenged: he will have to carry out deeds unfamiliar to him, in itself an indication of two dissimilar types of heroism (Phil.52-3). Particular emphasis is placed on Neoptolemus’ ‘true-bred’ origins, thus directly engaging with Achilles. Just like Statian Achilles, Neoptolemus is still an unproven hero who needs to live up to his paternal expectations (Phil.50-1:

---

484 Precursor of Eichmann’s damning statement?
485 See Allan (2011) 2 on the prologue as an important source of information for future action and on Odysseus’ ‘concealed’ active role.
When Odysseus finally discloses the modus operandi for their undertaking, however, we are removed from an Achillean code, as deceit is advocated (Phil.54-5: τὴν Φιλοκτήτου σε δεῖ / ψυχὴν ὃπως λόγοισιν ἔκκλησις λέγων).

The plotted treachery will involve the ‘false’ shaming of Odysseus after the judgment of arms (Phil.54-85), as the hero gives permission to Neoptolemus to slander him (Phil.64-7). Odysseus provides Achilles’ son with the fabricated claim that Neoptolemus had been denied the arms of his father, augmenting the deceit. Maintaining the pretence, we find an explicit reference to the dichotomy between Odysseus’ and Neoptolemus’ temperaments. Odysseus acknowledges that it is not in Neoptolemus’ nature to speak dishonestly or contriving any harm (Phil.79-80: ἔξοιδα, παῖ, φύσει σε μὴ περυκύτα/ τοιαύτα φωνεῖν μηδὲ τεχνάσθαι κακά’). The ‘clever’ manner in which Odysseus exhorts Neoptolemus to proceed is emblematic of Odysseus’ characterisation as guileful and un-Achillean.

Neoptolemus’ reply condemns Odysseus’ plan. We see him in distress (Phil.86), as he defends his rightful nature, claiming that he is not the sort of man who cheats, and neither was his father, from what he has heard of him (Phil.87-

---

486 Odysseus carefully introduces the scheme to Neoptolemus, and he captivates him by placing him in a position of importance, marked by ὑπηρέτης, often used in the context of an equal companion, Shuckburgh (1912) 61. Odysseus’ withholding of information is carried in the Achilleid, as Ulysses does not disclose the information about his ruse to Diomedes (Ach.1.711-25).

487 Note Gedike’s conjecture of δόλοις. Odysseus advises Neoptolemus not to lie about his ancestry, since there is no need to disguise it. Philoctetes regards Achilles as an honourable man, further distancing him from Odysseus’ nature and, more to the point, from the scheme altogether (Phil.56-7: ὅταν σ’ ἐρωτᾷ τίς τε καὶ πόθεν πάρει, / λέγειν, Ἀχιλλέως παῖς τὸδ’ οὐχι κλεπτέον).

488 For the judgement of Achilles’ arms, cf. Proclus’ summary of the Aethiopis, arg. 4; Little Iliad arg. 1 and arg. 3, where we learn that Odysseus had awarded Neoptolemus with Achilles’ weapons after the death of the hero and after the fetching of Neoptolemus from Scyros; Pindar, Nem.8.23-32, Od.11.543-55; Met.13. 1-381; Sophocles’ Ajax has the judgement of the weapons as its backdrop (Aj.41: χόλῳ βαρυνθεὶς τῶν Ἀχιλλείων ὀπλῶν).

489 οὔτε ἐξ ἀνιγκῆς (Phil.73) refers back to Odysseus’ feigned madness, a story also relevant for the Achilleid, as it shows (Phil.73) Odysseus’ own voluntary delay in joining the Trojan expedition (Cypr.5). Ulysses is the best person for the rescue mission on Scyros as he too, like Achilles, delayed his recruitment.

490 Note the emphasis placed on ‘nature’ (φύσει; περικότα).

491 Phil.77: ἠλλ’ αὐτὸ τοῦτο δεὶ σοφιζήσῃ, with a verb such as σοφίζω embodying the cunning guiles of Odysseus, echoing line 12 where Odysseus’ plan is called σόφισμα.
90: Λαερτίου παι, τούσδε και πράσσειν στυγῶ/ ἐφυν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἐκ τέχνης
πράσσειν κακῆς, /οὗτ’ αὐτὸς οὖθ’, ὡς φασίν, οὐκέφυσας ἐμέ). Through the
repetition of φύω, a term vastly employed in Greek tragedy to denote natural
disposition, Neoptolemus rapidly detaches himself, and his father, from
Odysseus. He specifies that he would rather fail when acting honestly than be
victorious through behaving dishonourably: it becomes clear that Achilles’ son is
derogatorily alluding to Odysseus himself (Phil.94-5).492 His retort to Odysseus’
plan of persuading Philoctetes echoes the words of Achilles in book 9 of the
_Iliad_ (II.9.312-13: ἐχθρὸς γὰρ μοι κείνος ὀμῶς Αἴδαω πόλησιν/ ὅς χ’ ἔτερον μὲν κεύθη
ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἶπη), thus following intertextually in his father’s footsteps.493
Moreover, it harks back to the Iliadic moment of Achilles singing what is dearest
to him, the famous _deeds_ of men, not words (II.9.189: τῇ ὅγε θυμὸν ἐτέρπεν, ἀειδε
δ’ ὁρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν).494

In the end, Neoptolemus’ thirst for κλέος is his undoing, as Odysseus cajoles
him into performing against his own nature (Phil.117-20).495 Odysseus has
manipulated the son of Achilles by persuading him to think that Neoptolemus will
attain heroic glory _only_ through the positive completion of the mission on
Lemnos.496 By promising Neoptolemus two ‘rewards’, wisdom and nobility,497
Odysseus appeals to the boy’s eagerness to fulfil his heroic destiny, as Achilles’
son has been called to Troy because of his father’s death, and, according to his
Homeric role, he must follow in his father’s path (Phil.331).498

492 For φύω and φύσις employed in Greek tragedy to determine inborn nature, and their semantic
richness, see Buccheri (2012) 137-65; for φύσις in Sophocles, see Beardslee (1918) 22-4.
493 Words we have seen before, see Knox (1964) 121.
494 Note the continuity in the _Achilleid_ (Ach.1.118: ut monstrare lyra veteres heroas alumno; 1.188-89:
canit ille libens inmania laudum / semina).
495 Although not before Neoptolemus manages once more to shame Odysseus’ nature (Phil.108:
οὐκ αἰσχρὸν ἦν ἤδη τῷ ψευδῇ λέγειν).
496 Allan (2011) 4: the search for glory does not stop once persuaded by Odysseus, but Neoptolemus
will continually exhibit this trait throughout the play.
497 Blundell (1988) 139.
498 There is a further critique to Odysseus at Phil.120, as Neoptolemus is aware that deceit is a
shameful stain on his ethical values. Gregory (2016) 130-31 dubs this moment as Neoptolemus’
‘crisis of disillusionment’, as he has set aside his morals, and he continues to be riddled with doubts
and regrets before finally adhering to the Achillean heroic code.
Roisman suggests that Philoctetes, in his attempt to engage in a battle for the paternity of Neoptolemus, metaphorically stands for the dead Achilles, whilst Odysseus needs to undo Neoptolemus’ Achillean nature and heritage.\(^{499}\) This heroic dichotomy is implicitly seen during Philoctetes’ first encounter with Neoptolemus: upon hearing that the boy is the son of Achilles, he abandons every hesitation, and instead addresses Neoptolemus with amiable affection, labelling Achilles ‘his dearest friend’ (Phil.242).\(^{500}\) The battle between Odysseus and Philoctetes therefore surpasses the old grudge, and extends to a contest of βία versus δόλος, the ἄρετή of word (λόγος) that Odysseus embodies versus that of action (ἔργον), championed by Achilles and inborn in Neoptolemus’ nature.

The drama proffers an additional interpretive road that, as we have seen, is crucial for the Achilleid: the Philoctetes exposes the profound anxiety of a son, Neoptolemus, and the hypothetical scenario of him not following his father’s example. In the backdrop of the drama, we see the process of maturation that Neoptolemus must undergo as a hero.\(^{501}\) His self-identity is slippery to grasp, as at times he exhibits traits of Odysseus (namely, his improvisational skills in the first dialogue with Philoctetes), and at times he seems to attain a higher moral ground, as his (arguably inborn) values surface when he is willing to return the bow to its rightful owner.\(^{502}\) Even the appearance of the only deus ex machina in Sophocles’ extant plays, Heracles, has been interpreted as a direct response of Neoptolemus’ inability to choose between heroic modes, and heroic paternal influences.\(^{503}\)

---


\(^{500}\) Later on, Philoctetes refers to Achilles as the finest of men alive, and finest of all dead men, upon realising that Neoptolemus is following his true nature, the one he was born with (Phil.1310-314). Philoctetes regards Odysseus as the evilest of men (Phil. 407-09), a view that he then applies Neoptolemus (Phil.927-28). This is further evidence that these are not so much individuals as much as Homeric heroic allegories at play. Cf. Allan (2011) 6 for complications of the figure of Neoptolemus, as he seems, as Knox (1964) 123 puts it, ‘a spurious Achilles’.


\(^{502}\) These are values such as his concern for his wrongdoings against Philoctetes and his pity (Phil.965-66). The return of the bow is seen as the coming of age for Neoptolemus, as Blundell (1988) 140-42 reads this moment as Neoptolemus ‘finally rejecting his quasi-parental influence and adopts his own birth-right of authority’. Neoptolemus breaks free from his Odyssean precepts, and had Hercules not appeared on stage, he would have brought Philoctetes back to Oeta, rather than sailing to Troy, fulfilling the bond of trust created with the exile (Phil.1398-401). This is crucial because we catch a glimpse of an alternative version of events: I will shortly return to this moment.

\(^{503}\) Roisman (1997) 161-62, who identifies Heracles’ divine status as allure for Neoptolemus. See also Austin (2011) 209. As Roisman (1997) 165 argues, Neoptolemus ‘rejects the human parenthood offered by Odysseus and Philoctetes, each of which is inevitably incomplete and
With the arrival of Heracles on stage, a third and more attractive model of heroism is imparted to Neoptolemus. Heracles effectively brings a sense of resolution, from a divine standpoint, to the continuation of events. Odysseus’ paternal agency is nullified, and he fails as a father figure for Neoptolemus. Heracles’ divine authority proves a powerful power of persuasion, and Neoptolemus still adheres to the sort of martial virtus that his father embodies and passes onto his son. Whether Philoctetes in a way is akin to Odysseus’ heroic conduct, whether Philoctetes embodies a different side to Achilles’ heroism, or whether Philoctetes is the ‘real’ Achillean player, two things become clear from the Sophoclean tragedy. First, that Neoptolemus has undergone a process of self-discovery throughout the Philoctetes, following an inborn nature that derives, in a way, from Achilles. Secondly, that the paternal role that Odysseus has attempted to play for Achilles’ son has effectively been thwarted, as Neoptolemus has rejected following in Odysseus’ footsteps, in favour of a different type of heroic conduct.

4.4 ‘Am I Ulysses?’ No, but you are now, boy: Ulyssian manipulations

In the Philoctetes, Neoptolemus thus emerges as a transitional character, with an adaptive malleability, and displaying a fleeting and adolescent nature. This stems from his failure in substantiating his worth as Achilles’ son, as he has not performed anything to display his father’s qualities during the war. Roisman

flawed in its own war, each of which answers to only part of who he is, in favour of a more remote, more perfect, and more satisfying paternity. This assessment of Neoptolemus’ choice of a divine paternity can be equated, in a way, to Achilles’ own brief choice of a ‘flawless’ paternal figure, Jupiter.

Heracles points them towards the right path, the Sophoclean lesson that heroic achievements can only be attained through friendship and cooperation.

Gill (1980) 139. The difference between Odysseus and Philoctetes is that the latter never advocates deceit in the tragedy, and Neoptolemus’ awareness, by following his inborn Achillean nature, is embodied by his guilt and pity. See Phil.1433-437 for Heracles’ quasi-vatic guidance, exemplified through a simile of two twin lions chasing the same prey: for more on this, see Allan (2011) 22-3. I will not discuss the debate on whether Heracles is Odysseus in disguise, or whether he is closer to Odysseus’ ideals than those of Achilles, cf. Roisman (2005).

Pace Roisman’s conclusion (1997) 165: that Neoptolemus is nothing like his father ‘at all’, since he agrees to do what his father had ‘steadfastly rejected’ in the Iliad (e.g. Ajax attempting to persuade him, the Briseis scandal, etc.).

Blundell (1988) 144.

For instance, he did not sail to Troy on his own accord but had to be fetched there, nor did he ask for his father’s armour, but it was given to him by Odysseus once he arrived at Troy. Roisman
concludes that in the end, Neoptolemus does not resemble his Iliadic father very much at all. But the comparison of Neoptolemus’ performance in the *Philoctetes* against that of his fully formed father in the Homeric sources can be regarded as accounting for Neoptolemus from a disadvantage point. This is not the case, however, if we associate the Sophoclean Neoptolemus with the Statian Achilles.

Achilles is a liminal character with an undeveloped and stifled behaviour. Neoptolemus’ own fluid state between ἀρετή and τέχνη in part derives from the lack of a paternal figure to follow. With no mould of a living father onto which he can shape himself, he attempts to follow his inborn nature and the expectations set by Achilles’ own deeds, though he is not sure of what exactly those might be (*Phil.*351: οὐ γὰρ εἰδόμην). This fluctuation between paternal figures and heroic models, and Neoptolemus’ distorted moral development, are elements that render the *Philoctetes* a true tragedy in the generic sense of the term. The reading of Neoptolemus’ malleability advanced concurrently with the interpretation of his development as a sort of *ephebeia*, an initiation for the youth to the world of adulthood and war. We get a glimpse of that ephebic transition as Neoptolemus goes from being repeatedly identified as παῖς to being qualified as ‘man’ (ἀνήρ) twice: once, after he confesses the trick (*Phil.*910: ἄνήρ ὁδ’) , and once in Heracles’ words (*Phil.*1423-424: ἐλθὼν δὲ σὺν τῷ δ’ ἄνδρι πρὸς τὸ Τρωικὸν / πόλισμα). Achilles also undergoes a transition to adulthood: he is firstly referred to as puer ten times, with these instances significantly clustered in the first half of the first

---

(1997) 167 for Neoptolemus as ‘the son of a heroic and principled man without his father’s heroism and principles’. Cf. Neoptolemus’ words to Philoctetes, where he enhances his own self-worth as if he were another Achilles (*Phil.* 334-90).

Roisman (1997) 167-68.


Hawkins (1999) 338. Roisman (1997) 169-70 believes that these changes of heart foreshadow Neoptolemus’ representation in the post-Homeric sources as a bloodthirsty hero, impious killer of Priam and Astyanax; for the story cf. scholiast on Lycophr.*Alex.*1268. Allan (2011) 23 sees a hint to these with Heracles’ sombre warning to the youth to show reverence to the gods (especially Zeus) when he will conquer the land of Troy (*Phil.*1440-443). I am grateful to Bruce Gibson (*per litteras*), who directs me to *Silv.*5.3.77-9, where we have a description of a much less favourable Neoptolemus.

Vidal-Naquet’s interpretation (1971) 623-31. Some scholars have proposed that Achilles’ cross-dressing can be considered an initiation rite, as Crawley first suggested (1983) 234-45. But see Heslin (2005) 205-7 on the scanty evidence to consider the cross-dressing episode a historical, established *rite de passage*.

**Ach.1.128; 136; 188; 229; 240 (puerilia carmina); 247; 252; 273; 302; 534; 578.**
book of the poem (thematically closely associated with his characterisation at Ach.1.150-170).\textsuperscript{514} In the second book, he is no puer, as he appears as a iuvenemque ducemque (Ach.2.8), magnaestator debite Troiae (Ach.2.32) and heros Aeacius (2.42-3).\textsuperscript{515} Building on these structural similarities, in this section I explore the ways in which the characterisation of Ulysses in the Achilleid draws from his counterpart in Sophocles, and how he manipulates Achilles in a similar way to Neoptolemus. I argue that reading the epic and the drama side by side enhances our interpretations of both. For the Achilleid, it grants us another viewpoint to interpret Ulysses’ agency, challenging traditional ‘positivist’ readings of his actions. Statius’ re-reading of the Philoctetes also provides Neoptolemus in Sophocles with a paternal precedent, so to speak, whereby his father’s actions in Statius validate those of Neoptolemus.\textsuperscript{516}

One of Achilles’ predominant characteristics is his desire to prove his heroic worth. Thessaly is not able to contain the youth, and soon enough even Scyros becomes oppressive (Ach.1.624-25: Quonam timidae commenta parentis / usque feres?).\textsuperscript{517} During his soliloquy, he conjures up the pathetic image of Chiron as a weeping and bereaved parent (Ach.1.629-31), and his regret of his feminine teachings, both through Thetis and Deidamia, is palpable (Ach.1.634-35: ast ego pampineis diffundere bracchia thyrsis/ et tenuare colus – pudet haec taedetque fateri –/ iam scio).\textsuperscript{518} This speech embodies a turning point in the narrative, as Achilles’ words serve as a self-fuel for the subsequent rape, a ‘twisted’ testimony of his masculinity, which is about to take place.\textsuperscript{519} Achilles addresses the river Sperchius, asking the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{514} On ephebes in Flavian literature, see La Penna (2000).
\item \textsuperscript{515} The second epithet foreshadows his death.
\item \textsuperscript{516} Thus, feeding into the idea of poetic one-upmanship that Statius deploys throughout his œuvre, but also of poetic belatedness as a façade and a curse.
\item \textsuperscript{517} See Lauletta (1993) 84-97 and Heslin (2005) 258-59 for Achilles’ soliloquy and Attis in Catullus 63.
\item \textsuperscript{518} On scio, see below.
\item \textsuperscript{519} Though anticlimactic: one would think that he is preparing himself to go to war, but he goes against those martial expectations and rapes Deidamia instead. Heslin (2005) 257 dubs this self-monologue ‘Achilles’ castration anxiety’. Contra Augoustakis (2016b) 218, who believes that the simile of the raptus leo at Ach.1.852-66 ‘is the moment when the hero finds the purpose that will fuel his epic career and will lead him to the epic telos, namely kleos’. From the soliloquy Achilles clearly knows that his masculine virtus has been cast aside, meaning that he was already aware of this side. With the rape scene, there is also the uneasy issue of Achilles’ entrance to manhood and adulthood portrayed as perverted.
\end{itemize}
stream whether misses his swims and the ‘promised hair’ (*Ach.* 1.628-29: *quaerisne meos, Sperchius, natatus / promissasque comas*). This is a clear reference to *Iliad* 23 and Patroclus’ funeral, during which Achilles stands away from the funeral pyre, cuts off his golden locks and gifts them to his cousin rather than to the river (*Il.* 23.141-2). These two words, *promissasque comas*, not only serve the purpose of paying homage to Homer’s treatment of Achilles’ life, but foreshadow the death of Patroclus, and simultaneously transport the reader into the martial world of the Homeric epic. Achilles is envious of Patroclus, as he imagines his cousin brandishing the weapons that were destined for him et (*Ach.* 1.632-33: *tu nunc telam manu, nostros tu dirigis arcus, / nutritosque mihi scandis, Patrocle iugales*). Achilles is profoundly concerned with using his martial *virtus* in a live arena that opposes unwarlike Scyros, imagined as a sort of peace-loving prison (*Ach.* 1.625-26: *primumque imbelli carcere perdes / florem animi?*). Achilles’ distress is further exemplified as he sees his yielding to the feminine sphere as an act of surrender and sacrifice of any prospect of future recognition (*nullus honos*). Achilles is overtly yearning for κλέος just as Neoptolemus had done.

Ulysses’ manipulation begins with his arrival on Scyros, but it is during a conversation with Lycomedes, that, catching the καιρόν, he begins his ruse (*Ach.* 1.784: *arrepto tempore*). At this point in the narrative, he has already noticed a girl among Lycomedes’ daughters who looks quite suspicious (*Ach.* 1.764-66: *At tamen erectumque genas oculisque vagantem / nullaque virginei servantem signa pudoris / defigit comitique obliquo lumine monstrat*). As Achilles was already bewitched by the new arms and heroes, Ulysses pitches to an audience that he knows is already interested (*Ach.* 1.754). Replying to Lycomedes’ wishful desire to contribute in the Trojan mission (*Ach.* 1.785-87), he is quick to describe the conflict as a matter of

---


521 Especially because it is only after Patroclus’ death that Achilles gets his aristeia.

522 Again, the presence of swapped arma foreshadow Patroclus’ death, but also Achilles’. See Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 238: this passage ends with a dramatic decrescendo, as at the start of the soliloquy Achilles seems to lean towards the abandonment of his female transvestism.

523 *Animi* is translated by Heslin as ‘courage’, but it can be rendered as ‘manly virtue’, cf. *Cic.* *Tusc.* 2.43. Interestingly, behind these words there seems to be an echo to Lucretius’ reflection of the absolute harmony between the sentient soul and the body (*Lucr.* 3.769-71).

succession, lineage and duty, where fathers are trading their weapons so that their sons can join the war (Ach.1.787-91). Ulysses positions himself as the ‘father’ of Achilles, as a substitute parent literally in charge of supplying Achilles with arma, but the mention of patres simultaneously underscores the ‘twisted’ handing of weapons that is taking place. Ulysses entices Achilles with words of fame, future virtus and an unparalleled martial arena, which counter Achilles’ previous soliloquy (Ach.1.792-3: …non alias umquam tantae data copia famae / fortibus aut campo maiore exercita virtus). This pledge finds its direct parallel in the Philoctetes, as Odysseus guarantees Neoptolemus two rewards: wisdom, and recognition by the Argive troops. Statian Achilles, like his Sophoclean son, is cajoled with the same promise.

Achilles is an attentive listener, literally and avidly dragging his ear to Ulysses’ story (Ach.1.794: aspicit intentum vigilique haec aure trahentem). Furthermore, Ulysses reiterates (iterat) the magnitude of the task as well as the appeal of these ‘new’ rewards, as he argues that it is there at Troy that omnis honos will be given to superb warriors, implicitly answering to Achilles’ distress at the prospect of nullus honos (Ach.1.798-99: omnis honos illic, illic ingentia certant / nomina). The repetition of illic also constitutes a window allusion to Aeneas’ version of the Trojan War through the eyes of Penelope in the Heroïdes, as Ulysses’ wife imagines an unnamed hero re-telling the events at Troy and its main warriors (Her.1.35-6: illic Aeacides, illic tendebat Ulixes, / hic lacer admissos terruit Hector equos). Statius’ reaction to both the Ovidian and Virgilian accounts is clear from the use of certare, a Virgilian reverberation (Aen.2.29-30: hic Dolopum manus, hic saevus tendebat Achilles; / classibus hic locus, hic acie certare solebant). In Ulysses’ manipulation, repetition of both subject (the Trojan War) and intent (the recruitment of a

---

525 Cf.p.53 and 483.
526 On Ulysses’ facundia here, see Ripoll (forthcoming).
527 See the inversion of these story-telling moments: whilst in the Achilleid it is Ulysses the one who proleptically looks to Troy, in the Heroïdes the narration of the war occurs post-conflict. What is striking, however, is the contextual similarity, as Penelope imagines an unnamed alius retelling the Trojan War in a sympotic context (Her.1.31-2: atque aliuis posita monstrat fera proelia mensa, / pingo et exiguo Pergama tota mero), which is the broader context of the scene between Achilles and Ulysses in the Achilleid.
528 On the Ovidian innovation from Virgil, see Weiden Boyd (2017) 197-98.
warrior) is key. Ulysses echoes the stakes at play here for the Trojan future, but he is also repeating himself, having uttered similar words for a comparable purpose in the Philoctetes.\footnote{Hagedorn (1997) 28-9} Had it not been for provida Deidamia, Achilles would have overwhelmingly, and at once, responded to Ulysses’ call to arms (Ach. 1.802: exisset stratis). Achilles’ realisation is seen in his hesitation, as his gaze is fixed upon the hero, and he is the last to leave the assembly in the room (Ach. 1.804-5: sed haeret / respiciens Ithacum coetuque novissimus exit). The outstanding repetition of adjectival forms of novus, a, um during the reception of the Greeks’ embassy on Scyros (from lines 750 to 815), a cluster of six instances can be further interpreted as an indication of its antonym.\footnote{What we are reading is, in a sense, new, as the players have changed, but also old ‘news’, as we are left with a familiar sense of déjà vu, of having seen certain elements before.} What we are reading is, in a sense, new, as the players have changed, but also old ‘news’, as we are left with a familiar sense of déjà vu, of having seen certain elements before.

Achilles’ fixation with glorious fame becomes even more evident during his final anagnorisis. Ulysses whispers with a gentle voice (Ach. 1.867: summissa voce) to a still cross-dressed Achilles that Troy’s walls are trembling (Ach. 1.871: ipsaque iam dubiis nutant tibi Pergama muris). The direct mention of a ‘paternal figure’ for the first time also seems to support the final acknowledgment of Achilles as a Homeric hero: iuvet haec audire patrem (Ach. 1.898).\footnote{Heslin (2005) 294.} Yet, again, it is not a wholly triumphant moment: Achilles’ heroic identity is somewhat thwarted, as the name of the pater is not explicitly made clear. Ulysses might be alluding to Peleus,\footnote{As envoys will be sent to Peleus (Ach. 1.921-22: mittitur Haemoniam, magnis qui Pelea factis / impleat et classem comitesque in proelia poscat), but these are only sent after Lycomedes has agreed to the marriage between Achilles and Deidamia, therefore the magna facta might be the nuptials! But there is surely some irony here, as magna facta can also be referring to the rape, meaning that, after all, Achilles is following in Peleus’ footsteps.}
Chiron, Jupiter, or even himself as a father figure for the youth. Yet a reason for the anonymity of *pater* is that Achilles here in the *Achilleid* is actually playing Neoptolemus’ role. During Odysseus’ *katabasis* in *Odyssey* 11, a dead Achilles is impatiently waiting to hear news of his son, whether he has followed in his father’s footsteps and joined the war (Od.11.492-93: ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε μοι τοῦ παῖδος ἀγαυοῦ μὴν ἐνίσπες, / ή ἔπετ’ ἐς πόλεμον πρόμος ἐμμεναι, ἤ καὶ οὐκί). Ulysses’ words to Achilles will prompt his martial virility to emerge, something that would indeed please Achilles ‘the father’ in the *Odyssey*. Finally, even Achilles’ miraculous growth (*Ach.1.881: mira fides*) has been associated to a sort of symbolic birth through the paternal agency of Ulysses.

It has been argued that Ulysses’ role as a paternal figure for Achilles and as a ‘metamorphic agent’ is entirely successful, as he has directed Achilles towards the right path to take: Ulysses belongs to the same epic realm as Peleus, and if Peleus is absent, any other heroic warriors will do as *exempla*, and in this particular case, Ulysses. However, Achilles’ transition into the martial world is far from straightforward. Achilles, despite Ulysses’ best efforts, is not entirely ready to continue on the path that Ulysses has presented to him with the offerings of the weapons. In fact, as soon as he hears Deidamia’s *grandia lamenta*, Achilles’ promised *virtus* (*Ach.1.793*) vacillates (*Ach.1.888: haesit et occulto virtus infracta calore est*).

Moreover, Achilles continues to hesitate in a sense (*haesit*), despite Ulysses’

---

533 Even Lycomedes: there could be also be a ‘return to the father’ motif behind the actions of the girls after the dances, as they seek again the paternal threshold (*Ach.1.841-42: repetuntque paterna / limina*).

534 It is interesting that Achilles bears again traces of excess: whereas before he used to measure himself with his father’s spear before (cf.fn.115), now he surpasses every expectation (*Ach.1.879: iam clipeus breviorque manu consumitur hasta*).

535 McAuley (2016) 365 on his transformation: ‘Incredible Hulk’-like, repelling the girl’s clothing simply through the upward and outward force of his own physical materialisation...Moreover, the imagery of divestiture and emergence here is highly suggestive of a kind of metaphorical birth, here inaugurated by the ‘father’ Ulysses”. We can push this point further, as it is an inverted birth through the agency of a male paternal figure, not a female maternal one, stressing further gender-bending imagery.

536 Heslin (2005) 294. During the moment of self-recognition, we are actually unsure as to who is doing the action of loosening the clothing (*Ach. 1.874: iam pectus amictu / laxabat*). McAuley (2016) 365 translates it as ‘already Ulysses was loosening...’ contra Fantuzzi (2012) 80, who has Achilles taking the initiative: however, the subject of *laxabat* is never specified.

537 Rosati (1992) 250 dubs Achilles’ state of mind as between ‘virtus and amor’. For *infractus* used to exemplify a ‘broken’ emotion, cf.Ov.Met.6.627-28: mota quidem est genetrix, infractaque constittira / invitique oculi lacrimis maduere coactis; Tac.Hist.3.42: ne Galliam Narbonensem temere ingredetur,
rhetorical question of *quid haeres?* (*Ach.* 1.867) and his stern indication of *abrumpe moras* (*Ach.* 1.872), so Ulysses’ manipulation is not a triumphant and optimistic endeavour.

### 4.5 *The ships not taken: alternative traditions*

Having examined Ulysses’ manipulation in the poem, the ambiguity in Achilles’ response to Ulysses’ call to arms is rendered even more obvious in a subsequent speech between the hero and Lycomedes (*Ach.* 1.892-909). Achilles pleads with Lycomedes as he attempts to diminish Deidamia’s blame (*Ach.* 1.904-5: *quid enim his obstare lacertis, / qua potuit nostras possessa repellere vires*?), asking the king for a sort of ‘expiation’, an atonement in order to cleanse his ‘sin’ (*Ach.* 1.906: *me luere ista iube*). I read this as a crucial moment that represents Achilles’ undermining of Ulysses’ metamorphic and paternal agency. Achilles, in fact, offers to lay down his weapons, to give them back to the Greeks and to stay on Scyros to fulfil his familial duties, with the present tense conveying a sense of immediacy (*Ach.* 1.906-7: *pono arma et reddo Pelasgis / et maneo*). This striking moment is remarkable, as it uncovers the possibility of a mythic change that cannot possibly happen, an

---

*monendo terruit; simul ceterorum fides metu infracta.* Cf. Barchiesi (2005) 69 for *calor* as poetic inspiration at *Ach.* 1.879-82. But here the *calor* is specifically opposing the heroic *virtus*, underlying the tensions of Achilles’ heroism. It seems like a new kind of inspiration, opposed to the *Pierius menti calor incidit* (*Theb.* 1.3).

538 See Fantuzzi (2012) 90: Lycomedes ‘seems to play a powerful role’, as he ‘almost counterbalances the influence of Ulixes and might have stopped Achilles from leaving’, yet the decision comes from Achilles’ himself, not Lycomedes.

539 Note the Loeb’s caustic comment here, n.109: ‘No more is heard of this proposal’. Fantuzzi (2012) 90-1 notices Achilles’ incertitude. My reading contra Thomas (1986) 117 n.3 who believes that ‘his [sic. Achilles’] offer to forego the war as an atonement for the wrong done to Lycomedes through his daughter carries no conviction and is not seriously considered’. This passage could be interpreted as an Ulyssen ruse on the part of Achilles, almost a crafty example of reverse psychology, but Achilles’ ‘love’ for Deidamia still prevents her abandonment. Rosati (1992) 252 stresses a psychologically complex Achilles torn between epic and elegy: ‘e per un attimo sulla *virtus*, sulla scelta eroica, sarà l’amore ad avere il sopravvento’ (but who does not recognise Ulysses’ part within it, at least not overtly), contra Aricó (1986) 2956, who argues towards a ‘definitive acquisition of the heroic role’. I side with Rosati, although I do not view it as a ‘fleeting moment’. Finally, Achilles here plays his archetypal role (*Il.* 9.307-429), where he refuses to accept gifts in exchange for return to battle, embracing a glorious-less life. Bruce Gibson (*per litteras*) directed me to the presence of the *arma*: if returned to the Greeks, it foreshadows the issue of the arms of Achilles in the *Philoctetes*. The prefix of *re-ddo* implies repetition.
outright deviation from the previous literary tradition. Achilles’ suggestion also represents the sacrifice of his own future κλέος.\textsuperscript{540}

This glimpse of a mythically impossible alternative narrative finds a clear parallel in the \textit{Philoctetes}. When Neoptolemus finally gives in to Philoctetes’ pleas, he agrees to sail home with the Greek archer instead of re-joining the Trojan expedition (\textit{Phil.}1402: \varepsilon\iota\ δοκε\iota, στε\iotaχ\iota\omega\mu\iota). Achilles’ son, following in Achilles’ Iliadic footsteps, casts aside the prospect of future fame, honouring his earlier promise to bring Philoctetes home and sail to Scyros himself instead of going to Troy (\textit{Phil.}1367-369: \\'\alpha\lambdaλ’ \\'\u with ξυνώμοσας, / πέμψον πρός οίκους: καυτός \\'\iota Σκύροι μένων / \exe\kappa\kappa\kappa\omega\sas α\u\nu\tau\o\z\ou\sas ἀπόλλυσθαι κακούς).\textsuperscript{541} The words of Statian Achilles are a direct echo of those of Neoptolemus, as the verbs employed both in the Greek and the Latin, μένω/maneo, can be connected through assonance and are used in an identical context.\textsuperscript{542} In the \textit{Philoctetes}, this moment harks back to an unconventional and untold narrative, and has the power to preclude, however momentarily, the events of the Trojan War. Neoptolemus’ suggestion has the potential of destabilising a prophetic edict, that of Helenus, in the same way that Achilles’ offer would in fact prove that Calchas is \textit{sine Apolline}, as Ulysses has feared (\textit{Ach.}1.552).\textsuperscript{543} Both Statian father and Sophoclean son suggest that they remain on Scyros, choosing private familial values over public civil ones: we are faced with the hypothetical prospect that Troy will not fall.\textsuperscript{544} In both texts, there is a possibility for a substitute literary tradition: Neoptolemus and Achilles threaten to invert and re-design the boundaries of their literary predecessors by

\textsuperscript{540} Fantuzzi (2012) 91 points out the melancholic tinge in Achilles’ words, and labels this moment as ‘Achilles’ psychological dilemma’: the hero oscillates between between his martial future and his family-life at Scyros.

\textsuperscript{541} Vidal-Naquet (1971) 633-34 argues that Philoctetes, when presented with the question that is asked by all tragic heroes (τί δράσω, \textit{Phil.} 1063; 1350) chooses the inglorious, fameless life.

\textsuperscript{542} Linguistically, they both derive from the same proto-Indo-European root *men-.

\textsuperscript{543} For an overview on Helenus’ prophecy and its moral implications, see Gill (1980) 137-46, especially 139-141. Cowan (2009) 325 n. 9 points put that several Attic tragedies open up the possibility for non-traditional routes, subsequently thwarted by a \textit{deus ex machina}.

\textsuperscript{544} Scyros is a good memory for Neoptolemus throughout the drama, see the fondness at \textit{Phil.}969-70.
almost turning to a new, untrodden direction. Statius’ Achilles is therefore characterised as his Sophoclean son.

There are also differences that complicate the picture in the Achilleid. One of the issues concerns ideas of poetic one-upmanship. The Achilleid positions itself as ante-Sophoclea, a poetic move that provides Neoptolemus with a ‘paternal precedence’. Statius answers to the anxieties of Neoptolemus in the drama by having his father, Achilles, face similar uncertainties when challenged by alternative paths. Yet, at the same time, Achilles follows in the footsteps of his son, not his father. The Homeric heroic code is subverted: Achilles does not follow his own literary paternal exemplum. If the recruitment motif in the Achilleid is literally doubling the Sophoclean recruitment of Neoptolemus, the latter’s words to Philoctetes in their first meeting in the drama can be retrospectively applied to the Achilleid. Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes that he does not know whether his own recruitment in the war was carried out by Odysseus sincerely or by deceit (Phil.340-45). In the following lines, Neoptolemus describes his reception by the Greek army: they think that they are beholding another Achilles (Phil.357-8: …ὁμνύντες βλέπειν / τὸν οὐκέτ’ ὄντα ζῶντ’ Ἀχιλλέα πάλιν). But Neoptolemus states, quite brusquely, that the Achilles they know is now gone, dead (Phil.359: κεῖνος μὲν οὖν ἐκεῖτ’.). If Achilles is trailing in Neoptolemus’ literary path (and we know that the Greeks are indeed waiting for Achilles), these words raise some concerns for the future Achilles of the Achilleid. We are again confronted with the uneasy hint that the Achilleis that they are expecting is dead, and that the one that will eventually (and hypothetically) land on Aulis, and then Troy, will be a mere spectre, perhaps a failing one, of his Homeric counterpart. Ultimately, and perhaps most importantly, the distortion of a father shaped onto a son’ mould underscores even further the absence of a paternal exemplum for Achilles.

---

545 Which had already been carried out in the Achilleid with the re-writing of the players in the Odyssey, where Statius had included Thetis in the persecution of Ulysses alongside Neptune (Ach.1.92-4: dabo tollere fluctus / cum reduces Danai nocturnaque signa Caphereus / esset et dirum pariter quaeremus Ulixem), cf.p.118.

546 In a way answering, and overruling, Priam’s words in the Aeneid (2.540-1: at non ille, satum quo te mentiris, Achilles / talis in hoste fuit Priamo).

547 Cf.fn.482.
Another problem is the outcome of the comparison between Neoptolemus and Achilles. Neoptolemus’ promise to Philoctetes is destined to go unfulfilled, as Heracles’ divine intervention stops their unexpected and non-canonical journey. His prophetic words to both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus about their awaited fame at Troy are enough to convince the two men at once to embrace their heroic destiny (*Phil*. 1447-448). Heracles’ apparition not only brings a moral resolution to the end of the tragedy, but also a compelling paternal *exemplum* for Neoptolemus.548 In the *Achilleid*, after Achilles’ suggestion of remaining on Scyros, Lycomedes’ agency underscores the futility of Achilles’ wish of going against the *fata*.549 This seals the continuation of Ulysses’ manipulation of Achilles even in the extant second book of the poem.

At this point in the narrative, the separation between Deidamia and Achilles is settled. The former continues to play her role of the Ovidian *relicta*, whilst the latter looks back to the Scyrian shores.550 The narrator marks out how Achilles’ newly found *virtus* continues to vacillate (*Ach*. 2.29-30: *...occultus sub corde renascitur ardor / datque locum virtus*).551 *Providus* Ulysses notices Achilles’ hesitation, and continues to entice the youth with words of future glory (*Ach*. 2.30-42).552 A few lines on, Ulysses the paternal rhetorician continues his manipulation by rousing Achilles towards ‘sexual jealousy and aggressiveness’, as he conjures up the image of Deidamia being carried away off Scyros by some other plunderer in an attempt to combine Achilles’ newly-found erotic interests with his martial

548 The Heraclean model functions so well in the *Philoctetes* because Neoptolemus is malleable and easily impressionable, and although in the end Odysseus’ plan of bringing Philoctetes to Troy works, the subtleties of Heracles’ message to Neoptolemus function much better than Odysseus’ behaviour, cf. Roisman (1997) 169.
550 For Deidamia as an Ovidian *relicta*, see Rosati (1992) 256-63 and cf.fn.29; cf. Lovatt (2013) 231-32 on the importance of the gaze in this episode.
551 Note the similarity in vocabulary to the ‘hidden love’ at *Ach*. 1.888; see Fantuzzi (2012) 90. The locution *locum dare* develops on the idea that *virtus* is being subjugated by love.
552 Ulysses stays true to his nature, as he twists the story of the trickery on the island: he adduces that it was not his doing that Achilles is finally on his way to Troy, as he would have come regardless (*Ach*. 2.41-2: *nec nostrum est, quod in arma venis sequerisque precantes / venisses*). This self-deprecatimg technique of Ulysses’ own agency highlights Achilles’ hyper-epic destiny: but had it not been for his fraudulent deception, we wonder what could have happened instead. Ulysses is as clever as the text he stars in, as the *Achilleid* tantalises its readers with the twisting of the tradition.
future (Ach.2.81-3).\textsuperscript{553} The cleverness in Ulysses’ manipulation is exemplified by the fact that Achilles does not effectively realise that Deidamia would actually be safer if he had stayed on Scyros with her.\textsuperscript{554} Ulysses is satisfied, because he knows that his words have hit the target (Ach.2.85: *tacuit contentus Ulixes*), and Achilles finally accepts Ulysses’ *praeccepta*.

This signifies the main difference between Neoptolemus and Achilles. In the *Achilleid*, Ulysses is ever-present and necessary, and in the end, Achilles follows Ulysses’ example. Whilst Neoptolemus has rejected the Odyssean values because he has found a better *exemplum* that heightens, and is in conjunction with, his own true, inborn nature, Achilles does not.\textsuperscript{555} Ulysses is able to persuade Achilles not only through the promise of future κλέος that he keeps reiterating, but also because the youth, still unstable between love and *virtus*, does not have, and has not had, another valid *exemplum* to follow, as he has only known the deceitful, Ulyssean code of conduct. The lack of a stable, paternal example for Achilles proffers enough tragic elements, as we have seen in the *Philoctetes*, but if that fatherly model is accepted and accessible only through Ulysses, then it becomes even more dangerously tragic.

Thus, Ulysses’ agency in the *Achilleid* is not forthrightly positive, and cannot be easily accepted as a valid paternal *exemplum*. As we reinterpret the poem with the *Philoctetes* in the background as an analogous narrative, we wonder what sort of hero Achilles will transpire to be. Achilles is (de)constructed as a hero, who follows, to an extent, his *son*’s undesirable *exemplum*, and who will fail to follow both his son, and his Iliadic counterpart. Moreover, as he has chosen to follow an Ulyssean *exemplum*, he enters the martial world with a trick, just as Ulysses had done (granted, voluntarily), thus jeopardising his heroic code.\textsuperscript{556} Achilles’

\textsuperscript{553} Cf. Hagedorn (1997) 64; The image of Deidamia crying out loud the name of Achilles (Ach.2.83: *et magni clamantem nomen Achillis*) reminds the audience of what the Greeks are doing themselves (Ach.1.474: *nomen Achillis amant*).

\textsuperscript{554} Hagedorn (1997) 64.

\textsuperscript{555} Could this be why Neoptolemus becomes a ruthless, savage, impious man in the aftermath of the *Philoctetes*? After all, we have seen the problematic *exemplum* of Herculean strength in the third chapter: the path shown to Achilles’ son is very dangerous, from all ‘paternal’ examples.

\textsuperscript{556} Heslin (2005) 299.
entrance to adulthood is thwarted, and leaves the reader wondering whether Achilles will find his ‘right’ heroic path, or whether his heroism has now acquired a different, Ulyssean aspect to it, just as his son had threatened to shadow Odysseus in the *Philoctetes*. In the next section, I associate the unsuitableness of Ulysses as a father figure for Achilles with his own characterisation in the *Achilleid*, and I elicit the perils that lurk beneath his portrayal.

### 4.6 *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Ulysses’ characterisation

In this section, I continue with the comparison between the *Achilleid* and the *Philoctetes*. Here, I examine similarities in contextualisation between the texts, in order to scrutinise the particular importance placed on both Odyssean missions as hunts.⁵⁵⁷ In the *Achilleid*, in fact, hunting imagery runs deep throughout the second half of the poem, and in particular, marks Ulysses’ undertaking.⁵⁵⁸ I then move the focus solely on the *Achilleid*, because an analysis of Ulysses’ broader characterisation will be seen to add sinister traits to his portrayal, discordant with his positive paternal role.

Vidal-Naquet argues that the *Philoctetes* quickly becomes an arena for the growth development of Neoptolemus, on a par with the Greek institution of *ephebeia*.⁵⁵⁹ The mission that Neoptolemus and Odysseus embark upon is framed in a threatening, aggressive way, and they continuously employ language of recognition and military espionage: this ambush is, intrinsically, also a hunt.⁵⁶⁰ When Odysseus claims that Neoptolemus cannot be the one to take down Troy unless armed with the Greek

---

⁵⁵⁷ Due to space constraints, I will not dwell on the elegiac element to the hunt, at play elsewhere (*Ach.1.568-69: illum sequiturque premisque improbus*). The language in the hunting similes of Ulysses, however, cast a far more disquieting light.

⁵⁵⁸ Is Thetis already aware that Ulysses will be the one who fetches Achilles on Scyros? Much before Calchas’ prophecy, and the subsequent choice of Ulysses as the ‘fetcher’, along with Diomedes, Thetis and Neptune know that Ulysses will be the chosen one for the mission. The use of *sequor* implies that Thetis is as much of a victim as Achilles himself, but it simultaneously signifies that the various prey of Ulysses will become the hunters, as he will become Thetis’ quarry himself (*Ach.1.94: et dirum pariter quaeremus Ulixem; Ach.1.684-88: quippe alta Tonantis / iussa Thetin certas fatorum vertere leges / arcebant aegr / omnibus invisum iam tunc sequetur Ulixem*). For the relationship between Thetis and Ulysses, see Ganiban (2015) 85-6.

⁵⁵⁹ Vidal-Naquet (1971) 623-38, especially 631-32; Odysseus in the sources underwent a similar experience, with his coming-of-age hunt of a wild-boar with his grandfather Autolykos (*Od.19*).

⁵⁶⁰ Vidal-Naquet (1971) 631; which recall Homeric Doloneia. For the hunt in other Sophoclean plays, especially *Oedipus* and Euripides’ *Bacchae*, see Rutherford (2012) 134-35.
archer’s weapon, Achilles’ son replies that if this is the case, then ‘we [Odysseus and himself] must hunt him down’ (Phil.116: θηρατέ’ ὄην γίγνοιτ’ ὄην, εἵπερ δ’ ἔχει). They are metaphorical hunters, and Philoctetes becomes the captured prey. This imagery becomes increasingly explicit and finds its apex when Philoctetes applies hunting vocabulary to describe himself as a cornered animal. His self-awareness of the ironic cyclicity of the hunt highlights even more his tragic situation. He knows that the animals he hunted in the past will become his own hunters now (Phil.954-960, esp. 957: καὶ μ’ οὖς ἔθησαν πρόσθε θηράσοντα νῦν). He is both literal prey, and metaphorical quarry of Odysseus.

In the Achilleid, Ulysses and Diomedes arrive on scopulosa Scyros at sunset (Ach.1.689-91: Frangebat radios humili iam pronus Olympo / Phoebus et Oceani penetrabile litus anhelis / promittebat equis). Ulysses instructs the rest of the expedition to remain on the ships, as he travels to the citadel with fidus Diomedes only, so as to raise no suspicion (Ach.1.691-701). However, Abas, the island’s lookout, has already warned the royal palace of their arrival (Ach. 1.701-703: ignota…sed Graia tamen…carbasa). What follows is a simile of Ulysses and Diomedes advancing together as a pair of wolves on a winter’s night:

procedunt, gemini ceu foedere iuncto
hiberna sub nocte lupi: licet et sua pulset
natorumque fames, penitus rabiemque minasque
dissimulant humilesque meant, ne nuntiet hostes
cura canum et trepidos moneat vigilare magistros.565

(Ach.1.704-8)

561 Cf. Vidal-Naquet (1971) 632-33 for other pointed examples. The words employed are: ἄπατη (1136, 1228), δόλος, δόλοις (91, 107, 608, 1118, 1228, 1282), τέχνη, τεχνάσθαι (80-88), κλέπτειν (967).
562 Phil.1004-9, with words like συνθηρώμεναι (referring back to his hands hunted down by Odysseus), ὑπῆλθες (’you have crept up on me) and ἔθησα (’you hunted [me’]). Cf. Segal (1981) 302 for an analysis on this particular semantic choice.
563 Most notably, and literally, is the case of Actaeon (Met.3.232-52).
564 See Rutherford (2012) 132-33: ‘a second strand of metaphor, echoed throughout the tragic corpus, is that of the hunt. Hunter and prey: the two are inseparable, but the hunter may become prey in his turn’.
565 Brugnoli (1969) 29 believes that Statius is the source for the Dantean passage at Inf. 26.36-7 (’e cosi insieme / a la vendetta vanno come a l’ira’).
The simile borrows from Homer (II.10.296-98), where the same two heroes are compared to lions moving forward in the dark.\textsuperscript{566} Virgil replaces lions with wolves (\textit{Aen}.2.355-60).\textsuperscript{567} This is an image that Statius again borrows, as wolves were thought to be better suitable for the idea of concealment (\textit{Met}.14.788: \textit{tactorum more luporum}).\textsuperscript{568}

This is not the first time that these two heroes have been likened to wolves (amongst other animals). At \textit{Ach}.1.461-65, a rather surprising simile shows all the Greek men (thus Ulysses and Diomedes by proxy) waiting at Aulis equated to frightened beasts being enclosed in an ever-shrinking arena.\textsuperscript{569} These usually aggressive beasts (a boar, a bear, a wolf and lions) are now wholly passive, and even the captured \textit{leones} become the object of disdain for a female deer (\textit{Ach}.1.467: \textit{et captos contempsit cerva leones}).\textsuperscript{570} By reversing the roles, Statius ‘destabilises the gender of the Greek warriors’, and presents the Greek heroes as yearning for Achilles in an elegiac fashion, and thus in a way emasculating them.\textsuperscript{571} However generically subversive the simile might be, the Greek troops are still waiting on warlike soil: epic warriors equated to voracious animals are in fact a stock image for similes in the battlefield.\textsuperscript{572}

\textsuperscript{566} Similarly, in the \textit{Argonautica}, the Argonauts (including Peleus and Telamon) attack the Bebryces and are compared to grey wolves assailing sheep (Ap.Rhod.2.123-29). For an analysis of this extended simile, its rarity and its Homeric resonances, see Knight (1995) 96-8. This simile of hunger driving the animals seems to be an inversion of the simile Menoeceus’ mother with a tigress (\textit{Theb}.10.820-26), whose bereavement leads the animal’s hunger to be stifled.

\textsuperscript{567} Incidentally, Quintilian uses this Virgilian simile to describe similes that are devised to conjure up a vivid image (\textit{Inst}.8.3.72).

\textsuperscript{568} Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 246-47; \textit{Met}.14.778-80: \textit{inde sati Curibus tactorum more luporum/ ore premunt voces et corpora victa sopore/invadunt portasque petunt}. Hawtree (2011) 164-67 points out that in the \textit{Achilleid} (and \textit{Thebaid}) ‘Statius’ wolves display prudence; they are not reckless like the Homeric wolves...relentlessly attacking farmsteads’ (II.4.471-72; 11.72-3). For wolf similes in the \textit{Thebaid}, see Marks (2013) 308-9. In the \textit{Iliad} Odysseus only gets one lion simile shared with Diomedes, yet in the \textit{Odyssey} he is the recipient of five aggressive lion similes out of six (Polyphemus gets other one; striking is Odysseus’ comparison to a hungry lion when facing Nausicaa at Od.6.130-36). Virgil uses wolf imagery in one of the most memorable similes of his epic, where Turnus is likened to a hungry wolf stalking sheltered lambs (\textit{Aen}.9.59-64). Also found in \textit{G}.537-38; cf. Turnus (\textit{Aen}.9.565-66: \textit{quaesitum aut matri multis balatibus agnum / Martius a stabulis rapuit lupus}); Arruns (\textit{Aen}.11.809-15).

\textsuperscript{569} Legras (1908) 62 points to \textit{Theb}.2.553-55.

\textsuperscript{570} This simile also foretells the episode of Iphigenia at Aulis (Lucr.1.84-102). The soon-to-be \textit{cerva} looks down on the heroes as they are compared to captured animals, cf.fn.250.

\textsuperscript{571} Again, see Moul (2012) 292-95.

\textsuperscript{572} Moul (2012) 293.
In the wolves simile on unwarlike land (Ach.1.207: *inbelli nuper Lycomedis ab aula*; 1.625: *imbelli carcere*), the presence of predatory imagery poses two intriguing issues: the simile stands out for its narrative unsuitability.\textsuperscript{573} Abas has already betrayed the presence of the Greeks on Scyros to Lycomedes: Ulysses and Diomedes are not aware that they have been spotted, but the indication of concealment that the simile portends seems therefore superfluous, even redundant. The second issue concern its aggressive connotations: they are substantiated in the *Iliad* and in the *Aeneid*, but do not seem justifiable in the *Achilleid*.\textsuperscript{574} Ripoll and Soubiran argue that the simile should not be read in light of its portended violence, but rather the idea of inner concealment. The two heroes hide the true purpose (*dissimulant*) of their embassy just as the two wolves that are approaching are able to restrain their impulses, but this does not account for its violent connotations.\textsuperscript{575} The simile is striking *precisely because* of its unnecessary viciousness in the *Achilleid*.\textsuperscript{576}

The heroes are walking up to Lycomedes’ palace in plain sight (Ach.1.709: *Sic segnes heroes eunt campumque patentem*), a route through an open field between the harbour and the acropolis (Ach.1.710: *qui medius portus celsamque interiacet urbem*).\textsuperscript{577} This description underscores even more overtly the simile’s paradoxicality and awkwardness, as it thwarts the secrecy of the heroes’ stride. The deep-seated anger the wolves are attempting to conceal from within (*penitus*) brings to light the martial breach that the mission embodies. This is not just a description of anger concealed or repressed: the violent simile with ravenous wolves looking for prey, vehicles as cleverly prudent as their tenors, further foreshadows a sort of sinister threat that the two heroes represent for the islanders, and especially for Achilles.\textsuperscript{578}

---

\textsuperscript{573} This applies also to the Amazons simile at Ach. 1.758-60, see the extended examination in Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 253-54, cf.fn.363.

\textsuperscript{574} Juhnke (1972) 169-70.

\textsuperscript{575} Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 247.

\textsuperscript{576} The simile also emphasises again the more sinister Odyssean heroic code.

\textsuperscript{577} Technically nighttime, as they have arrived at sunset.

\textsuperscript{578} The ‘parental’ hunger-anger that drives these wolves must be singled out, at it conjures up the idea of Ulysses (and Diomedes) as father/mother figures.
Wolf similes form an intrinsic part of the hyper-heroic realm of aggressive behaviour, and since they are animals that hunt in packs, they are an appropriate vehicle for comparison to warrior ensembles (e.g. the simile in the *Aeneid*).\(^{579}\) If the Ovidian notion of concealment is somewhat foiled as it follows Abas’ prompt announcement, then the dissimulated ferocity of Ulysses and Diomedes is striking for its violent undertones, which not only concerns the vicious imagery already present, but also its foretold menacing implications. In the *Metamorphoses*, wolf imagery is generally used to highlight the predatory violence that the tenor of the simile, often a divine or mortal woman, is subjected to.\(^{580}\) Daphne is likened to a lamb fleeing from a wolf during Apollo’s pursuit (*Met.*1.505: *sic agna lupum*); Arethusa is terrified like a lamb that is hearing howling wolves (*Met.*5.626-27: *anne quod agnæ est, / si qua lupos audit circum stabula alta frementes*); Philomela facing Tereus is associated with a lamb trembling when mangled by the jaws of a wolf (*Met.*6.527-28: *illa tremit velut agna pavens, quae saucia cani / ore excussa lupi nondum sibi tuta videtur*); and Hesperia flees from Aesacus like a deer from a wolf (*Met.*11.771-72: *veluti perterrita fulvum/ cerva lupum*).\(^{581}\)

Another Ovidian wolf, however, serves as an apt parallel for the passage in the *Achilleid* due its familial background.\(^{582}\) During Ceyx’s narration Daedalion and Chione’s fate, Onetor, Peleus’ cowherd, interrupts and warns Peleus of menacing wolf (Psamathe’s doing for the killing of Phocus) that has ravaged the herd and attacked the herdsmen. Peleus futilely attempts to pray to Psamathe, but he fails: only through Thetis’ actions as suppliant, the wolf is then turned to stone, and the threat is contained. The description of this wolf bears resemblances to the metaphorical wolves Ulysses and Diomedes:

\[
\text{inde fragore gravi strepitans loca proxima terret,}
\text{belva vasta, lupus iuncisque palustribus exit,}
\text{oblitus et spumis et sparsus sanguine rictus}
\]

---


\(^{580}\) Which would be appropriate in the *Achilleid*, as Achilles is still cross-dressed.

\(^{581}\) See *Fast.*2.799-800, where Lucretia is likened to a lamb quivering before a wolf.

\(^{582}\) Apart from Lycaon in book 1 of the *Metamorphoses*, that is. In book 11 of the *Metamorphoses* we also have the Ovidian account of Peleus’ rape of Thetis. For this episode in the *Achilleid*, Mendelsohn (1990).
fulmineos, rubra suffusus lumina flamma.
qui quamquam saevit pariter rabieque fameque,
acrior est rabie: neque enim ieiunia curat
caede boum diramque famem finire, sed omne
vulnerat armentum sternitque hostiliter omne.⁵⁸³

This Ovidian animal follows the impulses of rage and hunger: the line rabieque
fameque echoes the fames…rambiemque minasque of the Achilleid. Furthermore, the
Ovidian wolf represents a direct threat to Peleus’ cattle, and to Peleus and Thetis
themselves, and its unnecessary violence is driven by an immoderate rage, openly
causing destruction of its surroundings.⁵⁸⁴ Similarly, in the Achilleid, the wolf
simile is deployed to epitomise violence to Achilles himself.

The hostile connotations behind the characterisation of Ulysses (and
Diomedes) carry on to another simile. Once Lycomedes accepts the Greek
embassy into his palace, another simile is deployed to describe the rapacious side
of Ulysses:

interea visu perlustrat Ulixes,
scrutaturque domum, si qua vestigia magnae
virginis aut dubia facies suspecta figura;
porticibusque vagis errat totosque penates,
ceu miretur, obit: velut ille cubilia praedae
indubitata tenens muto legit arva Molosso
venator, videat donec sub frondibus hostem
porrectum somno positosque in caespite dentes.

(Uch.1.742-49)

Ulysses scans Lycomedes’ house in search of a maiden among the king’s all-
female offspring whose facial features might seem questionable. Its violent
undertones have not gone unnoticed: Heslin argues this simile of Ulysses as a

⁵⁸³ This reworks the simile in Aeneid 2.
⁵⁸⁴ Just as this wolf was a threat to Peleus’ cattle and Peleus himself, the wolves in the Achillean
simile are a threat to Peleus’ offspring.
The simile has two marked Virgilian precedents that underscore the importance of the hunting metaphor, the first again projecting the narrative on the Trojan plane. In *Aeneid* 2, when Aeneas recounts Creusa’s abandonment and his attempt at retracing back his steps to find her, he employs a similar image to describe his scrutinising gaze (*Aen.*2.753-54: *repeto et vestigia retro / observata sequor per noctem et lumine lustro*). Aeneas, after witnessing Troy engulfed by the flames, sees Phoenix and Ulysses in the empty courtyards of Juno’s temple, as they guard the spoils of war (*Aen.*2.761-63: *et iam porticibus vacuis Iunonis asylo / custodes lecti Phoenix et dirus Ulixes / praedam adservabant*). Virgil’s *porticibus vacuis* is recalled in Statius with his variation *porticibusque vagis*: just as Ulysses is guarding the ‘prey’ in the *Aeneid*, here we find the hero looking for another prey, Achilles. The significance of the location in the *Aeneid*, Juno’s sanctuary, is also relevant for the *Achilleid*, as Scyros is represented as being guarded by Minerva *Tritonia* (*Ach.*1.696-7: *placidique super Tritonia custos / litoris*). It seems, again, that Statius’ narrative leaps to the end of the Trojan War. The vocabulary of the simile also recalls the most well-known hunters of the *Aeneid*: in book 9, when Nisus is looking for Euryalus, he scans his surrounding and retraces his footsteps as he wanders the groves in search for his companion (*Aen.*9.392-3: *et vestigia retro / observata legit dumisque silentibus errat*).

Even before the simile with the *venator*, the vocabulary that describes Ulysses’ gaze and movements recall the context of a hunt, not only that of an investigation. *Scrutor* exemplifies the actions of hounds during a hunt

---

585 Heslin (2005) 151. Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 252 note that these similes are connected, but no analysis of their implications and impact is proposed, only a dramatic progression. Contra Perutelli (2006) 89, who interprets this is as a comic scene (i.e. Ulysses the tourist in Lycomedes’ palace).
586 Repeated again after Ulysses retells the mustering at Aulis (*Ach.*1.795: *cum pavent aliae*).
587 We also saw Deidamia and the rest of Lycomedes’ daughters worshipping the goddess, the guardian of Scyros’ shores (*Ach.*1.285-6: *Palladi litoreae celebrabat Scyros honorum / forte diem*).
The entire Greek mission on Scyros can be framed within a venatorial context, as Diomedes is ready to join Ulysses in the quest for the truth (*Ach.* 1.712-13: *qua nunc verum ratione paramus / scrutari*). Yet although Diomedes has embarked upon the expedition, it is clear by the narrative movement from *two* wolves to *one* individual – playing hunter and hunting animal – that Diomedes plays quite the secondary role. In other words, from two twin wolves that are depicted in equal terms, we transfer to a simile that presents the *venator* as the main character accompanied by a lesser figure, his faithful dog. The *muto*...*Molosso* of the simile has been interpreted as Diomedes, but the wolf-dog's actions in the simile are actually more representative of Ulysses' visual movements prior to the simile.

---

95, who argues that Statius fixates on Ulysses' scrutiny, which seems to me an inversion of the gaze of the Scyrian women directed at Achilles (*Ach.* 1.366-69). Later on, when Ulysses continues his manhunt, he surveys both faces and breasts (*Ach.* 1.761-62: *tum vero intentus vultus ac pectora Ulixes / perlibrat visu*), in the hope of noticing the absence of breasts that would betray Achilles. Feeney argues that 'identifying withy Ulysses and gazing through his eyes as he attempts to spot the difference between Achilles and the other girls, is a revealing, disquieting, and rather revolting experience'. Nuzzo (2012) 141 on *perlibrat*: 'il composto, attestato solo in prosa prima dell’età flavia, ricorre quattro volte in Silio Italico, di cui una a inizio di verso (5.321), ma è sempre usato nel suo senso proprio di «soppesare» e ha per oggetto armi (*hastam, iaculum, bipennem*); non altrove si incontra invece nel senso traslato che ha qui di “indagare”. The choice of words, however, is not fortuitous: it is significant in this violent context that Ulysses uses his gaze as a metaphorical weapon (*visu*), repeated at *Ach.* 1.742.

589 There is something metapoetic about the use of *vestigia* (and footsteps in general), especially because of the *Thebaid’s sphragis* (*Theb.* 12.817: *sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora*). Ulysses might be looking for vestigial traces of the Homeric Achilles: after all, this *virgo* is still *magna*.

590 Danzer (2013) 112.
591 Benton (2002) 34-5 talks about this passage in the *Troades* as an ‘investigation’.
Ulysses thoroughly investigates, scours the place, roaming around its labyrinthine halls. *Errare* is a verb often used to represent wandering animals, describing the lioness on the prowl lurking the plains in Virgil (G.3.245-46: *tempore non alio catulorum oblita leaena / saevior erravit campis*), or Silvia’s roving deer surprised by the arrival of Ascanius’ dogs, although in the *Aeneid* it is used to describe the prey rather than the predator (*Aen*.7.490-91: *ille…errabat silvis*; 493-94: *hunc procul errantem rabidae venantis Iuli / commovere canes*). Thus, Ulysses’ movements before the actual simile already present him as a hunter; nevertheless, they also seem to cast him in the more animalistic role of the Molossian wolf-dog too, in charge of discovering the whereabouts of his prey. This mission is Ulysses’, and Ulysses’ only.\textsuperscript{593}

The only simile in Latin literature that features Molossian wolf-dog alongside a hunter occurs in the *Bellum Civile*, so Lucan is the archetype for Statius here.\textsuperscript{594} The simile is as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
Sic, dum pavidos formidine cervos
claudat odoratae metuentes aera pinne
aut dum dispositis attollat retia varis,
venator tenet ora levis clamosa Molossi,
Spartanos Cretoque ligat, nec creditur ulli
silva cani, nisi qui presso vestigia rostro
colligit et praedae nescit latrare reperta
contentus tremulo monstrasse cubilia loro.
\end{verbatim}

* (BC 4.437-44)

Marcus Octavius, commander of a Pompeian fleet in the Adriatic, is waiting for the rafts carrying Antonius’ troops to be in open water, as he chooses not to attack. Asso argues that ‘the hunting simile conveys the state of mind on both

\textsuperscript{593} Note his reticence to tell Diomedes of the plan (*Ach*.1.719-25), above fn.486.
\textsuperscript{594} First noticed by Legras (1908) 63; Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 251-52, who offer *Pun*10.77-82 and *Thyes*.497-501 for the idea of a silent dog tracking a wild boar. Ripoll and Soubiran identify the inimical prey in the passage (*hostem*) as a boar, arguing that through the final detail (*dentes*) we can identify the animal, but I am sceptical. If indeed a boar, though, then this hunt for Achilles becomes even more significant on Ulysses’ part because of the hunt of the wild boar with his grandfather Autolykos, making this Ulysses’ ‘first’ expedition, cf.fn.559. On Lucan, Legras (1908) argues that the engagement with Lucan is limited, but I argue that Lucan is a model here.
meaning that the Pompeian side is patiently waiting for the traps set in the sea to work, and the terror of Antonius’ men having seen the enemy just on the opposite shore (BC 4.415-17). Similarly to the Achilleid, in Lucan the hunter is holding on to one of his hounds, trained not to bark upon the discovery of the prey’s lair (contentus…monstrasse cubilia). The description of the dog showing (monstrasse) the prey’s den is significant here, as it seems to push even further the characterisation of Ulysses’ double role as both the hunter and the Molossian hound. When Ulysses finally comes across a ‘girl’ that does not have any signs of virginal chastity (at tamen erectumque genas oculisque vagantem / nullaque virginei servantem signa pudoris), he stares and indicates ‘her’ to Diomedes with a side-long glance: the prey has been located (Ach. 1.766: defigit comitique obligo lumine monstrat).

The engagement with Lucan continues, as the unidentified Statian prey finds a parallel. The hostile place the Caesarians believe to be a safe haven is described as follows:

Non pabula tellus
pascendis summittit equis, non proserit ullam
flava Ceres segetem; spoliariat gramine campum
miles et attonso miseris iam dentibus arvo
castrorum siccas de caespite volserat herbas.

(BC 4.410-14)

The men engage in animalistic behaviour, a sort of ‘perverted grazing’ due to their adverse circumstances, and they will become the frightened stags in the subsequent simile: desperation and a foreboding sense of impending doom are the two main emotions at play. The victims in Lucan and Statius bear some

596 Dilke (1954) 132.
597 On defigere, cf. [Tibullus] in Messalla’s eulogy ([Tib.]3.7.82-5: nam te non alius belli tenet aptius artes,/ qua deceat tutam castris praeducere fossam,/ qualiter adversos hosti defigere cervos,/ quemve locum duxit melius sit claudere vallo). It is coincidentally interesting Messalla is described as having surpassed all of Ulysses’ conquests (3.7.31-81).
598 Asso (2010) 193: ‘the ostensible effect of the paradox is to debase these fames-ridden humans into grazing sheep’. 

153
resemblances. In the Statian passage, the hunter is crossing the fields (arva), and his target rests its fangs on the turf (positosque in caespite dentes), whereas in Lucan the men, the metaphorical prey, have grazed the shrivelled grass with their own famished teeth (attonso...arvo; miseris...dentibus; de caespite). Statius’ apparently surprising usage of this simile thus recalls a moment a great anxiety and expectation in Lucan, as the men are resolved to continue with their suicide pact. Juhnke’s observation on the aggressiveness of the wolves simile in the Achilleid can be applied here, especially in light of Lucan’s dark and ominous context. At first, it might appear paradoxical to see Ulysses as a ravenous wolf, as a savage hunter and perhaps even as his loyal hound, but the hero’s arrival on Scyros with the Greek troops represents the grandeur of the epic realm violently intruding on the land of Lycomedes. Finally, it casts an uneasy tinge on Achilles, the willing but unwitting prey.

Due to the configuration of the Greek expedition as a predatory chase, the Amazon simile that is bestowed upon Deidamia, Achilles still in drag, and her sisters during the reception on the embassy becomes even more significant if read within this particular context. This simile depicts Lycomedes’ daughter at dinner with the Greek men, and they are equated to Amazons returning from a bloodthirsty mission (Ach.1.758-60: subeunt, quales Maeotide ripa, / cum Scythicas rapiere domos et capta Getarum/ moenia, sepositis epulantur Amazones armis). Just as in the case of the hunter’s simile, Ripoll and Soubiran highlight the ‘surprise’ effect and the narrative inappropriateness, as it stands again the more conventional use

---

599 Juhnke (1972). There is a hint of Civil War in the representation of the Trojan War as a conflict (Ach.1.467: gemini pariter sua bella capessant /Atridae famamque...). Feeney notes (2004) 88-9 that there is a progression from the number seven, teasing us with another Thebaid with the seven commanders of the Statian epic (Agamemnon, Menelaus, Diomedes, Sthenelus, Antilochus, Ajax and Ulysses), to the One missing, solus Achilles.

600 See the tremendous noise caused by their arrival (Ach.1.750: rumor in arcana iamdudum perstrepet aula). I have argued elsewhere that the context of the passage, as its whole context, is highly evocative of the arrival of Aeneas in Carthage at Dido’s court in Aeneid 1, and that this intertextual model accounts for a number of elements in the reception scene.

601 Heslin (2005) 152-55 offers an examination of the battle of the gaze between Ulysses and the girls/Deidamia. Whilst Ulysses attempts to ‘undress’ Achilles with his eyes, Deidamia strives to cover up the hero, which is becoming progressively harder to do (Ach.1.766-71). For an analysis of the simile in terms of its defiance of established gender roles, see Panoussi (2013) 342-45. For other Amazonian references, see Ach.1.353 and Ach.1.888. See Davis (2015) 167-68 for a comparison between the Amazon Hyppolyte in the Thebaid and Deidamia here. I argue elsewhere for a strong intertextual connection to Val.Fl.5.
of an Amazon simile within a warlike context. But in light of the hunting imagery that pervades the Greeks’ arrival on Scyros and the actions of Ulysses (and Diomedes) the simile acquires a new, apt meaning. The ‘battle of the gaze’ that Heslin argues for can be extended to a ‘battle of the hunters’, as Deidamia effectively foils (momentarily) Ulysses’ plan. He is called providus twice in the text (Ach.1.542; 1.698), and the only other character who is assigned the same adjective is Deidamia (Ach.1.802-3: ni provida signo / Deidamia): she becomes a direct antagonist to Ulysses. Through venatorial imagery, the Amazon simile might not only show the transgressive potential of Lycomedes’ daughters who are partaking in all-male symposia, as Heslin argues, but also the defiant stance that Deidamia takes against the completion of Ulysses’ venatorial mission.

4.7 Thesiphone, thou help me for tendyte / Thise woful vers: Ulysses the Fury

These dangerous undertones to Ulysses’ characterisation bring me to the final section of this chapter. I conclude the examination of Ulysses’ agency by investigating another role that the hero assumes: that of a Fury. I argue that Ulysses’ descent on Scyros is presented as equivalent to a Virgilian and Silian Fury, and that this representation turns his arrival in an incipit of war, enhancing the tragic/epic elements of his portrayal.

We touched upon the venatorial tinge behind Diomedes’ words (Ach.1.712-13). The line belongs to a larger conversation between Ulysses and Diomedes:

\[
\text{tunc haerentem Ithacum Calydonius occupat heros:} \\
\text{‘Nos vocat iste labor: neque enim comes ire recusem,} \\
\text{si tua cura trahat. licet ille sonantibus antris} \\
\text{Tethyos aversae gremioque prematur aquosi} \\
\text{Nereos, invenies. tu tantum providus astu} \\
\text{tende animum vigilem fecundumque erige pectus:} \\
\text{non mihi quis vatum dubiis in casibus ausit}
\]

\[602\] Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 253 offer parallels (Aen.11.659-63; Pun.2.73-6; 8.428-30, Theb.5.144-46) and argue that we ought to read this simile as enhancing Deidamia’s virginal status.
\[603\] Contra Jorge (1990) 53 n.108: ‘Here the robust nature of the simile, lacking the appropriateness it has in the Thebaid [sc. book 5], is reduced to the level of the absurd’.
\[604\] Of course, a foil necessary for the trick to occur. See Murray (2014) 53 for power-relations expressed through gaze and Achilles’ passivity.
\[605\] Also noted by Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 259.
\[606\] Thus, building on Murray (2014) 54 and Heslin (2005) 154.
After Calchas’ prophecy, Diomedes tells Ulysses to engage his vigilant soul with the task at hand, and to put his fertile pectus, intended as the seat of intelligence and emotions, to it. Fecundus here holds the meaning of ‘fertile’, ‘prolific’ of schemes and deception.\(^6\) The phrase *fecundumque erige pectus* has been acknowledged as an allusion to Virgil’s *Aeneid* 7, in a passage where Juno, in a wonderful programmatic display of her well-known thirst for vengeance, stirs Allecto’s chthonic powers, which prompts the Fury to rouse the anger of the native Italians:

\[
\text{quam Iuno his acuit verbis ac talia fatur:}\n\text{‘hunc mihi da proprium, virgo sata, Nocte laborem,}\n\text{hanc operam, ne noster honos infractave cedat}\n\text{fama loco, neu conubis amibre Latinum}\n\text{Aeneadae possint Italosve obsidere finis.}\n\text{Tu potes unanimos armare in proelia frater}\n\text{atque odiis versare domos, tu verbera tectis}\n\text{funereaesque inferre faces, tibi nomina mille,}\n\text{mille nocendi artes. Fecundum concute pectus,}\n\text{dissice compositam pacem, sere crimina belli;}\n\text{arma velit poscatque simul rapiat iuventus’}.\]

\text{(Aen.7.330-40)}

In line 338, Juno prays to Allecto that the Fury ‘shake/beat violently her fertile chest’. Horsfall sees in *concutere* the deliberately violent idea of ‘searching’, as in ‘ransacking’, but it also holds the metaphorical meaning of ‘shaking out a garment’.\(^7\) The Virgilian context is fertile with agricultural imagery, as *concutere* must be read in combination with *fecundum* and *sere* in the following line. The idea is that Allecto is ‘sowing, from the fertile folds of her *sinus*, the seeds of war’, a rather sinister crop.\(^8\) Both in Virgil and Statius, this signifies an inversion of the

\(^{8}\) Horsfall (2000) 235.
original meaning of the word, an inevitable, nefarious perversion of the natural or normal sense attached to ideas of both bodily and poetic fertility.\textsuperscript{610}

Aspects of Allecto’s description are used to designate Ulysses’ own capabilities in the \textit{Achilleid}, casting him in the role of Allecto: Ulysses is the agent \textit{belli} just as the Fury is.\textsuperscript{611} The proemial significance here is striking: in the \textit{Achilleid}, this is a turning point in the narrative, a new incipit, just as in \textit{Aen. 7} we are moving towards war.\textsuperscript{612} Ulysses’ agency is the narrative drive. Although using \textit{variatio} for the action conveyed through the verb \textit{concurre}, the verb \textit{erigere} holds a similar meaning of ‘rousing’ or ‘exciting’ one’s mind towards a certain goal.\textsuperscript{613} We see this idea play out in the metaphorical sense, for instance, in Lucan, when Pompey exhorts his wife Cornelia to lift her spirit (\textit{BC} 8.76-8: \textit{Erige mentem, / et tua cum fatis pietas decertet}). The distinct Virgilian flavour to the depiction of Allecto is seen in Silius. In \textit{Punica} 2, after Hercules succeeds in convincing \textit{Fides} to return to Earth and inspire the citizens of Saguntum, Juno sends down Tisiphone disguised as one of the women, Tiburna, who persuades the citizens not only to build a funeral pyre in the city, but to join her in what can only be described as a mass suicide:

\begin{verbatim}
illa deos summumque Iovem turbantia tela,
quis Acheronta moves, flammam immanesque chely-
dros
stridoremque tuum, quo territa comprimit ora
Cerberus, ac, mixto quae spumant felle, venena
et quicquid scelerum, poenarum quicquid et irae
pectore fecundo coquitur tibi, congere praeceps
in Rutulos totamque Erebo demitte Saguntum.
hac mercede Fides constet delapsa per auras.
\end{verbatim}

\textit{(Pun.2.535-42)}

\textsuperscript{610} See for instance Cic.\textit{Div} 1.13.20-3 (= fr. 0.71-4 Courtney): \textit{haec adeo penitus cura videre sagaci / otia qui studiis laeti tenuere decoris, / inque Academia umbrifera nitidoque Lyceo / fuderunt claras fecundi pectoris artis}).

\textsuperscript{611} For Allecto’s metapoetic role in \textit{Aeneid} 7 in relation to the Apollonian Muse, Erato, see Bocciolini-Palagi (2016) 55-97.

\textsuperscript{612} See Conte (2007) 213-31 on the \textit{Aeneid}’s multiple proems.

\textsuperscript{613} We can also interpret \textit{erigere} in its most literal sense, to ‘raise’. The women are resting on the couches, Deidamia continues to pull Achilles towards her (\textit{Ach.} 1.766-67), but as we have seen, we know that he wishes to stand up at once (\textit{Ach.} 1.802: \textit{exisset stratis}). The idea of \textit{erigere} the \textit{pectus} is also interesting, as Feeney points out the emphasis on –\textit{pect} throughout the reception scene (2004) 95, cf.fr.588. The idea of raising one’s chest is what Achilles should not do in order to be discovered: it is ironic that Diomedes bids Ulysses to do so.
The immediate model for this Tisiphone is Allecto. They bear striking resemblances, as Tisiphone exhibit a teeming breast filled with the driving forces of the wars. Given Silius' adoption and re-working of the Virgilian locution for an analogous situation in the *Punica*, it is striking that Statius would employ an idiom so permeated with violence to characterise Ulysses. The context of the phrase cloaks Ulysses' mission in Scyros again with a darker, more threatening atmosphere that proleptically looks to the battlefield. This appears to be another intrusion of martial epic into the feminine world of Scyros. Furthermore, Diomedes assumes the Junonian mantle in the *Achilleid*, as he refers to their joint mission as *iste labor* (*Ach.1.529*), alluding to Juno’s *hunc…laborem* and *hanc…operam*, where the duplication of the same concept grants Juno’s plea with a sense of immediacy. The anaphoric address of *tu…tu…tibi* in the *Aeneid* extract can be perhaps picked up on again by Diomedes’ stern address of Ulysses as *tu* (‘you, the only one who…’).

The last line of the passage in the *Aeneid* also fits in well in the context of Ulysses’ mission. Juno’s final wish, the authoritative ‘let young warriors want arms, and at once demand them and snatch them up’, can be relocated in Statius. It will not only be through the tearing of the feminine dress that Achilles can (re)gain control of his masculinity, but it will be also through the actual snatching of the arms during Ulysses’ trick. The hero will place among the feminine objects that he will present to Lycomedes' daughters, a spear and a shield, and the young boy will be drawn to these weapons. And in fact, once the Greek cohort arrives on Scyros, whilst the rest of Lycomedes’ daughters are terrified at the disruption that their arrival has caused, Achilles is eagerly desiring to see the weapons that these new heroes are carrying with them (*Ach.1.754-55: Pelides avidusque novos heroas et arma / vel talis vidisse cupit*). Furthermore, we have already seen Ulysses’ hyperbolic speech attempting to rouse Achilles, and the way that Ulysses portrays the Trojan War as a matter of lineage and repetition (*Ach.1.791: tradunt arma patres, rapit inrevocata iuventus*). The use of *rapio* in direct conjunction with *arma*, and the ending of both sentences with *iuventus*, link the passages together. Allecto will instil *amor belli* into the hearts of the young Trojan warriors, which mirrors
the events that are happening everywhere in Greece, of which Ulysses is part of, where fathers are handing down their arms to the youths. Ulysses is the one who will provide the young hero with the tangible weapons that will aid his transition into the heroic world.

4.8 Timete Danaos et dona ferentis: conclusion

In light of his previous association and striking resemblance both to the nefarious missions of Allecto and Tisiphone and to their chthonic powers, Ulysses’ endeavour on Scyros is tainted with hints towards nefas and martial strife, and he assumes the mantle of a sort of ‘perverted’ father figure for the youth. His tricks effectively send Achilles to his death, thus also fulfilling his role as Fury. Whilst sending a son to war is not a sign of a ‘bad father’, there is a difference between the traditional act of handing down weapons from father to son and the way Ulysses uses a scheming trick to arm Achilles. In this chapter we have therefore seen that, by reading Sophocles’ Philoctetes alongside the Achilleid, the paternal role that Ulysses plays in the poem is not devoid of issues, and it underscores both the inappropriateness of this manipulative father-figure for Achilles and the tragic and dangerous tinges of Ulysses’ characterisation in the poem. Ulysses’ mission on Scyros can be interpreted as triumphant, but it manifests elements that conjure up rather sinister images. Here, I advance a final reflection on Ulysses’ role here in this passage. The only instance of the phrase pectus fecundum (accompanied by a genitive) in the Statian corpus occurs in the eighth book of the Thebaid (Theb.8.170-72: omnia laudes, / Amphiarae, tuas fecundaque pectora veri / commemorant lacrimis). The narrator directly addresses the warrior-seer as a sign of respect for the vates, and Augoustakis’ commentary makes the connection with the Achilleid.614 What is striking is that the context is certainly not similar: Diomedes endows Ulysses with oracular powers that appear to go beyond quasi-vatic duties, but Ulysses is not a vates. In Ovid’s Tristia, pectus fecundum is closely associated with poetic inspiration (Trist.5.12.37-8: denique non parvas animo dat gloria vires, / et fecunda facit pectora laudis amor). Ulysses’ agency as a Fury and as an imagined vates programmatically accelerates the narrative towards its epic telos.

614 Augoustakis (2016a) 135.
By having Ulysses in the role of Allecto in book 7 of the *Aeneid*, which begins the 'Iliadic' part, we are faced again with both a compressed narrative and a second half of the poem looks to ‘proper’ epic themes. Ulysses is invoked as the necessary, proemial agent that will set epic on its rightful path, and this nefarious imagery embodies the rupture of the ‘softer’ Scyrian narrative. Ulysses’ role as *vates* also elicits a comparison with the Statian poetic *persona* of the *paedagogus*. Ulysses doubts whether he will be the one able to bring an *armed* Achilles to Aulis (*Ach.1.547-46: sed me spes lubrica tardat: / grande quidem armatum castris inducere Achillem*). Similarly, the *Achilleid*’s poet promised to *deducere* the hero throughout the whole of Troy (*Ach.1.6*). This reflection of the *vates* and the poetic *persona* brings me to the following chapter, where I explore the role of the *vates* in the *Achilleid*. I analyse how the traditional role of the *vates*, embodied by Calchas, is subverted, which leads me to a reflection on the figure of the poet in the *Achilleid*.

---

616 Again, Ripoll (forthcoming).
617 The Ulysscean/Statian association can be further highlighted in Statius’ more general attitude to his poetic Achilles, as he regards Achilles as his repeatedly, see below fn.756.
CHAPTER FIVE

Tremefactus vates
Calchas’ role and vatic authority

"J’ai appris que pour être prophète il suffisait d’être pessimiste, puisque chaque question se résout toujours dans le sens le plus tragique. Je finirai par m’attendre à ce que tout ce que je crains arrive, irrémédiablement”

Elsa Triolet (1960)

5.1 A fare il profeta mai nessuno ci guadagnerà: re-thinking vatic authority

The description of Ulysses as a quasi-vates reveals the undermining and subsequent loss of an authorial voice in the poem. In the Achilleid, Calchas embodies the traditional vates, as he prophesies Achilles’ location during the Aulis window (Ach. 1.491-537).618 The presence of a vates in a poetic composition signals the manifestation of the voice of the poetic persona: a seer is widely accepted to be a sort of textual deputy for the figure of the poet.619 The vates par excellence in the Thebaid is Amphiaraus, thought to be, as Henderson dubs him, the ‘hypostasis’ of the poet.620 His importance for the creation and continuation of the Thebaidic narrative toward its tragic ending (the poet’s own task) is crucial.621 The employment of vates to denote the warrior seer 17 times in the epic (with another vates, Tiresias, coming in second place with 8 instances) strengthens this identification.622 This chapter thus begins with an important question: if in the

619 Most famous is Horace’s self-designation as vates (Epod. 16.66); see Jocelyn (1995) 19-50 for a study on the term, and Markus (2003) 446-48 for Statius’ imitation, in the proem of the Thebaid, of Horatian and Pindaric introductions. See Watson (2003) and Stocks (2016) 161 n.22. On the Virgilian Sybil as vates, see Miller (2009) 146 n. 120. On Lucanian vates, see O’Higgins (1988) 213-14; Masters (1992) 138-41 and Galli Milč (2016) 159-77. On Orpheus as a Statian vates in the Silvae, see Lovatt (2007) 145-63, opposing Newman’s view (1967) 124 that the post-Augustan vates does no longer ‘represent poetry in a serious aspect’. According to Lovatt, there is a difference in usage between the vates in Statius’ epic poetry (the prophet) and the Silvae (the poet, himself). Nevertheless, in Silv. 2.7, this distinction is blurred, as Lucan is vates and sacerdos (2.723; 42). See Gibson (2006) 254 on Silv. 5.2.164-65: ‘there is also a sense in which the poet has his own mantic function…the almost direct echo of 164-65 in 162-73…strengthens the identification of Statius as a vates’. Here, I concentrate on the epic/tragic figure of the vates.
622 See Lovatt (2007) 146 n.5 for all incidences in Statius’ epics.
Achilleid Ulysses is seen as a vatic agent, what are we to do with the actual vates, Calchas?

McNelis reflects that the poem is delineated by the presence of seers and prophecies from the first line of the poem, encompassing the text from its very beginning (Ach. 1.2). A study of the vates, and vatic imagery, in the poem has not been carried out, and is fundamental: Calchas’ prophecy, in both content and form, propels the narrative towards its epic telos. Walter’s recent book on prophets in Flavian Epic explores in detail these figures in the three ‘canonical’ epics, the Argonautica, the Thebaid, and the Punica, but she does not dwell on the figure of the prophet in the Achilleid. I thus examine Calchas’ figure and his role, and such enquiry paves the way for a metapoetic discussion, triggered by both the staging and content of the prophetic inspiration of Calchas, the poet figure in the Achilleid.

This chapter first explores the figure of Calchas through comparison and contrast to other Classical, Neronian and Flavian epic seers. I show that the vates in the Achilleid is not by any means a traditional figure. Instead, Calchas’ undergoing of prophetic furor shows gender-bending elements, most visible in the violent and feminised vocabulary employed to describe his frenzy, which mirrors the description of female prophetesses, and later gender-bending figures in the Thebaid such as Thiodamas and as Tiresias. Ultimately, I consider Calchas to be a passive, sacrificial victim, of whom we hear nothing more in the extant composition. The second half of this chapter offers an interpretation as to how, and why, the Statian poetic persona aligns himself/itself with a feminised vates. Taking into account the issues that surround the loss of the traditional authorial voice in the poem, I juxtapose Calchas’ furor with the most important feminine voice in the Achilleid, that of Thetis, who acts as a ‘competing’ voice to the

---

624 Walter (2014) 1 n.1 explains that since the epic breaks off, there is no sufficient textual basis for an in-depth assessment of this work.
traditional poetic authority/voice.\textsuperscript{625} This chapter reads Calchas as a tragic figure, and reflects on the position of epic authority – challenged – in the \textit{Achilleid}.

5.2 \textit{Vatic imposter syndrome: the manipulation of the \textit{vates}}

In the proem of the \textit{Achilleid}, the Statian poet fashions himself as \textit{vates} through the image of the poet donning the ceremonial fillets (\textit{Ach.}1.11: \textit{ nec mea nunc primis augescunt tempora vittis}), begging Apollo for \textit{novos fontes} (\textit{Ach.}1.9) after his entrance into the Aonian grove to seek the necessary inspiration for the \textit{Thebaid}.\textsuperscript{626} The first time the word \textit{vates} is used in the \textit{Achilleid}, however, it is not employed to designate the \textit{vates} of the \textit{Achilleid}, Calchas,\textsuperscript{627} but Domitian in the proem (\textit{Ach.}1.15-6: \textit{ cui geminae florent vatamque ducumque / certatim laurus}), describing the emperor as a \textit{poeta doctus}, a ‘quondam poet’.\textsuperscript{628} Yet the ruler has long left behind his poetic activities (\textit{Ach.}1.16: \textit{ olim dolet altera vinci}), and Statius does not ask him for poetic inspiration, but rather, for a recusational pardon (\textit{Ach.}1.17: \textit{ da veniam}).\textsuperscript{629}

The second time that the word \textit{vates} explicitly appears in the \textit{Achilleid} is in a prophetic context:

\begin{quote}
\textit{hos abolere metus magici iubet ordine sacri}
\textit{Carpathius vates puerumque sub axe peracto}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{625} To play on Lovatt’s now canonical article on prophecy in Flavian epic (2013).
\textsuperscript{626} Heslin (2005) 78 sees the proem’s agricultural imagery (e.g. \textit{depleo}) as ironising the apparatus of poetic inspiration, distancing ‘the \textit{Achilleid} still further from the \textit{Thebaid}, whose author played the vatic role of the mad poet in earnest’. The \textit{vates} figure is still embodied by Calchas, cf. Feeney (2004) 88. Bessone (2014) 218-19 highlights Statius’ paradoxical self-positioning as one of Thebes’ ancestors alongside Amphion, taking on the role of the mythic \textit{vates} (\textit{Ach.}1.12-3). For the literary compositional ‘secondariness’ of Statius as following in the footsteps of his own \textit{Thebaid}, with a play on \textit{primis…vittis} and \textit{fronde secunda}, see Hinds (1998) 96-7 and fn.92.
\textsuperscript{627} Deemed to be Statius’ stand-in in the \textit{Achilleid}, as Fantuzzi (2012) 88 upholds and I follow.
\textsuperscript{628} Heslin (2005) 79.
\textsuperscript{629} Interestingly, in the \textit{praefatio} of the first book of the \textit{Silvae}, the loss of indulgence (\textit{venia}) is the audience’s reaction to the publication of his occasional poetry. Statius reassures Stella that his poems have not lost their \textit{celeritas}, produced in the heat of the moment (\textit{Silv.}1. ep.2-3: \textit{hos libellos, qui mihi subito calore et quadam festinandi voluptate fluxerunt, et 1.8-9: Sed apud ceteros necesse est multum illis pereat ex venia, cum amiserint quam solam habuerunt gratiam celeritatis}). See also \textit{Silv.}3.1.162: (\textit{da veniam, Alcide}). Rosati (2002) 238-49 on the mention of the emperor as a double-edged sword: Domitian has an inspirational function, but there is an uneasy relationship with power and literary freedom. See Ovid’s \textit{Fast.}1.3-6;15-20, where we have an analogous situation to the \textit{Achilleid}: Germanicus, the dedicatee \textit{princeps}, is also a poet, thus likened to Apollo as the god of poetry, as Rosati (2002) 241 notices. The mention of Domitian is an exercise in careful political prudence, and, simultaneously, a legitimising act. For the emperor as Muse, see further Rosati (2002) 238-51.
secretis lustrare fretis, ubi litora summa
Oceani et genitor tepet inlabentibus astris
Pontus. ibi ignotis horrenda piacula divis
donaque—sed longum cuncta enumerare vetorque.
trade magis! sic ficta parens: […]

(Ach.1.135-41)

When Thetis arrives at Chiron’s cave and requests for Achilles to be handed over, she fabricates a lie in order to add greater urgency to her needs: Proteus (Carpathius vates) has ordered her to resort to magic, as she needs to carry out purifying rites in far-away shores and horrid sacrifices to dispel her nightmarish concerns over her son.630 Thetis assumes the Didonian mantle, as the Virgilian heroine had created the presence of a sacerdos in order to conceal her suicidal intentions from her sister (Aen.4.483: hinc mihi Massylae gentis monstrata sacerdos; Aen.4.497: monstratque sacerdos). The reminiscence of this Virgilian episode in the Achilleid invention certainly ‘portends an unhappy outcome for Thetis’,631 and reveals one of the few Virgilian models that works successfully for Thetis. What is striking in Thetis’ lie, however, is the precise choice of vatic authority. The locution of Carpathius vates is in fact only attested in Virgil and Ovid before Statius, and the weight of the authority that Thetis relies on is quite substantial.632

In the Georgics, the name is employed by Cyrene to denote the infallible prophet Proteus (G.4.387-88: Et in Carpathio Neptuni gurgite vates / caeruleus Proteus), and the description of his omniscient vatic powers (G.4.391-92: novit namque omnia vates, / quae sint, quae fuerint, quae mox ventura trahantur).633 The context is familiar to the reader of the Achilleid, and highly relevant to its plot: Proteus is the one who prophesies to Thetis that Jupiter will shun her to avoid cosmic disequilibrium (Met.11.221-28). Once Peleus is able to restrain the prophet, he rises from the

630 See Dilke (1954) 95, and Heslin (2005) 116 n.23 for textual similarities with Dido’s deceitful speech to Anna (Aen.4.480-82).
632 Uccellini (2012) 129: the toponym’s Latin tradition commences with Virgil. The use of sacerdos in the Achilleid is confined to the metuenda sacerdos (Ach. 1.600-1), who controls and restricts male access to the woods; cf.fn.260.
633 In turn, the Proteus episode in the Georgics establishes a dialogue with Homer’s version of Menelaus’ capture of Proteus in Odyssey 4, see Morgan (1999) 43-6.
whirlpools and tells Achilles’ father how to bind, capture and rape Thetis (Met. 11.249: donec Carpathius medio de gurgite vates). Consequently, Thetis’ choice of vates in the Achilleid at first indicates that the goddess is depending on a higher authority, in light of how successful Proteus’ dicta have already been in the literary past. She is living proof that Proteus indeed knows omnia. But Thetis’ use of Proteus also shows how a traditional vatic authority has the potential to be manipulated and undermined. Whether the prophecy in the Achilleid exists or not (and it does not, as only Statius mentions it, and pinpoints it as ficta), Thetis’ adoption of Proteus as the vates in her fiction derives from a clear tradition where Proteus is deemed to be an unerring, authoritative figure. The use of the rare toponym is a metaliterary trigger warning: Proteus, the quintessential shifty vates, becomes a tool in the hands Thetis, and vatic authority is introduced in the poem as an entity that can be bent to a character’s whim.

A vates’ rulings are constructed as something easily manoeuvred, even fabricated. Thetis’ first monologue in the poem conveys more ominous elements that relate to a vaticinatory sphere, as if Thetis were taking up the vatic mantle herself (Ach. 1.33-5: ecce novam Priamo facibus de puppe levatis / fert Bellona nurum: video iam mille carinis / Ionium Aegaeumque premi). Words such as ecce, urging us

---

634 Thetis’ earlier words to herself (Ach. 1.32: agnosco monitus et Protea vera locutum) indeed recall the Ovidian story (Met. 11.221-23: Namque senex Thetidi Proteus ‘dea’ dixerat ‘undae, / concipe: mater eris iuvenis, qui fortibus annis / acta patris vincet maiorque vocabitur illo’). In Ovid, Proteus had indeed prophesied that Achilles was going to surpass his father, and this is the prophecy referred to at 1.32. Thetis sees as praesagia of her own death (i.e. her son’s) the Trojan fleet, captained by Paris, and even before her soliloquy, the narrator had interjected with the poignant reflection that parents’ concerns are never in vain (Ach. 1.25-6.: heu numquam vana parentum / auguria!). On the ambiguity of this verse, which could be either of either Statian or Horatian in origin (Carm. 1.15), see Uccellini (2012) 59.

635 See the pun in προτος, cf. Walter (2014) 308.

636 Thetis’ use of Proteus’ authority can also be interpreted as ex post facto slandering. She is indirectly seeking vengeance on the god who disclosed ways to trick her into a mortal marriage. See also Proteus (Pun. 7.403-93), with Walter (2014) 207-20, where he is depicted as an ambiguus vates (Pun. 7.436).

637 Thetis is not the first woman to do so, see Andromache (Tro.33-40). See Uccellini (2012) 65-6 and Rosati (1994a) 78 n.20: the presence of Bellona and faces portend the torches of war, not only those of marriage, and ultimately refer to Troy’s tragic fate (Aen. 7.319-22). There are hints of Gigantomachy in Thetis’ description of the Trojan War, which echo Phlegyas’ description at Val.Fl.2.124-25: ecce gravem nodis pinguique bitumine quassans / lampada turbata Phlegyas decurrit ab urbe), see Fucecchi (2013) 109 n.6. Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 158-9 note that the clause echoes Seneca’s Troades, where Andromache, on the verge of drawing Astyanax out of Hector’s tomb, imagines her son, instead of Helen, as the reason for the thousand (Greek) ships (Tro.707-8: Hic est, hic est terror, Ulixe / mille carinis); see Harrison (2015) 140. See her curse (Tro.1006-8 hoc classi
to join in the vision, *agnosco* and *video* are often used in prophetic contexts, for instance with the Sybil’s cry (*Aen.* 6.46: *deus, ecce, deus*), the abrupt entrance of the *sacerdos* Mopsus (*Val.Fl.*1.207: *ecce sacer totusque dei per litora Mopsus*) or Thiodamas (*Theb.*10.160: *ecce repens superis animum lympañtibus horror*). In particular, the other instance of *video* in the poem seems to mirror Calchas’ own abilities as *vates*, and the active gaze necessary for divination (*Ach.*1.530-31: *video per Cycladas altas / attonitam et turpi quaerentem litora furto*), which signals the presence of a competitive dialogue between the two. Furthermore, the *agon* between Thetis and Apollo/Calchas (to which I shall return in the second half of this chapter), between the cross-dressing and the un-dressing, between two figures that pull Achilles in different directions, is evident from the direct address of Calchas to Thetis at the beginning of the prophecy (*Ach.*1.525-35). They represent the two distinct spheres at play in the *Achilleid*, and they both embody the two peripheries of Achilles’ life: Thetis his fameless yet long existence, and Calchas his short yet glorious life. Thetis is therefore configured as a possible *vates* and as Calchas’ (even Apollo’s) adversary.

### 5.3 Destabilising forces: Calchas’ authority

If fraudulent or non-traditional mantic voices emerge, as in the case of Ulysses and Thetis and her use of Proteus’ authority, the figure of the *vates* becomes ambivalent. In the poem, Calchas embodies the traditional epic seer, interpreted as the mouthpiece of the poet’s voice, as both characters rely on Apollinean inspiration for their ‘compositions’. Calchas is the ‘protector of the plot’, as his

---

*a accidat / toti Pelasgae, ratibus hoc mille accidat / meae precabor, cum vehar, quidquid rati
exesse similar to Thetis’ own plea of a storm and shipwreck (*Ach.*1.71-6: *has saltam [...]. / si quis adhuc undis honor, obrue puppis, / aut permitte fretum! nulla inclementia: fas sit / pro nato timuisse mihi. da pellere luctus / nec tibi de tantis placeat me fluctibus unum / litus et Iliaci scopulos habitare sepulcri’). The presence of a *sepulcrum* rings to Andromache’s trick. Fantham (1979) 461 n.13. Bessone (forthcoming a) notes this too.

638 As well as other vatic characters I shall return to, such as the Roman *matrona* in Lucan (*BC* 1.679-70: *video Pangea nivosis / cana iugis*; 1.685-86: *huc ego…agnosco*, referring to Pompey and 1.694: *vidi iam, Pheobe, Philippes*, or Amphiaraus’ witnessing his own death (*Theb.*3.546-47: *Quid furtim illacrimas? Illum, venerande Melampu, / qui cadit, agnosco*). For the clear reworking of Lucan in Statius, see most recently Mira Seo (2013) 148-49, n.7. See Lovatt (2013) 128 n.19 for verbs of perception in the Sybil episode in *Aeneid* 6.

639 On the active gaze, see Lovatt (2013) 133.


prophecy ensures the advancement of the narrative of the Trojan War. Calchas’
agency is essential: it also fulfils the poet’s proemial pledge of originality: nowhere
in the extant sources had the vates prophesied the whereabouts of Achilles in
drag. His traditional role as the best diviner of them all (II.1.70: οἴωνοπόλων ὅχ’
ἀριστος) flags his importance, carrying with him an important literary baggage.
The Statian Calchas navigates both his Greek, Homeric, and Latin counterparts,
in Virgil, Ovid, and Seneca, but he is altered in the Achilleid.

The prophecy of Calchas occurs in Aulis, as we are at the threshold of war.
The tension and urgency of his instrumentality is patent: Protesilaus subjects him
to a vituperatio, claiming that he has been inactive, too forgetful of Apollo’s tripods
(Ach.1.496-97: ‘O nimium Phoebi tripodumque oblite tuorum / Thesstoride). His
prescient abilities are undermined, as Protesilaus ironically asks the seer if he
cannot see (Ach.1.495: cernis) that all the Greeks are waiting for Achilles; the
warrior’s speech resembles Ulysses’ plea to Calchas in the Aeneid (Aen.2.122-29)
and Capaneus’ inflamed speech to Amphiaraus in the Thebaid (Theb.3.598-618). Though, in comparison with the Thebaic scene, the violence is attenuated –
Protesilaus is not an impious contemptor superum – we still find traces of
scepticism towards seers, often distrusted and ridiculed (Ach.1.504-5).

---

and Calchas are anxious about the completion of the ‘poem’s heroic task, and hence the epic
narrative’. In the Achilleid, the one who is anxious is Ulysses, interestingly (Ach.1.547: sed me spes
lubrica tardat), strengthening his portrayal as an alternative vatic presence.

643 Ach.1.4. This is not Calchas’ first prophecy in the tradition. Statius disregarded his previous
divination, cf. Apollod.Bibl.3.13.8 and fn.102, as it is this revelation that prompts Thetis to hide
her son. The improba virgo prophecy is the initiation of the seer.


645 Cf. Amphiaraus (Theb.8.117: et tripodum iam non meminisse meorum), with Augoustakis (2016a)
114 on Theb.8.116-17, where the seer accepts his death. Protesilaus accuses Calchas of being
inactive, but this is the first time he prophesies: urgency and literary tradition are his fuels.
Protesilaus is the first one to die at Troy (Ach.1.494-95) so he might be eager, but oblite has also the
meaning, here ironic, of forgetting oneself when assuming the mask of a character (Tac.Dial.2.1: in
eo tragoediae argumento sui oblitus tantum Catonem cogiisset). Writing out his Homeric past,
perhaps?

646 Parkes (2008) 393-94; see Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 220-1, especially with Aen.2.122-23:
Hic Ithacus vatem magno Calchanta tumultu / protrahit in medios; Ach.1.493-94: increpitans magno vatem
Calchanta tumultu / Protesilaus ait.

647 Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 221.
The natural comparison between Calchas and Amphiaraus brings to view the uneasy detail that Calchas in the *Achilleid* does not follow his Statian counterpart.\(^{648}\) Amphiaraus in the *Thebaid* is a warrior-prophet, active on the epic battlefield, who sees his own demise and partakes in the war, and whose epic/tragic death (swallowed whole by the Earth along with his chariot) prompts a second Amphiaraus, Thiodamas, to replace him.\(^{649}\) In the *Achilleid*, however, Calchas has been spared from the prospect of an active participation in the Trojan War (*Ach.*1.510-11: *arma horrenda tibi saevosque remisimus enses / numquam has inbelles galea violabere vittas*).\(^{650}\) The choice of adjective for his fillets, *inbelles*, aligns Calchas not with Aulis, but rather, the Scyrian background, described in similar terms (*Ach.*1.207; 1.625; 1.714).\(^{651}\) The adjective portends notions of weakening and feminization, already detectable in Capaneus’ hateful speech to Amphiaraus (*Theb.*3.666-67: *procul haec tibi mollis / infula terrificique aberit dementia Phoebi*). Protesilaus attacks Calchas’ virility and consigns him to the side-lines of war. The use of *violare* also carries the idea of emasculation, as Ulysses sees Thetis having defiled his manliness (*Ach.*2.35: *callida femineo genetrix violavit amictu*).\(^{652}\) Calchas is detached from the epic sphere and plays a passivised role: the warrior-prophet model that Amphiaraus embodies is not suitable.\(^{653}\) Furthermore, before Calchas prophesises, there is an abrupt change of narrative focus from Protesilaus to Calchas, which highlights a striking detail: Calchas does not react to Protesilaus’ words, as the narrator does not allow him a direct speech in response but rather, he has already begun his divination process (*Ach.*1.424: *iamdudum*). This is

---

\(^{648}\) On Capaneus and Protesilaus, see Bitto (2016) 273-74.


\(^{650}\) Due to the importance of *Aen.*2 for this scene, Protesilaus’ words are imbued with tragic irony as they portend the opposite view, that prophets in the midst of battle will not be spared despite their divine protection, as in the case of Panthus (*Aen.*2.429-30: *nect te tua plurima, Panthus, / labentem pietas nec Apollinis infula texit*). The parallel casts doubt on Protesilaus’ promise.

\(^{651}\) Nuzzo (2012) 135 reads the thyrsi to be ‘feminised’, as opposed to ‘pacific’. *Inbelles* means ‘unwarlike’, referring to that which is not part of the war, *ergo* the female sphere (*Met.*12.476: *bella relinque viris*). Note Lycotas’ strange mix of sexual and military ambiguities in Arethusa’s account (*Prop.*4.3.24: *num gravis imbellis atterit hasta manus?*). For the adjective, see Uccellini (2012) 170; cf.p.140.

\(^{652}\) In the second example, the use of *violare* conveys the idea that the ross-dressing is an ‘illicit penetration’, as McAuley reflects (2015) 350. See Fowler (1987) 190-1 for the Virgilian use of *violare*, and Jamset (2004a) 99-100 for its importance to Parthenopaeus.

\(^{653}\) Calchas’ hesitation (inferred from Protesilaus’ rebuke) can be interpreted as a delay strategy in performing a prophecy with such a shameful subject matter: more on this below.
different from Amphiaraus’ response to Capaneus’ impious speech, as we have his answer in full (Theb.3.620-47).654

The promise of Calchas’ exclusion from warlike activities is also seen with his rewards for his vatic service, unspecified but labelled as greater than those of the Greek leaders (Ach.1.512-13: sed felix numeroque ducum praestantior omni / si magnum Danais pro te dependis Achillem’).655 The notion of transposition in this line (pro te) elicits that Calchas’ duty is not only that of prophesying: he will have to offer great Achilles as a substitute for himself.656 But the use of praestantior for Calchas’ future is striking, for it recalls fame derived from death, particularly prominent in Statius’ consolationes in the Silvae, and felix recalls the Stoic notion of death as a blessing.657 Protesilaus appears to be implying that Calchas’ status is potentially connected through fame only after his death: this interpretation intensifies the violence behind Protesilaus’ abuse, and explains perhaps Calchas’ hesitation (for which otherwise there is no overt explanation, unlike in the case of Iphigenia). The warrior’s words proffer the notion a quid pro quo exchange, with Calchas offering himself in order to ‘activate’ the beginning of the Trojan War.658

654 Perhaps because we do not need to hear from Calchas, for he is not an active voice! Another dissociative point between Amphiaraus and Calchas is that Amphiaraus’ reply to Capaneus’ invective concentrates on what the seer has already seen. The use of the past tense is crucial, as we do not see his furor (Theb.3.640-41: vidi ingentis portenta ruinae, vidi hominum diuumque metus hilaremque Megaeram…). These lines have been widely disputed. Dilke (1954) 119. Most recent editions are upholding the reading in P (pro te dependis, contra pro te portendis found in QKCR, portendis in E), but already in P, as Barth notices, ‘hic etiam versus vitiatus est’: the final e in te and the prefix de seem to have been added later. Dependo means to pay, or to lay out x, but is never found in verse with pro (TLL 5.1.569.40). Calchas is trading places with Achilles, as the TLL 5.1.569.45 points out: i. Achillem tua vice mittis. Rependo (to pay in kind, to pay back, to counterbalance) is quite common in the Statian corpus, but total deletion in the manuscript makes it difficult to speculate.

656 Loeb: ‘as your substitute in the fighting force’.

657 Which is, in essence, the subject of the Argive laus of Amphiaraus (Theb.8.174-207); on praestantior see Silv.5.1.97 and Silv.5.3.107. On felix in Statius, see Gibson (2006) 159, for Priscilla’s state after her death, an idea that goes back to Silv.2.1.223 where Glaucias, the dead youth, is felix (cf.Silv.2.7.24: felix heu nimis et beata tellus). See Augustakis (2016a) 145: soldiers mourning Amphiaraus are hoping that he has reached Elysium (felles lucos), ‘a place traditionally characterized as happy and blessed’. For the use of the epithet in a chthonic context, see Silv. 5.3.266 (though it is felix ille), see Gibson’s notes (2006) at 258 and 366.

658 There could be a metapoetic hint that links Calchas to the vates-figure in the proem: both Calchas and the Statian poetic persona in fact metaphorically offer Achilles to the Greeks/to Domitian (Ach.1.19: magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles; 1.513: si magnum Danais pro te dependis Achillem).
Calchas’ presence is far-reaching and consequential, but his position is muddled: first, by the sceptical reaction of Diomedes and Ulysses, and second because of his passive portrayal and indications of immolation inferred from Protesilaus’ *vituperatio* (accentuated after his prophecy, as we will see). Moreover, Calchas’ authority is challenged even before his prophecy. In Ovid’s Aulis narrative, Calchas is introduced in a distinctive manner, with the use of the grandiloquent Homeric patronymic *Thestorides*.659

```
obstipuere omnes, at veri providus augur
Thestorides ‘vincemus’, ait; ‘gaudete, Pelasgi!
Troia cadet, sed erit nostri mora longa laboris’
atque novem volucres in belli digerit annos.
```

(*Met*.12.18-21)

In the *Achilleid*, the seer is not presented first with his patronymic, but rather with his name (*Ach*.1.493-94: *increpitans magno vatem Calchanta tumultu / Protesilaus ait*), perhaps undermining his epic prestige. But when we juxtapose these two figures of Calchas, their differences augment the displacement and deterioration of the seer’s authority in the *Achilleid*. The adjective used to describe Calchas in Ovid is *providus*, translated as ‘prophetic’, ‘categorized by forethought’, trailing after his traditional representation as *augur*.660 Seneca also employs *augur* to refer to Calchas (*Tro*.533: *augur haec Calchas canit*). In the *Achilleid*, however, Calchas is never explicitly referred to as *augur* (οἰονοπόλος, though he does perform ornithomancy), thus drawing attention to a demarcation between his Homeric, Ovidian and Senecan portrayal, and his role in the *Achilleid*. What is more, *providus/a* is fairly often used in the Statian corpus (10 incidences),661 and four times it is used in a context of prophecy and applied to seers (of Amphiaraus, *Theb*.3.450 and 4.197; of Manto at 10.639 and of

---

659 Papaioannou (2007) 35-6 and *II*.1.68-73. The Latin borrowing *Thestorides* occurs first in Ovid (*Met*.12.19; 12.27), then twice in the *Ilias Latina* (52, 59), and twice in the *Achilleid* (*Ach*.1.47; 1.516). *Thestorides* does not occur in the retelling of the Trojan War in *Aen*. 2, but patronymics are also used to augment a character’s heroic values: it might not be surprising that Aeneas does not refer to Calchas, the Greeks’ seer, as *Thestorides*.


661 11, if we count the emendation at *Theb*.8.276-77 (*quae tripodas successor agat, quo provida laurus / transeat…*), when attempting to find a replacement for Amphiaraus, his laurels are ‘prophetic’. See Augoustakis (2016a) 180.
Capaneus, in a sacrilegious context, at *Theb.* 10.485-86: *sunt et mihi provida dextrae / omina*).\(^{662}\)

In the *Achilleid*, the adjective is used three times, twice of Ulysses, once in a passage embedded with prophetic significance, as we have seen (*Ach.* 1.542), once in a narratorial description (*Ach.* 1.698: * Providus hero*), and once of Deidamia (*Ach.* 1.802).\(^{663}\) So Calchas’ vatic abilities, overtly and textually marked in the tradition by his ability to foretell the future through the interpretation of birds’ flights, are either shifted from a vatic character to a non-vatic individual (*Providus*), or non-existent in the *Achilleid*. Statius therefore constructs Calchas outside the boundaries of his literary cast, and offers a vatic figure whose authority, from the onset of his appearance in the narrative, is undermined and passivized, a seer who stands liminally, like Achilles, between a warlike and an unwarlike world.

5.4 *Sibylline Calchas: bodily possession*

Calchas’ authority is far from straightforward in the poem, and his portrayal raises questions on the traditional role of the *vates*. In this section, I build on this argument, and focus on the staging and portrayal of his possession. I thus examine his bodily *furor* and its consequences on the seer (*Ach.* 1.514-26; 1.536-37). I argue that the staging of Calchas’ *furor* is described in violent, feminised terms: Calchas becomes the vessel of Apollo, in the manner of prophetesses. The image of frenzied prophet is not present, as Lovatt highlights, in the Homeric epics and in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, but it is non-Homeric and it canonically belongs to the genre of tragedy.\(^{664}\) An analysis of Calchas’ *furor* in these terms acquires a new dimension for our understanding of the poem and the epic/tragic hints present throughout the epic. I then linger on the similarities and differences between Calchas’ portrayal and that of his *male* counterparts in Neronian and Flavian epic.

---


\(^{663}\) See Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 259 for Deidamia as adversary to Ulysses, and fn.605.

\(^{664}\) Lovatt (2013) 130-32, n.27 for signs that there could have been more prophetic moments in the Epic Cycle. Cassandra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* is identified through signs of prophetic madness, and she is the first prophetess to experience such mode of divination.
In this reading, I bring forth two suitable Statian models for Calchas as alternatives for Amphiaraus: Thiodamas and Tiresias in the *Thebaid*, two seers who display gender-bending elements to their characterisations. The correspondences and divergences from other epic seers underscore again Calchas’ process of feminisation and his characterisation as Apollo’s victim. I argue that this portends a nefarious and tragic outcome for the *vates*, and I draw out the proleptical allusions to the Trojan War, which transform the entity of Calchas as a proleptical object, a reminder of the horror to come.\(^{665}\)

The Sibyl’s portrayal in the *Aeneid* is the main model for Calchas.\(^{666}\) Virgil’s representation of the Cumaean Sibyl is so captivating that it becomes a *topos* for Flavian epicists, who repeatedly cast their own prophets, and their *furores*, in her mould.\(^{667}\) The representation of the seer in the *Achilleid* in terms of frenzy and divine possession is therefore hardly surprising, but the significance of this model needs to be re-evaluated, especially in light of its dramatic nuances. It is also important to draw out the gendered discourse it prompts, for bodily possession is often described as a sort of rape, as in the case of the Sibyl,\(^{668}\) and its embedded tension between feminine and male forces, subjects and objects of the prophecy itself.\(^{669}\)

---

665 A sort of Deiphobus (*Aen.*6).
666 Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 224. Other Roman models are Cassandra in Seneca’s *Agamemnon*, the Roman *matrona* and Phemonoe in Lucan, the prophecy of Mopsus in Valerius Flaccus, the Thebaic Tiresias and, more marginally, the Roman soldier’s prophecy at *Punica* 8. I return to these examples as the discussion unfolds, but surprising is the absence in the French commentary of the discussion of another *furor* in Silius, for it bears a striking resemblance to Calchas at *Punica* 3.692-99, and Thiodamas’ *furor* in book 10 of the *Thebaid*. For the programmatic value of the Sibyl in Statius *Silv.*4.3, see Newlands (2002) 309-25, but note that her madness is contained in three verses (*Silv.*4.3.121-23: *en*! et *colla* rotat novisque late/ *bacchatur* spatii viamque replet/ *tunc* sic *virgineo profatur* *ore*). See Bitto (2016) 275 n.357 for a list of these *furores*. During the Lemnian episode (*Theb.*5.90-6), Polyxo is seized by Bacchus, so her possession is not Apollinean. In Valerius, however, she is *vates Phoebi dilecta* (*Val.*Fl.2.316), see Finkmann (2015) 1-33 on her Homeric role as *vates*. Nevertheless, due to the *lacunae* in her Valerian description, and her otherwise unknown oracular abilities, I will not put her forward as a model for Calchas.
667 Zissos (2008) 190 highlights the popularity of these type-scenes in post-Virgilian epic: he quotes *Ach.*1.152-35, but explicit parallels are left undiscussed.
668 I shortly return to this idea, but Sharrock (2002) and Miller (2009) 141-42 rightly read Apollo’s possession of the Sibyl as a prophetic rape.
669 Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 224 highlight that the hyperbolic manner in which Calchas’ divination is present is quite dissonant from the rest of the narrative, but it serves the purpose of highlighting the different narrative arenas (Scyros VS. Aulis) and different moral codes (Thetis’ VS. warriors’) at play here.
Let us begin from the enactment of the prophecy. Calchas’ mise en scène is as follows:

*Iamdudum trepido circumfert lumina motu*  
*intrantemque deum primo pallore fatetur*  
*Thestorides; mox igne genas et sanguine torquens*  
*nec socios nec castra videt, sed caecus et amens*\(^{670}\)  
*nunc superum magnos deprendit in aethere coetus,*  
*nunc sagas adfatur aves, nunc dura sororum*  
*licia, turiferas modo consultit anxius aras*  
*flammarumque apicem rapit et caligine sacra*  
*pascitur. exsiliunt crines rigidisque laborat*  
*vitta comis, nec colla loco nec in ordine gressus.*  
*tandem fessa tremens longis mugitibus ora*  
*et oppositum vox eluctata furorem est […]*  

*(Ach.1.514-26)*

We have an extremely detailed progression of vatic abilities: Calchas is a seer through divination, he performs ornithomancy, but he is also a frenzy-imbued Sibyl through capnomantry, culminating in violent bodily possession.\(^{671}\) He is portrayed as an überseer, but Calchas’ role as a bird-diviner, for which he is traditionally known, has been devalued, as it comes second in the list of his abilities after the god has entered his body (*intrantemque deum*), behind the act of consulting the gods’ councils.\(^{672}\) After having referred to the *sagas…aves* and consulted the threads of the Parcae and the sacrificial altar, and after having inhaled the *caligine…sacra*, Calchas undergoes the sibylline *furor*, which allows

---

\(^{670}\) *Amens* (P\(^1\)CR), *absens* (P\(^2\)QKBE). Nuzzo (2012) 110 prefers *absens*, arguing that ‘la clausola è probabile variazione di quella lucanea *caecus et amens* (BC 10.146)’. I favour *amens*, as it could be a Lucanian borrowing: we gaze upon a raging Caesar (*pro caecus et amens / ambitione furor*). Barth’s reading: ‘mente aliorum emote, sensibus turbatis’. Unlike *caecus et absens*, we find the combination of variants of *caecus* and *amens* in a number of contexts, ranging from madness used for invectives, to elegiac laments: Lucius Accius, *Trag*. 450 (*Heu! cor ira fuit caecum, améntia rapiór feroque*); Catull.64.197, of Ariadne (*cogor inops, ardens, amenti caeca furore*); *De Har.Resp.* 48.7-8, of Clodius; *Theb.* 7.47-8; and in Lucan again (BC 7.474, with *amentes* and *caecos*). *Caecus + absens* only occurs in [Quint.]* Decl.Min.* 385.5.2. However, *absens* would make sense with the idea of Calchas’ prophecy looking to the present, elsewhere.


\(^{672}\) This is arguably similar to Ripoll’s comment on Statius’ description of Ulysses through his most recognisable traits, cf.fn.478.
him to reveal Achilles’ hiding place. There is also a striking detail: we never hear the voice of Calchas the seer, apart from a sudden and puzzling interjection to address the god whose influence he is under (Ach. 1.529: et me Phoebus agit) we only grasp his divinely possessed voice.

Calchas’ main archetype is the Virgilian Sibyl.673 The similarities in the execution of the Calchas passage can be seen when, for the first time, the Cumaean Sibyl in Virgil receives and is possessed by the god (Aen. 6.46: deus, ecce, deus!), and the colour on her face undergoes drastic changes (Aen. 6.47: non vultus, non color unus). Presumably,674 she is turning paler as the god approaches, which is similar to the first sign of Apollo entering Calchas’ body (Ach. 1.515-16: intrantemque deum primo pallore fatetur / Thesiorides).675 The expression deus, ecce, deus also recalls the cries of Statian Apollo with meus iste, meus (Ach. 1.528). The same frantic style is employed to describe the arrival of Apollo in the case of the Sibyl and the effect that the god has on Calchas in the Achilleid.676 The Sibyl’s hair does not stay ‘tamed’ (Aen. 6.48: non comptae mansere comae), and Calchas’ hair stands up in his frenzy, with the sacramental ribbons falling (Ach. 1.522-23: exiliunt crines rigidisque laborat / vitta comis).

The sense of complete physical strain in the Aeneid is epitomised by the Sibyl attempting to resist Apollo’s attack (Aen. 6.77-9: At Phoebi nondum patiens, immanis in antro / bacchatur vates, magnum si pectore possit / excusisse deum). The god, however, continues his violence, and the viciousness is exemplified by her rabid mouth (Aen. 6.79-80: tanto magis ille fatigat / os rabidum fera corda domans fngitque premendo; 6.100-1: ea frena furenti / concutit et stimulos sub pectore vertit Apollo). This detail finds a parallel in Calchas’ possession, as the seer struggles to release (solvit) his voice from his tired mouth (fessa…ora), afflicted by the possession (et oppositum vox eluctata furorem est).677 The use of mugitus further echoes the bellowing sounds

673 By no means the first time we see a female prophetess undergoing a violent furor, see above fn. 664.
674 Horsfall (2013) 104 does not weigh in on the colour.
675 Which can echo Thiodamas’ own changes in facial appearance.
676 See Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 226 for other echoes (Silv. 4.6.36).
677 Fessa…ora: is the tradition exhausted after this vision of the Achilleid? This reading would again add to the idea of the cyclical and inevitability of epic.
that the Sibyl emits in her cave (Aen. 6.99: *antroque remugit*). Despite the language of rape not being as prominent during Calchas’ possession, it is clear that this is an unequal, and overpowering power-dynamic.\(^{678}\)

Calchas also reworks the Sibyl who appears in Lucan. Phemonoe filters the image of the Virgilian Sibyl but leads it to tragic extremes.\(^{679}\) The similarities between Phemonoe’s possession and that of Calchas are evident: after her first false attempt to prophesy, urged by Appius, the god overwheels her, in an unprecedented display of violence:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tandem con territa virgo} \\
\text{confugit ad tripodas vastisque adducta cavernis} \\
\text{haesit et insueto concepit pectore numen,} \\
\text{quod non exhaustae per tot iam saecula rupis} \\
\text{spiritus ingessit vati; tandemque potitus} \\
\text{pectore Cirrhao non umquam plenior artus} \\
\text{Phoebados inrupit Paean mentemque priorem} \\
\text{expulit atque hominem toto sibi cedere iussit} \\
\text{pectore. bacchatur demens aliena per antrum} \\
\text{colla ferens, vittasque dei Phoebeaque serta} \\
\text{erectis discussa comis per inania templi} \\
\text{ancipiti cervice rotat spargitque vaganti} \\
\text{obstantis tripodas magnoque exaestuat igne} \\
\text{iratum te, Phoebe, ferens. Nec verbere solo} \\
\text{uteris et stimulos flammasse in viscera mergis:} \\
\text{accipit et frenos, nec tantum prodere vati} \\
\text{quantum scire licet.}
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{(BC 5.161-77)}

The bodily reactions are in essence those of Calchas: their heads and the prophetic fillets move in an unnatural way, walk and movements are convulsive and intermittent, and there is no grasp of reality. The most peculiar parallel between Calchas and Phemonoe, departing thus from the Virgilian archetype, is that both are prevented from disclosing their knowledge. In Phemonoe’s case, this

\(^{678}\) See Miller (2009) 141-42 for vocabulary of sexual violence.

\(^{679}\) O’Higgins (1988) 215; Masters (1992) 119 talks about the negation and distortion of the Virgilian model in Lucan. See Casali (2011) 203, who argues that the responses of the Lucanian prophetess represent a ‘degradation from the illustrious model, but also the degradation of that model’.
authoritative vocal struggle with the god is exemplified by the reins, and the more explicit narratorial interjection in the last line of the passage above.\textsuperscript{680} In the case of Calchas, it is simply hinted at, firstly through the detail of his voice breaking free, but most importantly through the adjective chosen to define his furor (\textit{oppositum…furorem}, which complements his struggling voice).\textsuperscript{681} This locution, unique in Latin literature, signifies the suppression of Calchas’ voice, and his furor (i.e. Apollo and his control) acts as a barrier that prevents the seer from actually uttering the prophecy. This is not only a scene of divinely inspired possession, followed by a triumphant vision, but also a moment of profound divergence between the ability to speak freely, whilst possessed, and constraint that seems to come from the divinity. There is not only violence, but also a resistance between god and \textit{vates}, which adds yet another element of struggle, ultimately submissive, to Calchas’ presentation.

5.5 An unlikely prophet: Calchas and his male counterparts

Calchas’ thus undergoes an unrestrained frenzy, characteristic of prophetesses undergoing \textit{furor}. For a prophetess, the physically overwhelming divine presence and ‘inspiration can be represented as a sort of penetration, a sort of sexual violation’.\textsuperscript{682} In Flavian epic, the boundaries between what constitutes a calmer, male mode of divination and the frenzied madness that characterises prophetesses become imprecise. The conscious blurring of gender distinctions that develops in Flavian epics is corroborated by ‘the increasing importance of masculine prophetic madness [which shows] the complexity of gender in Flavian epic’.\textsuperscript{683} In this section, I juxtapose Calchas’ figure to that of other male \textit{vates}, to elicit further similarities and differences in his description. I then highlight Calchas’ similarities to Tiresias and Thiodamas.

\textsuperscript{680} Masters (1992) 126: he reads this inversion referring to \textit{Aen.} 6.100-1. Apollo does not allow Phemonoe anything more than a narrow prophecy for Appius (BC 5.197).

\textsuperscript{681} \textit{OLD} 2 on \textit{oppositus}: ‘situated so as to form a barrier’, similar to what Deidamia does with Achilles, using him as a shield (\textit{Ach.} 1.920).

\textsuperscript{682} Lovatt (2013) 124, and 123-38 for a list of frenzied Greek prophetesses.

\textsuperscript{683} Lovatt (2013) 139.
The more traditional *haruspices* in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, Arruns (an Etruscan soothsayer) and Nigidius Figulus (an astrologer) feature prominently at the end of the first book of the epic. Their appearance follows that of ominous portents and nightmarish presages of Civil War, and they are brought into the narrative in order to predict the future: all they see are ill-omened warnings of Rome’s destruction. Arruns performs ornithomancy, and extispicy of a sacrificial bull, whose innards are blackened and putrid (*BC* 1.584-637) and Nigidius Figulus reads the heavens, noting that war has confounded even the rightful course of the stars (*BC*1.638-72). These two figures, however, are not recipients of violent *furores*, the crucial difference that points towards a shift in Calchas’ traditional portrayal.\(^{684}\) A similar discourse can be construed with the figure of Idmon in Valerius. Idmon’s knowing abilities are expressed in a concatenation of explicit negations of the signs of inspiration seen in Mopsus, as we shall shortly see (Val.Fl.1.228-30: *sed enim contra Phoebetius Idmon, / non pallore virens, non ullo horrore comarum / terribilis, plenus fatis Phoeboque quieto*). Idmon performs pyromancy, haruspicy and ornithomancy (Val.Fl.1.231-33: *cui genitor tribuit monitu praenoscere divum/ omnia, seu flammas seu lubrica comminus exta / seu plenum certis interroget aethera pinnis*). Idmon represents a calmer prophetic character without enduring Apollo’s possession. He is *plenus* with the knowledge of the fates, and his divination described as being enabled by a ‘quiet Apollo’: the seer will not undergo a *furo* based on ecstatic frenzy or bodily possession.\(^{685}\) Idmon’s composure distances him from the prophetic type that Mopsus’ figure is contrastingly meant to evoke: though Stover calls Idmon’s prophecy a ‘possession’, he argues that it is indeed ‘a gentle affair’ between the seer and his father Apollo, and the so-called ‘Lucanesque negative enumeration’ marks a clear-cut distinction between the two seers.\(^{686}\)

Consequently, Mopsus represents a more suitable figure for Calchas.\(^{687}\) His frantic possession marks his entrance:

\(^{684}\) These are historical figures. On Nigidius Figulus, see Getty (1941) 17-22; on the figure of Arruns in the *Aeneid*, see Miller (1994); in Lucan, Rambaud (1985). For an analysis on the *haruspices* in Lucan, see Domenicucci (2013) 29-46 and Santangelo (2015) 177-88.

\(^{685}\) Zissos (2008) 199.


\(^{687}\) Canonically, Mopsus and Calchas are rivals, see Lovatt (2013) 53-4.
The image of Mopsus terrifyingly walking along the shores, with fillets and hair raised over his head, recalls Calchas’ own frenzied bodily transformations (exsiiliunt crines rigidisque laborat / vitta comis). Mopsus also recovers his voice, which unsettles those around him (Val.Fl.1.209-10: vox reddita tandem / vox horrenda viris); similarly, Statius chooses to zoom in, as we have seen, to Calchas’ own strained voice (et oppositum vox eluctata furorem est). Focalisation brings these two vatic events together: in both episodes, the vates is represented as the object of the gaze (ecce), but we never fully become participants in their possession.688 Similarly, Calchas is configured as the recipient of our gaze, as the narrative focuses on the Greeks’ sudden focalization of an already possessed seer (iamdudum). Strikingly, the seers’ alignment as recipients of the gaze is a predominant trait of female prophetesses, thus destabilising both their authority and their masculinity.689

Similarities aside, there are differences between Mopsus and Calchas. In the former’s case, his appearance instils terror into those around him (Val.Fl.1.227-28: Iamdudum hac Minyas <vates> ambage ducemque / terrificat).690 In the Achilleid, those present do not react at the sight of the vates, as we quickly veer towards Ulysses and Diomedes. This lack of response is intriguing. In the Argonautica, Mopsus’ considerable size is emphasised, both in terms of his physical appearance (immanis visu) and the expanse through which he is frantically moving.691 In the Achilleid, there is no trace that the possession enhances Calchas’ stature or status, as the size of Calchas is never specified. We see this difference in bodily

689 Lovatt (2013) 133.
transformation also with another Valerian seer, Phineus, whose old age does not prevent his appearance from appearing as greater by Jason and his comrades (Val.Fl.4.551-52: *tam largus honos / tam mira senectae maiestas infusa; vigor novus auxerat artus*). Phineus is not a suitable *comparandum* for Calchas due to the lack of *furor*. He actively takes up the necessary paraphernalia for his Apollinean divination of his own accord dynamically rousing (*ciens*) the god (Val.Fl.4.548-49: *hic demum vittas laurumque capessit / numina nota ciens*).

Unlike Calchas, who is wholly passive in his reception of Apollo (*intrat deum*).

The corporeal entrance of a god – generally Apollo – signals the possession *topos*. In the *Achilleid*, the locution *intrans deus* (in the transitive sense) is customarily used in a gendered context. For instance, Medea’s utterance in Ovid, who blames a nameless god for being caught up in a frenzied love, triggering the tragedy that ensues (*Met.7.55: maximus intra me deus est*).

In Silius, there is an unnamed *sacerdos/vates* who receives the god (*Pun.3.697: Ecce intrat subitus vatem deus*), which, similarly to Calchas, triggers the utterance of a prophecy (*Pun.3.699: Ac maior nota iam vox prorumpit in auras; Ach.1.526*).

The violent hints

---

692 Murgatroyd (2009) 266; Lovatt (2013) 136-37, who argues that in this passage, ‘inspiration […] is a positive force rather than a maddening one’. Compare in the *Achilleid* where Chiron is re-invigorated upon seeing Thetis (*Ach.1.122-23*).


694 It is striking that Protesilaus orders Calchas to break into the council of the gods (*Ach.1.508: inrumpe deos et fata latentia vexa*, deriving from Amphiaraus’ scene at *Theb.3.634, superum…inrumpere coetus*), but Calchas simply becomes the passive vessel of the god. Notice how different is the active action of ‘entering’ of the mind of the gods that the priestess in book 1 of the *Punica* carries out (*Pun.1.123: intravit mentes superum*). Calchas surprises the gods whilst deliberating but it does not seem to be enough (*Ach.1.518: nunc superum magnos deprendit in aethere coetus*). I follow Ripoll and Soubiran’s (2008) 225 suggestion that *deprendo*, alternative form of *deprehendo*, means to ‘take by surprise’. Breaking in upon gods and their dwellings is often rather sacrilegious, and results in death, as in the case of Hippomedon, warned by the words of Crenaeus (*Theb.9.342-43: deumque / altrices inrumpis aquas*).

695 See Ovid’s Leucothoe here: Sol/the Sun God enters the bedchambers taking on the appearance of the girl’s mother, Eurynome, and then rapes her. The words *Thalamos deus intrat amatos* (*Met. 4.218*) could hold a proleptical tinge to them, looking forward to the rape that is subsequent in the *Achilleid*.

696 The Loeb’s translator assumes this *sacerdos/vates* in Silius to be male, but there is nothing that determines his gender. The Sibyl is dubbed sanctissima vates in the *Aeneid* (6.45), and *sacerdos* can be applied to female priestesses too. It cannot be the same priest that shows Bostar around the temple of Jupiter Ammon, because as they are amazed at the old man’s tale of how the oracle came to be (*Pun. 3.692: dam ea miramur*), there is a sudden screeching and the doors burst open, revealing a *sacerdos* standing in front of the altars (*Pun. 3.694-95: ante aras stat veste sacerdos / effulgens nivea*), who then prophesies. Cf. Walter (2014) 298-307.
of struggle in the Silian passage (prorumpit) are picked up again in the *Achilleid*, showing how Calchas is undergoing a violent possession (torquens).⁶⁹⁷

Thiodamas in the *Thebaid* fits the gendered bill best: his vatic appearance on the doomed epic/tragic stage of the Statian poem destabilises, and even inverts, the clear-cut distinction of the furor’s modus operandi.⁶⁹⁸ Thiodamas’ late appearance makes it clear that, as the secondary warrior-prophet replacing Amphiaraus, he is not prepared for the possession’s overwhelming intensity:

> prosilit in medios, visu audituque tremendus
> impatiensque dei, fragili quem mente receptum
> non capit: exundant stimuli, nudusque per ora
> stat furor, et trepidas incerto sanguine tendit
> exauritque genas; acies huc errat et illuc,
> sertaque mixta comis sparsa cervise flagellat.

*Theb.10.164-69*

Such an overt divine possession is extremely arresting, and the emphasis on Thiodamas’ vulnerability augments its tragic dimension.⁶⁹⁹ The waves of pain flood and drain at the same time his quivering eyes (*Theb.10.167-68*), which echo Calchas’ bloodshot and unnaturally twisted eyes (*mox igne genas et sanguine torquens / nec socios nec castra videt…*). Thiodamas’ tossing his neck, almost whipping the sacrificial garland turned one with his hair (*Theb.10.169: sertaque mixta comis sparsa cervise flagellat*) is a physical movement that reverberates during the climax of Calchas’ own frenzy (*exsiliunt crines rigidisque laborat / vitta comis*).

Torquens indicates physical strain, the seer is anxius, and his sacrificial fillet suffers (lit. ‘labours’, *laborat*) under the hardened hair. Whilst trembling, he unbinds himself (*solvit*) from the prolonged bellowing sounds (*longis mugitibus*).⁷⁰⁰ The adjective

---

⁶⁹⁷ And conjures up again the idea of a Fury-like furor, with Allecto turning her flaming eyes on Turnus (*Aen*.7.448-49: *tum flammea torquens / lumina cunctantem*). Torquens means to twist unnaturally (*Ach*.1.855), but also suggests physical torment/torture, cf. *OLD* 4.


⁶⁹⁹ Just after this passage, he is compared to a priest of Cybele meeting his demise, which, as Lovatt (2013) 138 underscores, further ‘brings out the uneasy relationship between inspiration and power, gender and violence, subject and object of the gaze’.

⁷⁰⁰ Dilke (1954) 120 takes *mugitibus* to be an ablative of separation.
functions as a temporal marker that indicates a protracted and painful *furor*, reiterated by the detail that his mouth is exhausted (*fessa...ora*).\(^{701}\)

Thiodamas thus becomes a suitable figure for Calchas, but only in its gender-bending elements: like Amphiaraus, Thiodamas belongs on the battlefield, categorically precluded to Calchas. In the *Thebaid*, however, there is another seer with a history of crossing gender boundaries: Tiresias.\(^{702}\) I here propose that we view Tiresias as a figure fit for comparison with Calchas in the *Achilleid*. What is more, in the *Thebaid* he is accompanied by Manto, his daughter, and the feminine agency of the girl is essential for the successful completion of the divination. This ‘double act’, to use Lovatt’s words, creates a unified version of the Virgilian Sibyl, but with its subversions, whereby Tiresias’ ‘masculine self-sufficiency is compromised by his reliance’ on his daughter. As a team, they cross gender boundaries.\(^{703}\) Due to the peculiarity of Tiresias and Manto, who do not sit comfortably in the aforementioned vatic models, I treat them as a separate case that contributes to Statius’ construction of Calchas.

Tiresias features prominently in *Thebaid* 4 and 10. His character as a seer, following Seneca’s *Oedipus*, moves from *vates* to necromancer, as he brings back Laius’ soul.\(^{704}\) Accompanied and helped by his daughter Manto, he is introduced in the narrative with the appellative *vates* (*Theb.4.407*).\(^{705}\) Tiresias’ notorious blindness does not prevent him from preparing the rites (*Theb.4.443-72*): his first

---

\(^{701}\) I return to *mugitus* below.


\(^{703}\) Lovatt (2013) 158.

\(^{704}\) For a study of Statius’ Tiresias and his Senecan counterpart, see Augoustakis (2015) 377-86. Augoustakis’ observation that Statian Tiresias immediately undertakes necromancy is interesting, because in Seneca it is the last resort: *nefas* becomes normalised in Statius’ grim world! See also Taisne (1991) 257-72.

\(^{705}\) Tiresias’ reasoning behind the necromancy is that the gods do not reveal themselves effectively enough in other forms of divination (slaughtering of cattle, the reading of animal entrails or capnomancy itself), *Theb.4.409-14*. This is another indication that violent possession and necromancy are the only successful modes of divination. For the metapoetics of this necromancy, see Parkes (2010)14-23.
call to the shades is not successful (Theb.4.500: *Atque hic Tiresias nondum adventantibus umbris*). Nevertheless, after another strong plea (Theb. 4.501-18), Manto interrupts Tiresias and tells him that the shades are indeed approaching (Theb. 4.519: *audiris, genitor*). As Tiresias is blind, Manto acts as his sight and describes to him the scenery, plagued with ghostly characters from the Theban cycle (Theb. 4.553-78). But suddenly, Tiresias assumes control of the vision, as he momentarily regains sight. Manto’s retelling has been so successful that it crosses the boundaries of epic enargeia, for her tale has allowed Tiresias to take over in such supernatural visions. This moment of clarity for Tiresias is marked by physical changes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Talia dum patri canit interemerata sacerdos,} \\
\text{illius elatis tremefacta assurgere vittis} \\
\text{canities tenuisque impelli sanguine vultus.} \\
\text{nec iam firmanti baculo nec virgine fida} \\
\text{nititur, erectusque solo […]}
\end{align*}
\]

(Theb. 4.579-583)

The violence of the vision for Tiresias recalls Calchas’ bodily possession. Their furores share similar physical characteristics. Their hair stands on end on their heads, and the sacramental fillets are either struggling to stay in place or are lifted up (possibly about to fall). The repetition of nec (Ach.1.522-23: *exsiliunt crines rigidisque laborat / vitta comis, nec colla loco nec in ordine gressus*) unites these passages through the process of thematic inversion, as it pinpoints the differences between the two seers. On the one hand, Tiresias no longer needs his staff, or Manto, as he is able to stand erect on his own. On the other hand, Calchas, not blind and acting on his own, suffers the opposite effects. Moreover, the consequences of the frenzy are not the same for both seers. For Tiresias, already punished with blindness for his insolence, the necromancy functions as a liberating experience. For Calchas,

---

706 As Lovatt describes, ‘his inner vision transcends sight’: it is not an internal visualization, but his own blindness, dissolved by the strength of the light. Lovatt (2013) 159 and Theb. 4. 583-85.
707 Lovatt (2013) 159.
708 Elatis suggests that the ribbons are ‘elevated’ in the sense of being lifted due to the hair standing up on its own. See Parkes (2012) 265, who contrast this side-effect to Phemonoe’s first fake prophecy, where *nullo […] horrore comariam/ excussae laurae* (BC 5.154-55).
709 See Lovatt (2013) 159, and again Phineus.
who has not suffered godly retribution, Apollo’s possession is not envisioned as a positive event, but becomes a debilitating and submissive moment. No respite, however fleeting, is given to Calchas.\footnote{See Lovatt (2013) 149-61: blindness and abjection are the male equivalent of female rape.}

In book 10, a desperate throng of Thebans begs Tiresias to prophesy again (\textit{Theb.}10.589-91), as the city is held hostage by Luctus, Furor, Pavor and Fuga (\textit{Theb.}10.558-59).\footnote{Williams (1972) 102; Parkes (2012) 268.} During Tiresias’ prophecy (\textit{Theb.}10.589-615), we can discern striking textual and thematic similarities to Calchas’ episode.\footnote{There is another reference, but it is grammatical, see Williams (1972) 102.} Here are Tiresias’ bodily changes:

\begin{quote}
ille coronatos iamdudum amplectitur ignes, 
fatidicum sorbens vultu flagrante vaporem. 
stant tristes horrore comae, vittasque trementes 
caesaries insana levat: diducta putares 
lumina consumptumque gens redisse nitorem. 
tandem exundanti permisit verba furori:
\end{quote}

\textit{(Theb.}10. 604-9\textit{)}

The beginning of both prophetic frenzies is marked by \textit{iamdudum}, which conveys a quicker narrative pace. As we have seen, in the case of Calchas, it marks that the seer is \textit{already} undergoing the \textit{furor}, as he does not listen to Protesilaus’ rebuke. This is similar to Tiresias’ case, where it seems that even though Manto is describing to her blind father what she is seeing in the fire (\textit{Theb.}10.603: \textit{patriasque inluminat umbras}), the seer has already gone into frenzy, indicating that he is already under the god’s possession. The type of divination performed by Tiresias, who absorbs the flames on the altars, is a mixture of pyromancy and capnomancy, very similar to that of Calchas (\textit{Ach.}1.521: \textit{flammarumque apicem rapit}).\footnote{Williams (1972) 103; although in the \textit{Thebaid} is discussed at more length, perhaps since in this particular passage Tiresias does not use other forms of divination.} Tiresias interprets the vapours emanating from the twin flames, which symbolise the funeral pyre of Eteocles and Polynices. The way in which Tiresias ingests (\textit{sorbens}) the flames recalls the image of Calchas literally seizing (\textit{rapit}) the...
flames.\textsuperscript{714} In the \textit{Thebaid}, the fires of Apollo’s altar are \textit{coronatos}, garlanded with laurel, in a similar fashion to the \textit{laurigeros ignes} (\textit{Ach}.1.509).\textsuperscript{715} These two Apolline seers also experience physical duress when enduring their respective frenzies. Following his portrayal in book 4, Tiresias’ hair stands up in a mixture of horror and sorrow, with the \textit{vittae} quivering because of the maddened state, which recalls both his previous \textit{furor}, and that of Calchas in the \textit{Achilleid}. When the godly delirium reaches its climax, before Tiresias’ speech, we find out that speech has been impeded by the strength of the vision (i.e. the god), with words like \textit{permisit} that figurally take the meaning of ‘giving up’, as well as finally (\textit{tandem}) ‘allowing’ the words to come out, implying a certain prior opposition, as we have seen with Phemonoe too. This again is echoed in the description of Calchas’ struggle to free his voice.

But Tiresias is not the only vatic voice in this episode: where does Manto stand in all this?\textsuperscript{716} She takes up a narratorial role (\textit{Theb}.10.549: \textit{carmenque serit}), and does so successfully, but she is not allowed to continue as Tiresias takes over. Manto is as a striking figure, an \textit{interemerata sacerdos} who is never violated by Apollo, and a figure who never suffers divine inspiration or possession whilst still exhibiting prophetic skills.\textsuperscript{717} With her voice, she attains a powerful dimension – for a female figure – and, since she is untouched by Apollo (\textit{Theb}.10.488: \textit{virgo}), it is her father alone who endures the \textit{furor} that canonically belonged to god’s prophetesses.\textsuperscript{718} Gender-bending imagery abounds: Statius makes the female prophet Manto a \textit{virgo}, who does not receive Apollo’s possession, and turns the calm prophet into the full recipient of Apollo’s frenzy.\textsuperscript{719} Manto is the agent who enables Apollo to enter into her father’s body, yet she does not possess the

\textsuperscript{714} Williams (1972) 103.
\textsuperscript{715} Williams (1972) 103 and Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) 225.
\textsuperscript{716} For the difference between Thebaitic Manto and Senecan Manto’s more tangential role, see Walter (2014) 202-7.
\textsuperscript{717} Walter (2014) 204-5.
\textsuperscript{718} Lovatt (2013) 160; Walter (2014) 204. Apollo makes sure that Manto remains a virgin (\textit{Theb}.7.758-9: \textit{conatusque toris vittatam attingere Manto / Lampus: in hunc sacra Phoebus dedit ipse sagittas}).
\textsuperscript{719} Walter (2014) 204; see Keith (2002) 399-402 for Manto’s learned Theban history.
authority nor does she undergo Tiresias’ frenzy. Lovatt rightly argues that she is a ‘channel for information not even affected by the process of passing it on’, but effectively she plays a larger role, as the sole enabler of both rites in book 4 and 10: her importance should not be underestimated. I agree with Walter when she argues that the labelling of Manto as *provida* suggestively indicates that she has become a prophetess in her own right (*Theb.* 10.639: *fit provida Manto, / responsis ut plana fides*). Furthermore, Tiresias and Manto have been recognised to be ‘a channel for further violence’, as the seer’s final divination enacts Menoeceus’ death, and the nefarious end of the Theban War.

If we take Tiresias to be an intertextual model for Calchas, then we are witnessing another gender inversion. Tiresias’ inactivity during the war turns him into a more suitable vatic figure for unwarlike Calchas, but, as we have seen, the outcome of their prophecies/visions is diametrically different. What is more, the female agency of Manto, which turns father and daughter into one, whole Sybil, is removed from the *Achilleid*: Calchas stands alone, accompanied by no woman and undergoing a canonically feminine *furor* on his own. I argue that the removal of the female counterpart in the rites in *Achilleid* – strengthened by the emphasis placed on the feminisation of the bodily repercussion – suggests that Calchas is acting both as female and male during his prophecy, further highlighting, and drawing from, the inversion of gender that occurs in the *Thebaid*. The clues scattered in the *Achilleid* indicate that the prophesying act for Calchas is a violent episode, not to be deemed as an example of hyperbolic dramatization. What is more, the adoption of female prophetic models for Calchas is not only because of the Sibyl’s totalising influence – as we have seen differences in execution – but because the boundaries of gender (and poetic authority) become hazy and

720 In Ovid’s *Met.* 6.157, however, as Michalopoulos (2012) 226 argues, Manto ‘acts as a female surrogate for Tiresias’.

721 Mopsus and Idmon are a ‘double act’, cf.fn.703 for Manto and Tiresias. In the case of Amphiaraurus and Melampus working together, as Fantham has argued (2010) 610, Melampus’ figure is necessary for the authentication of what Amphiaraurus will see and describe (what is more, from a narratological perspective because they are on a secluded mountain: Statius needs Melampus so that Amphiaraurus is not talking on his own).


negotiable, especially in the case of Statius' Thiodamas and Tiresias/Manto. In a text like the *Achilleid*, simultaneously so concerned with gender restrictions and so opposed to clear-cut dichotomies, the choice of Calchas' portrayal as a feminised prophet does not therefore seem arbitrary.

5.6 *A song of war and death: outcomes of furor*

We have seen the feminisation of the *vates* figure in the *Achilleid* in the way Calchas' bodily changes are depicted. I argue here that this feminisation elicits tragic elements, and that this becomes clearer when observing Calchas *after* he has prophesised. When describing the aftermath of Phemonoe's possession in Lucan, it is clear that there is a heavy price to be paid for the attainment of knowledge beyond the realm of mortals: death (*BC* 5.116-20). Phemonoe is strained by Apollo's possession and she faints once the god has poured over her entrails the waters of Lethe, so that she can forget (*BC* 5.221-22). As soon as the god leaves her, she drops onto the ground (*BC* 5.222-24: *...Tum pectore verum / fugit, et ad Phoebi tripodas rediere futura; / vixque refecta cadit*). The narrative shifts to Appius, but it leaves Phemonoe's fate unclear. I also argue that the description of the consequences of divine *furor* is again a gendered matter. In fact, in the case of male seers, even those who undergo possession, focus on bodily changes and repercussion is seldom retold: in the case of Mopsus, we swiftly move on to Idmon's prophecy, in the case of Thiodamas, his *furor* is followed by a prophecy and the subsequent rousing of the warriors to an attack against the Thebans.

Phemonoe's fate echoes the depiction of the unnamed Roman *matrona* who bursts into the narrative at the end the first book. After her vision, she lies exhausted: the idea of bodily possession – perhaps even pushing towards divine rape – is ever-present (*BC* 1.695: *Haec ait et lasso iacuit deserta furore*).

---

725 Stover (2012) 160-61 dubs Apollo's attempt to silence the *vates* to be an example of 'vatic obstructionism'.
727 And in fact, she is close to death (*BC* 5.224: *vicinia leti*), cf. Masters (1992) 144.
728 Fowler (2002) 148: 'a true orgasmic frenzy which is so violent that eventually her life is snuffed out by it'.
729 Masters (1992) 143 has argued, contra Lovatt (2013) 133: '...at the end of the book, she may lie passively, but we are not given any sense that she will suffer from her vision'.
Commentators notice that Calchas faints after his possession: two lines are devoted to this image.

\[
\text{Hic nutante gradu stetit amissisque furoris viribus ante ipsas tremefactus} \text{ conruit aras.}
\]

\((\text{Ach.1.536-37})\)

The interesting juxtaposition of \textit{nutante gradu} and \textit{stetit} (‘whilst staggering he stopped’) creates a contradictory image, a \textit{vates} who stands still whilst struggling to walk after Apollo has left the body. A similar expression, as Nuzzo notices, conjures up the same image in the \textit{Silvae} (Silv.5.5.16: \textit{ipsa gradu labente tulit}), denoting a mother bringing her own child to their funeral with falling step: funereal overtones cloak Calchas’ exit here.\footnote{Roche (2009) 390 emphasises the Virgilian literary \textit{topos} of fainting and falling silent after a prophecy (Aen.6.102: \textit{cessit furor et rabida ora quierunt}): Calchas is among those who faint. Ripoll and Soubiran (2008) only advance a caustic note, ‘effondrement final du devin’, pointing to Lucan again, whilst Dilke omits discussion.}

The striking element, however, is the symbolism behind Calchas’ final scene in the poem. The \textit{vates} hurries (\textit{conruit}), but the addition of \textit{tremefactus} adds an element of ruin to this characterization: shaken, he utterly collapses before the altars as he speeds towards them. Particularly fitting is the end of Cassandra’s \textit{furor} in Seneca’s \textit{Agamemnon}, where the Chorus witnesses the prophetess’ utterances and her subsequent downfall:

\[
\text{Iam pervagatus ipse se fregit furor, caditque flexo qualis ante aras genu cervice taurus vulnus incertum gerens.}
\]

\((\text{Ag.775-77})\)

Cassandra falls likened to a bull – one cannot help seeing Iphigenia in this image – an animal ready for an ill-omened sacrifice. The locution of \textit{ante aras} (often + \textit{stare}) is used often to designate a ritualistic victim. In the case of Lucretius, the context is Iphigenia’s own sacrifice (Lucr.1.89-90: \textit{et maestum simul}}
In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas promises many a sacrifice for a disguised Venus (*Aen. 1.334: multa tibi ante aras nostra cadet hostia dextra*), which is taken up by Ascanius (*Aen. 9.627-28: et statuam ante aras aurata fronte iuvencum / candentem pariterque caput cum matre ferentem*). In Ovid, Helle and Phrixus stand terrified on the sacrificial altar, waiting for Ino’s punishment before being saved by the ram sent by Nephele (*Fast. 2.861-62: et soror et Phrixus, velati tempora vittis, / stant simul ante aras iunctaque fata gemunt*), Althaea is standing in front of the altars, torn between her sisterly duty and her motherly duties (*Met. 8.479-80: utque manu dira lignum fatale tenebat, / ante sepulcrales infelix adstitit aras*), and Ovid’s Erisychthon is compared with a sacrificial victim (*Met. 8.763-64: ante aras ingens ubi victima taurus / concidit, abrupta cruor e cervice profundi*). Seneca follows: before Tiresias and Manto’s necromancy, the seer’s daughter has prepared a suitable victim for their slaughter (*Oed. 303: opima sanctas victima ante aras stetit*).

At the end of Calchas’ furor, the seer is portrayed as a sacrificial victim too, a feminised *vates* being abandoned by the divinity: the image is startling, and augments the tragic characterisation of Calchas, who is depicted as a tragic replacement for Achilles, and the necessary victim of Apollo. Before offering a metapoetic reading as to why the seer in the *Achilleid* is presented in these terms, it is important to highlight the significance of this vatic moment for the beginning of the Trojan War. Why would Statius devote two lines to describing the aftermath of the prophetic act in such a symbolic manner? His vision is true – despite Ulysses’ disbelief – and the Trojan War cannot be re-written: but in light of the undermining of his vatic authority, the construction of Calchas as a victim does not seem puzzling or hyperbolic anymore. The vocabulary used to describe Calchas also simultaneously evokes the description of Troy falling in the *Aeneid*,

---

733 Gale (1991) 414-26 advances semantic similarities between this passage and Virgil’s *Georgics* (4.541-51), with the death of the sacrificial animals, personified, at the altar.
734 The death of Priam at the hands of impious Pyrrhus is described in the same ritualistic terms (*Aen. 2.550-51: hoc dicens altaria ad ipsa trementem / traxit*).
where the city is compared to a falling ash tree (*Aen*.2.363: *urbs antiqua ruit*, and 2.630: *et tremefacta comam concusso vertice nutat*).\(^{735}\)

What is more, the use of *mugitibus* recalls the *Aeneid* again, but not just the Sibyl’s terrifying cave as we have seen before: Laocoön’s groans when asphyxiated by the sea snakes as he was sacrificing a bull are described as the *mugitus* of a bull who is not ready to be slaughtered (*Aen*.2.223-24: *qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram / taurus*). Asso points out the ‘brilliant twist’ that Virgil pulls here, as the presiding officer in charge of the sacrifice becomes the victim, the animal to be slaughtered instead: Laocoön’s *mugitus* foreshadow the fall of the Trojan war.\(^{736}\) The *vates* in the *Achilleid*, the guardian of the epic plot who triggers the Trojan War, can be read as a proleptically-charged, mnemonic marker and *object*. The image of the exhausted, frenzy-imbued prophet, enduring divine violence canonically employed for female prophetesses, falling upon the altars where he has sacrificed, functions as a grim glimpse to (and reminder of) the horror that will ensue.\(^{737}\) In this way, Calchas follows in the prophets’ Thebaidic footsteps: Protesilaus’ promise of deliverance becomes empty, and we are again reminded that we have seen his fate before, and that even prophets will not escape the madness of epic and war.\(^{738}\)

### 5.7 Truly a tragic Thetideid? Conclusion

So far, I have examined how the portrayal of Calchas plays with, and subverts, various tropes of Flavian vatic *furor*, and how his description betrays deep concerns with issues of feminisation and victimisation of the figure of the *vates* in the poem, and, more generally, in the tradition. When we look at these tensions that arise from the text, we ought to frame these repercussions within their metapoetic significance, as the presence of the figure of the *vates* echoes ideas of inspiration and composition of poetry.\(^{739}\) We must think of how they reflect on

---

\(^{735}\) The only other instance of *nuto* in the *Achilleid* describes the fall of Troy in Ulysses’ speech (*Ach*. 1.871: *ipsaque iam dubiis nutant tibi Pergama muris*).

\(^{736}\) Asso (2010) 181-82 reads the Virgilian passage with the fall of Saguntum at *Pun*. 1.362-72.

\(^{737}\) Calchas’ seemingly *un*violated temples, which we know will be eventually violated (cf.fn.650) also augment the proleptical, tragic force.

\(^{738}\) Walter (2014) 207.

\(^{739}\) Cf.fn.619.
the figure of the poet, and finally, perhaps more broadly, they ought to initiate a poetic discourse as to ultimately how Statius envisioned the composition of the *Achilleid*.

We have seen that the figure of the *vates* is often, if not always, a character who signals the presence of the figure of the poet within his text. The *vates* is the mouthpiece of the god, especially Apollo as the divinity concerned with prophecy and poetry: therefore, often, if not inevitably, his presence signifies the presence of the poet, or better, his poetic *persona*. The *vates* is the character on which the poet projects his metapoetic ideas, ideals and even anxieties. If in the *Achilleid* the role is played by Calchas, as we have seen, and he is constructed as a figure that undergoes the emasculating process of divine inspiration and violence, we must then analyse why is he depicted in this way, and, ultimately, what can we draw out from the choice of said process. Fowler reflects on the tension between divine inspiration and divine rape in the *Aeneid*, and his question can be extrapolated from its Virgilian significance and applied to our present discussion:

> ‘These two aspects of the Sibyl…are rarely connected. But if the Sibyl’s inspiration is like the poet’s, and inspiration is figured as sexual assault, where does that leave the creative artist?’

In the case of Statius, we do not have a Sibyl – naturally, as the poem’s subject matter is Greek in nature – but we do have a *vates* who is primarily influenced by Virgil, a Sibylline poet-bard who is portrayed as a figure who undergoes a distinctly feminised *furor*. Sharrock’s contribution, in the same volume, takes an even more direct approach:

> ‘When the poet plays ‘Sibyl’, then, he becomes a woman, a tortured, agonised woman who speaks the words of Apollo (playing ‘muse’), because she must, when she is forced by a kind of prophetic rape to accept the god’s domination, and to open her mouth and the hundred mouths of her cave to allow his words to pass.’

---

740 Ibid.
These are the axes I want to consider here: if Calchas’ Apollinean possession is presented as a violent, bodily intrusion, a feminising act that leaves the vates as a passive recipient of the god’s influence, how does this ‘emasculating’ reflect on the Statian poetic persona? In order to attempt to offer an interpretation, we must begin with the contents of Calchas’ prophecy.

Calchas’ prophecy has been analysed because of its Ovidian reminiscences, as in the case of Fantuzzi’s main analysis. The immediate models for the motif at play in the Achilleid (‘Calchas consulted about an issue which leads him to utter an oracle that is upsetting to a member of his audience’) is found in Aen.2, with Sinon’s fabricated story to the Trojans who captured him, and Iliad 1.53-100, in the manner of a window allusion, where Calchas is asked to prophesy and points to the return of Chryseis to her father, a fundamental point that begins the Homeric epic. The Iliadic model is, without a doubt, an important intertext for our Calchas here, but there are a number of differences in content that need to be drawn out. In the Iliad, it is Achilles who asks for an explanation of Apollo’s anger at the beginning of book 1, and Calchas’ response is constructed in a calm and explanatory manner: the god’s plague has been sent because of Agamemnon’s impiety, and what needs to be done to appease Apollo is the girl’s return and a sacrificial offering. We have already seen the difference in execution between the Iliadic Calchas and the Statian Calchas, but even the contents of their speeches are diverse. Calchas in the Iliad explains what needs to be done next, with a view to future action.

On the other hand, the main object of Statian Calchas’ divination is the transvestism of Achilles acted out by Thetis. The present tense is recurrent in the passage (rapit; aufer; video; veniunt; and the stern present imperative of scinde… scinde… ne cede), and the effect it creates is quite interesting. Because Calchas’ prophecy is not explicitly concerned with events that take place in the future, and

---

it does not serve the purpose of advising the Greeks on any matter: the focus remains on Thetis and her transvestism of Achilles. The prophecy is not about the future: it is rather a parallel vision that ‘glimpses’ at an episode happening outside the Aulis window. The use of the present tense generates the effect of a parallel narrative, which in turn creates a further layer to the divide of what has happened on Scyros and the events at Aulis, with these two levels in constant dialogue with each other. In fact, Calchas is analytically (re)seeing what has happened in the first 396 verses of the Achilleid, in their exact narrative order: Thetis’ raptus of Achilles (focalized through the eyes of Calchas, Ach.1.526-29), her Latonian pondering over the most suitable location to hide her son (Ach.1.529-32), the transvestism (Ach.1.533-34) and finally the ambiguous line of the improba virgo, who could be Achilles, Deidamia, or indeed, both (Ach.1.535). Calchas looks back to the narrative, as if he had been given a window to the past, and then, instead of referring what he has seen, he attempts to break his own temporal level by addressing Achilles himself, ordering him to discard the female garments he is donning, almost as if the boy were listening to what he is says (Ach.1.534: scinde, puer, scinde et timidae ne cede parenti). Calchas thus effectively retells, as if he were witnessing them, the events of the Achilleid, and more specifically, those enabled by Thetis. This is where we see more clearly the difference between what the Greeks tell and what the Achilleid is really about. Furthermore, and most importantly, the figure of the vates is feminised because it must deal with Thetis’ overpowering, feminine agency in charge of the extant Achilleid, which threatens the poem’s epic progress.

Calchas’ prophecy is a direct attack against Thetis; the frenzied prophet directly addresses the goddess (Ach.1.526: quo rapis ingentem magni Chironis alumnun…?). As Moul has shown, this address has a strong Horatian flavour,

746 See Fantuzzi (2013) 160 for this paradox in interaction between Calchas and Achilles/Thetis, and that Achilles’ subsequent soliloquy seems to be a direct answer to Calchas’ cries. The characters are breaking the walls of narrative time and place.
747 For Calchas to ‘understand’, it seems that he needs to be feminised.
749 Pace Moul (2012) 296, who argues that ‘the prophet’s horrified reaction as he sees a vision of Achilles’ abduction and disguise is very funny’.
as the poet had addressed Bacchus in his frenzied possession, seeking inspiration for Augustus’ apotheosis (Carm. 3.25.1-2’; quo me, Bacche, rapis tui / plenum?). Yet this is the striking element in the Achilleid with the address to Thetis, for ‘we may expect him [Calchas] to begin addressing the god himself’. Instead, we have Thetis, and it is she who is taking away Achilles: she is configured as a sort of opposing inspiration, steering the narrative away from its epic course. Moreover, by beginning his prophecy directly addressing Thetis, the significance that it is placed upon the goddess’ power is compelling: the direct address might be part of a broader vituperatio, but its placement symbolically intensifies her status. She is seen as a match for Calchas, and Apollo by proxy. The tension between these sides, furthermore, becomes overt when Calchas attacks Thetis’ weight as a goddess:

\[
\text{non patiar: meus iste, meus. tu diva profundi?}
\]  
\[
\text{et me Phoebus agit.}
\]

(Ach.1.528-29)

Calchas’ eagerness to claim Achilles for the Greeks is represented by the twice repeated possessive; \textit{mihi} closes off the end of the passage (Ach. 1.535: \textit{ei mihi raptus abit}!). The god’s zealousness tinges the passage with a darker significance, for Apollo acts as destroyer of his own creation: Statius invokes him in the proem, but simultaneously ‘Phoebus will be there at the end, when he kills Achilles, with Paris, at the Scaean gate’. The divide between Thetis and Calchas/Apollo is made explicit as each sits on a different, but consecutive line, in a carefully balanced divine stand-off (\textit{tu…me}). Perhaps it is here that we might grasp best the identification of Calchas with the figure of the poet. Calchas is literally moved, driven (\textit{agit}) by Apollo, and, just as in the pre-prophetic \textit{furor}, we still find violent

\footnote{Moul (2012) 296-97}
\footnote{Moul (2012) 296-97. Moul also argues in favour of the proleptical force that the Horatian intertext grants the passage in the Achilleid, as in the same poem Horace self-fashions as a Bacchant: the Horatian allusion looks forward to the rape and the disguise of Achilles (compared to Bacchus), but it is not explicit.}
\footnote{For Thetis \textit{literal} steering following in Latona’s footsteps, see McNelis (2009) 238-46.}
\footnote{Feeney (2004) 89: this morbid interest of Apollo in the hero is sustained, as the god aids the Greek in their arrival by sending favourable winds (Ach. 1.682-83).}
undertones in this image: one of the meanings of *agere* is, quite simply, to attack.\(^{754}\) We see this for instance in the case of Amata’s Bacchic madness, stirred up and vexed by order of a divinity, Juno, through the agency of Allecto (*Aen.*7.405: *regnam Allecto stimulis agit undique Bacchi*).\(^ {755}\) Calchas, just as the poet, depends on Apollo’s inspiration for the crafting of his words. What is more, the possessiveness that transpires from the seer’s words is particularly relevant for Statius, as the poet had endearingly – possibly with a paternal tinge – designated his composition as *meus Achilles* elsewhere (*Silv.*5.2.163).\(^ {756}\)

It is therefore natural to think of this prophetic passage in metapoetic terms, as pointed reflections of the ever-present gender and generic tensions that run throughout the *Achilleid* are also at play in Calchas’ prophecy.\(^ {757}\) If we combine this presentation on the poet’s part with the subject matter of the prophecy, which are Thetis’ feminine powers, and indirectly, her prominence as a goddess (*Ach.*1.527: *femineis, Nerei, dolis*...), and Achilles’ transvestism, it does not seem fortuitous that Calchas, the poet-prophet, is portrayed as undergoing himself a feminine *furor*. After all, the prophecy he has produced is, in essence, the first part of the poem, enacted by a female agent, Thetis, and is retold in an epic environment. In light of the abundant inversions of masculinity, Calchas’ *furor* needs to be retold in feminine terms because its subject matter is an epic figure who is feminised himself by a feminine agent.

The tension between Apollo and Thetis in the passage can also be explained in these broader metapoetic terms. The quasi-paternal expression of

---

\(^{754}\) *Agit* can literally mean to ‘put in motion’, a notion that will crop up at the end of this section. See also Fantuzzi (2012) 88.

\(^{755}\) For this passage’s Euripidean allusions and Bacchic frenzy instilled by other gods, see Mac Góráin (2013) 134-35. See also Amphiarraus’ reply (*Theb.*3.625-26: *sed me vester amor nimiusque arcana profari / Phoebus agit*).

\(^{756}\) See Gibson (2006) 254 for other examples: the identical phrasing occurs at *Silv.*4.7.23-24. Though Achilles is not strictly an inspiring deity, Sharrock’s reflection (2002) 210 n.14 is important here: the scholar argues that the way poets refer to their inspiration(s) is a gendered matter. The possessive *meus* is often used in relation to the inspiring muse, or even of the subject matter in certain cases (*mea Cynthia, mea puella, Thalia mea* and so on), but a poet dubbing Apollo as *meus* or his Augustan composition as ‘my Augustus’ is unheard of: ‘men, whether divine or imperial or otherwise, are not subject to appropriation in such a way’.

\(^{757}\) Again, see Moul for the inversion of masculinity (2012) 292-95.
Calchas/Apollo, ‘mine, that boy is mine’, as Feeney has shown, indicates that the god is sinisterly eager to re-appropriate of Achilles and to have the youth finally arrive at Troy. Apollo’s, or/and the prophet’s, eagerness embodies the imperative need to return to the epic plot. Thetis, however, is the dangerous figure who threatens the Trojan War ab initio, but, most importantly, also the mastermind behind the transvestism. She is depicted as an artifex, as the sculptor Pygmalion who moulds her son and teaches Achilles how to behave like a woman (Ach. 1.332-34: qualiter artifici victae pollice cerea / accipiant formas ignemque manumque sequuntur, / talis erat divae natum mutantis imago). On the importance of Thetis as creative force, one of Rimell’s reflections has not received the attention it deserves, namely that ‘Thetis might – in theory – adopt or shadow Statius’ role as a poet in the Achilleid’. She also notices that the poetic ambitions of Statius (and Calchas/Apollo) and Thetis might stand on two paradoxical levels, but they ‘are also perfectly aligned – just one of many energizing paradoxes knotted through this text which help push Achilles towards the horror of rape and war’.

This is a shrewd observation, and I believe it can be pushed even further. The verses discussed above (Ach.1.528-29) are striking also because of their ambiguous and split nature, as Feeney has shown: it could be either Apollo or Calchas speaking, or both. It becomes difficult to discern the voice of the god, his prophet and the poet, as they become blurred in the search for Achilles, the poem. But if we read them whilst taking into consideration that there are metapoetic hints at play, then Calchas’ question, tu diva profundi, acquires yet another layer of metapoetic significance. If we consider the necessary feminisation of the poetic persona, the importance placed upon Thetis, her agency and its configuration as inspiration for the first 396 verses of the poem and the analeptical force of the prophecy that acts as a summary for a fundamental section of the narrative, Thetis

---

758 Cf.fn.151; Fantuzzi (2012) 88 links Calchas to the didactic author Ovid in Ars Am. 691-6, and both figures treat Achilles’ transvestism with disapproving moralistic contempt.

759 McAuley (2016) 347 talks about a ‘sudden congruence between the voice of the poet and the voice of the mother in the poetic text’.

760 Rosati (1983) 51-93 on the role of Ovid’s Pygmalion as the Ovidian artist; McAuley (2016) 362-63 for the tragic construction of a ‘fantasy’ behind this image.


indeed becomes another figure standing in for the poet, the poet who enabled Achilles’ cross-dressing. But what does this mean for the poet of the *Achilleid*, Statius? And what if Thetis’s agency is not working *against* that of the poet, but actually is the product of the inspiration process?

When we talk about poetic inspiration, we need to return to the beginning of this thesis, to the poet’s statement of intent: the proem. Fowler observed that ‘any figuration of poetic creation in terms of an energizing flow has to deal with the tricky question of *where* that energy comes from, within or without, and whether the poet is to be identified as the powerful source of that energy or as borne along helplessly by it’.763 In the proem of the *Achilleid*, we have three sources of poetic inspiration: the Muse, Apollo and Domitian:

Magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti
progeniem et patrio vetitam succedere caelo,
diva, refer.

(*Ach.1.1-3*)

tu modo, si veterem digno deplevimus haustu,
da fontes mihi, Phoebe, novos ac fronde secunda
necte comas

(*Ach.1.8-10*)

At tu [Domitian] […]
da veniam ac trepidum patere hoc sudare parumper
pulvere

(*Ach.1.14, 17-18*)

The *diva* of the *Achilleid* has been identified with Calliope and Erato, and the presence of an unnamed goddess goes back to the *Iliad* (*II*.1.1-2: μὴν ἄειδε θεὸν
Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος / οὐλομένην).764 Nevertheless, if, as we have seen,

764 Barchiesi’s reflection (1996) 59-60 first sparked the interest in this unnamed *diva*, who seems to be Erato because of *Silv*.4.7.1-8 (*iam diu lato spatiaha campo / fortis heroos, Erato, labores / differ ataque*
Calchas/Apollo are the ones eager to bring Achilles to his epic realm, and in light of Thetis’ characterization as *diva profundi*, the enabler of Achilles’ shameful transvestism, it would not be too unreasonable to think that the *diva* in the proem, who retells of Achilles, is Thetis. After all, she is similarly presented in Ovid, and her familial situation is likewise showcased:

```
nam coniuge Peleus
clarus erat diva nec avi magis ille superbus
nomine quam soceri, siquidem Iovis esse nepoti
contigit haut uni, coniunx dea contigit uni.
```

(*Met. 11.217-20*)

Who else would know of the offspring that is denied immortality better than Thetis? The creation of the *Achilleid* therefore becomes a cumulative process, and a dissociative one as well: the contrasting pulls of inspiration, Thetis versus Apollo, echoed in the mirroring narrative, are epitomised in the disjointed cry in Calchas’ prophecy. The poem’s different sections are the object of different inspirations, following the pattern found in the profoundly cyclical (and somewhat ironic) proem: Thetis, the goddess who begins the narrative must be invoked first, and she must be allowed the fulfilment of her *femineus dolus*, to the horror of those who know. This is up until we change focus to the epic intrusion and the epic reminder that there is a war to be fought. Apollo – not without problems – violates and urges his *vates* to disclose the proper epic way, thus fulfilling the propitiatory address of the proem. Calchas is therefore not the only ‘hypostasis’ of Statius, but Thetis becomes one too: a nefarious, dangerously

---

*ingens opus in minors / contrahe gyros*. On Erato and *amor belli*, see also Feeney (2004) 99-100. See Uccellini (2012) 32-4 for an excellent discussion of the various contenders for an identification of this *diva*. Most recently, see Bocciozini-Palagi (2016) 24. Interestingly, the *Achilleid* changes the plurality of the Thebaidic *deae* (*Theb. 1.3-4: unde iubetis / ire, deae?*). For Statius’ relationship with the Muse as a form of conflict in the *Thebaid*, see Rosati (2002) 229-33.

*765 Who is continually concerned about her lesser, mortal marriage, cf.p.121. The presentation of Achilles as the feared offspring (feared, that is, by Jupiter), long debated in the scholarship and dubbed as incongruous, becomes less out of line, perhaps. With this reading, the question before the transvestism is tinged with irony (*Ach. 1.283-84: Quis deus attiontiae fraudes astumque parenti / contulit?*). The *quis deus* could be another, ironic, gender inversion. Bessone (forthcoming a) argues that here we have Love, the most powerful force in terms of metamorphosis and gender bending imagery. However, *contulit* implies that the two deities, Love and goddess, are working together.

*766 The poet, therefore, plays *diva* and *vates*: the feminisation of Calchas, and the overbearing presence of a woman, Thetis, are the necessary processes for poetic innovation.*
feminine and disruptive one,\textsuperscript{767} but without whom we would effectively have no \textit{Achilleid}, and no Achilles to re-direct to his epic destiny. Statius’ own wish at the beginning of the proem discloses this wide-ranging potential (\textit{Ach}.1.5: \textit{sic amor est}).\textsuperscript{768} As Bocciolini-Palagi exemplifies, the use of \textit{amor} in Virgil is an all-encompassing narrative force that incorporates epic, elegy and tragedy.\textsuperscript{769} McAuley highlights that \textit{amor} in the \textit{Achilleid} is not only the desire of the poet for his poetry and the amorous \textit{contaminatio} of Achilles’ dalliance with Deidamia, but also the love of Thetis for her son, thus conceding that Thetis’ agency can be interpreted as a poetic narrative drive.\textsuperscript{770} Calchas’ feminisation, the weakening of the proper epic \textit{vates}, therefore becomes the necessary process to provide a prophecy ‘al femminile’. Ulysses’ fashioning as a Fury also adds to this argument: just as Thetis embodies the unnamed Muse in charge of retelling the story of Achilles \textit{before} the war, Ulysses embodies the Fury who will be in charge of spreading \textit{amor belli} in the second half of the poem.\textsuperscript{771}

I end this chapter with a consideration on the importance of poetic memory at play in the \textit{Achilleid}. Thetis can be interpreted as the Muse in charge of the poem, and is configured as the ‘protector of the plot’: in the words of Bessone, ‘it is up to Thetis to set in motion Statius’ second epic’.\textsuperscript{772} In the introduction, I briefly pointed out the importance of poetic memory in the \textit{Achilleid}: this is seen in the last two lines of the poem, as Thetis is entrusted by Achilles with the safeguarding of the extant poem. They follow:

\begin{quote}
Hactenus annorum, comites, elementa meorum 
Et memini et meminisse iuvat: scit cetera mater. 
\end{quote}

\textit{(Ach}. 2.166-67)

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{767} Hinds (2016) 314. 
\textsuperscript{768} On this Callimachean echo, see Heslin (2005) 73-4 and McAuley (2016) 353. 
\textsuperscript{769} Bocciolini-Palagi (2016) 91-7. 
\textsuperscript{770} McAuley (2016) 353. 
\textsuperscript{772} Bessone (forthcoming a).
Thetis is relegated by Achilles’ *damnatio memoriae* of the Scyrian episode as the one who knows (*scit*) the rest, *cetera.* What is ‘the rest’? Some argue that these things left unsaid that Thetis knows could be the circumstances of Achilles’ arrival on Scyros, whereas some argue that this is a reference to the reasons why Achilles was left with Chiron in the first place. But, as we have seen in the introduction, Achilles’ downright negation throughout his monologue of anything to do with Scyros would lead us to the conclusion, as he says, that these things (i.e. martial training, these *elementa*) are the ones he is keen on remembering. The rest, the shameful intermezzo of his transvestism, is his mother’s doing, as she is consigned with the knowledge of it. Thetis not only becomes the *diva* that puts in motion and retells the *Achilleid*, but the one who is then destined to keep and know its story.

The use of *scire* (against *memini*) has a programmatic flavour, which, I argue, actually portends tragedy. At the beginning of the *Achilleid*, when Statius asks Apollo for a second, or a propitious garland (*Ach.*1.9: *fronde secunda*), he moves from Mount Helicon (*Ach.*1.10: *Aonium nemus*) to the Dircaean territory, declaring that it knows that he is the composer of the *Thebaid* (*Ach.*1.12-3: *scit Dircaeus ager meque inter prisca parentum / nomina cumque suo numerant Amphione Thebae*).

Statius therefore hands over to the Dircaean field (i.e. the battlefield where the

---

773 Heslin (2005) 63: ‘As Achilles disappears into his mother’s womb, the poem ends, having given a complete account of all the events of Achilles’ life up to his joining the Trojan expedition. There is no formal closure here, but it is an eminently logical place to pause’.
775 The use of *scire* for what Thetis, the transvestism, recalls Achilles’ own admission during his monologue, where the hero says that whilst Patroclus is learning how to be a man, he *knows* (*iam scio*) how to brandish thyrsi and spin the thread (*Ach.*1.634-36). For Achilles, it is indeed a shameful thing to retell (*pudet haec taedetq ue fateri*), and *knowing* seems shameful too, cf.fn.518.
776 This is ratified by the reaction of the Scyrian habitants (*Ach.*2.8-9).
777 Jamset’s afterthought (2004b) 246 suggests on the last two lines that it seems as if the poet himself, Statius, refuses to continue the story, advancing the tentative (but perfectly plausible) interpretation of the poem as an intentional fragment, but she focuses on Achilles’ ‘success’ story, rather than its epic/tragic elements.
778 It is the *vates* who usually knows: see Tiresias (*Theb.*4.514: *scimus enim [et] quidquid dici nosciquem timentis*).
*Thebaid* plays out) the knowledge of his previous poetic composition: it seems to me that it is no coincidence that Statius consigns knowledge of the extant *Achilleid* to Thetis. *Scire* enacts a parallel with Statius’ earlier composition, but it is not a positive one: the Theban fields have witnessed the nefarious battle of the Seven against Thebes, and its landscape knows and remembers. In the *Achilleid*, the maternum nefas that Thetis has performed is destined to fail, but she will not only know of its downfall, but she will also know and remember of the consequences of her failure.\(^{780}\) Thetis goes from diva to mater, mirroring her tragic progress in the *Achilleid*, and the last line of the poem aptly captures the fact that this Thetis is not only the goddess of the *Achilleid*, but also encompasses her Iliadic alter-ego who will – in vain – attempt to save her son.

In the proem of the *Thebaid*, Thetis appears as an internal witness to the nefas of the battlefield: she is portrayed as horrified at the sight of the river Ismenos’ mighty waves, which will then become a reality in Hippomedon’s fight with the river in book 9 (*Theb.* 1.39-40: *et Thetis arentes assuetum stringere ripas / horruit ingenti venientem Ismenon acervo*).\(^{781}\) The narrative of book 9, which centres upon the killing of Crenaeus at Hippomedon’s hands, echoes the slaughter of Asteropaeus at Achilles’ hands (*Il.* 21.139-204). What is striking, as Newlands argues, is that Statius chooses to depart from the Iliadic intertext, which focuses on Achilles’ aristeia, in order to shine its narrative spotlight onto Crenaeus’ mother and her lament (*Theb.* 9.351-98).\(^{782}\) Crenaeus’ last – and only! – word is mater, which enacts a parallel with his mother’s tragically piercing invocation of her son (*Theb.* 9.355-56: *utque erupit aquis iterumque iterumque trementi / ingeminat ‘Crenaee’ sono*).\(^{783}\) In

---

\(^{780}\) McAuley (2016) 366-67 highlights that the return to proper epic at the end is far from traditional.


\(^{782}\) Newlands (2004) 151.

\(^{783}\) Crenaeus’ mother voices a lament, following in Hypsipyle’s footsteps. Note the repetition, which conveys an endless cycle. The latter seems at time a suitable comparison to Thetis, as Walter (2014) 222 calls her a narrator with epic ambitions. Regrettably, space constraints preclude further examination, in terms of womanly laments, between all of these figures, but the lament of Crenaeus’ mother at *Theb.* 9.376-98 can be glimpsed at in Thetis’ direct speeches throughout the *Achilleid*. Furthermore, even though Achilles does not die facing the Scamander (and therefore he is playing the Hippomedon role in the *Thebaid*), the juxtaposition of similar circumstances for two women across different sides of the war is firstly seen in the *Thebaid*, with Argia and Antigone. On
the Achilleid, Achilles’ last word is mater, and in the Thebaid, Thetis is seen in its incipit as petrified at the image of the river collapsing onto itself. At the end of the Achilleid, are we perhaps meant to supply Thetis’ future utterance of Achilles’ name at his eventual, and inexorable death? Thus, the designation of Thetis’ agency as nefas, as we have seen in the introduction, is twofold. Firstly, it reveals the uneasiness when it comes to discern a feminine side to a hyper-masculine hero: it should be something not to be remember (and this is why Calchas’ voice struggles to break free in what Stover calls ‘vatic obstructionism’). Secondly, however, it reinforces the idea that there is indeed a tragic element interwoven in this story of Achilles: the description of Thetis’ attempts at saving her son as nefas simultaneously points towards the real nefas that will unfold at Troy. McAuley argues that Thetis ‘is operating in the interstices of the determined tradition’, and that this is, after all, her story, the Thetideid. But if the Achilleid is indeed a cranny in the tradition, Statius and his creation, Thetis, is chiselling it.

the latter, see Manioti’s contribution (2016) 122-42; and in the Achilleid with Andromache and Thetis, again McAuley (2016) 359-60. On Theban laments, see Jamset (2004b) 94-133. Again, underscoring the inevitable cyclicality of epic. This reading would also retrospectively put into question Achilles’ words of grand lineage before the killing of Asteropaeus (Il. 21.184-99). On laments in Flavian epics, see Jamset (2004b) 97-109; Voigt (2016) 59-84 and Augoustakis (2016c) 276-300. Cf.fn.725.

McAuley (2016) 360: when refused her plea, Thetis has other plans (Ach.1.97: alios animo commenta paratus), in the same way that Statius had expressed his recusatio (Ach.1.18-9: te longo necdum fidente paratu / molimur magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles).
Ending at the end: conclusion

With this thesis, I unearthed darker, tragic/epic elements at play in the *Achilleid*. These elements had not been systematically analysed by the scholarship, and their incidences had been downplayed in order to favour a less martial, ‘softer’ reading of the poem’s narrative. The thesis therefore, first and foremost, has proposed to bring to light these components, in order to proffer another angle from which to read parts of the *Achilleid*. This inquiry into the darker epic and tragic constituents thus supplements one of the essential interpretive paths of Statius’ composition: its generic polyphony, complex and multidimensional.  

By doing so, this thesis has read the *Achilleid* as an epic in its own right within its literary tradition and has shown the profound engagement of the poem with its predecessors, as well as its superb level of narrative coherence and mirroring design. This intertextual examination has illustrated how the poem, with its ultra-compressed narrative, exhibits elements with an embryonic tragic and epic potential that echo epic and tragic treatments in previous epics. The *Achilleid* thus becomes a poem of paradoxes and expectations, as we see constant hints to the upcoming war in its most negative aspects, and overwhelming tensions lurking beneath the depiction of its main hero. Chapter two and three have shown how Achilles’ own characterisation presents him as a liminal and problematic figure with monstrous, theomachic attitudes, but the narrative also simultaneously underscores his tragic portrayal and mortal fate, as well as his denied immortality. Achilles plays both the hunter and hunted role, the heroic lion and the cannibal, the Bacchus and the Pentheus role, the Hercules and the Jovian role, and this intertextual analysis of his portrayal has seen how the poem exposes his intrinsic inconsistencies, a hero walking a dangerous path. This contradictory depiction of Achilles further elicits a metapoetic discourse in constant dialogue with his heroic predecessors and engaged in the deconstruction of the hero *par excellence*, a poetic move that continues to

---

788 Thus, expanding upon Achilles’ characterisation in Heslin’s monograph as being *semivir, semifer* and *semideus*. 
tantalise (even obsess) the reader against the looming weight of the tradition to come, which almost precludes any prospect for narrative continuance.

Achilles’ depiction is not the only characterisation that reveals that proper epic and tragic themes, belonging to a darker realm, are firmly embedded in the poem’s narrative. Chapter four has identified a strong intertextual echo in Ulysses’ rescue mission on Scyros, that of Sophocles’ Philoctetes, which encloses Ulysses’ portrayal within a tragic frame, and problematises his agency as a paternal figure for Achilles, and simultaneously increases Achilles’ own tragic portrayal. The engagement with the Philoctetes also augments the inevitable cyclicality of epic and tragic themes, endowing the Achilleid with a sense of inexorable and tragic martial continuity, adding to its narrative compression and to its stifling atmosphere.\footnote{Building from Rimell (2015).} The darker examination of Ulysses’ portrayal further brings forth elements that feed into the darker reading of the poem, as he becomes the hunter closing in on his unwitting prey, Achilles. His role as a Fury in charge of enacting the ‘epic’ part of the Achilleid evokes dangerous and unsettling models that recall nefarious epic beginnings.

Regarding tragic figures, chapter five has questioned the poem’s vatic figure, Calchas, the quintessential alter-ego for the poet. Calchas emerges from this examination as a highly feminised figure, whose right prediction is eclipsed by the emphasis placed on the divine violence inflicted upon him. His feminisation has metapoetic implications: he is working against a feminine poet-figure, Thetis, the real poet of the extant Achilleid. As McAuley has shown, the poem is indeed a maternal epic, and I have shown how her antagonistic agency in the poem enables the poem’s creative process and lays bare its tragic truth.\footnote{McAuley (2016).} Thetis has witnessed horrified the events unfolding in the Thebaid: in the Achilleid, she is resolved to shield her son from a Trojan War that looks a lot like Statius’ previous tragic/epic strife, where redemption becomes almost impossible. The transvestism trick, far from being an ironic and light-hearted moment, becomes the last resort of a mother who knows too well that her nefas will pale in comparison with the horror of the battlefield.
Bibliography


Augoustakis, A. (2016a) Statius, Thebaid 8, edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary, Oxford


Austin, N. (2011) Sophocles’ Philoctetes and the Great Soul Robbery, Madison


Beardslee, J. W. (1918) The Use of φύσις in the Fifth-century Greek Literature, Chicago


Bessone, F. (2011) La Tebaide di Stazio: epica e potere, Pisa


Bessone, F. (forthcoming b) in Papaioannou, S. and Marinis, A. (edd.) (forthcoming) Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic


Bocciolini-Palagi, L. (2016) La Musa e la Furia: Interpretazione del Secondo Proemio dell’Eneide, Bologna


Briguglio, S. (forthcoming) “Vel alio transeundi gratia: the (Generic) Sound of Silence in Statius’ Thebaid”


Coffee, N.; Forstall, C., Galli Milič, L., Nelis, D. P. (edd.) Intertextuality in Flavian Epic Poetry, Berlin


Fish, S. (1980) *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, MA


Fratantuono, L. (2012) *Madness Triumphant: a Reading of Lucan’s Pharsalia*, Lanham, MD


Höistad, R. (1948) Cynic Hero and Cynic King: Studies in the Cynic Conception of Man, Lund


Knox, B. M. (1964) *The Heroic Temper*, Berkeley


216


Papaioannou, S. and Marinis, A. (edd.) (forthcoming) *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic*


Parkes, R. (forthcoming) in Papaioannou, S. and Marinis, A. (edd.) (forthcoming) *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic*


Rabel, R. J. (1997) Plot and Point of View in the Iliad, Ann Arbor


Shelton, J. A. (1978) Seneca’s Hercules Furens: Theme, Structure and Style, Göttingen


224


Williams, R. D. (1972) P. Papini Stati Thebaidos Liber Decimus, Leiden


