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EPIC VOICES IN STATIUS' *ACHILLEID*: CALCHAS' VISION AND ULYSSES' PLAN*

ABSTRACT

This article deals with Calchas' prophecy and Diomedes' and Ulysses' interventions during the mustering of the Greeks at Aulis in Statius' Achilleid *(1.514–52). It will be argued that Calchas and Ulysses embody two different approaches to the generic tensions of the new epic which Statius' poem represents. Calchas, the old* uates *of the Homeric tradition, seems unable to fully understand the 'poetics of illusion' enacted by Thetis and Achilles in disguise, as is clear from his vision. His point of view is skilfully complemented by Ulysses, who turns out to be the true* uates, *as well as the perfect leader for Achilles' rescue. As the only figure who can face the fluid and ambiguous reality of the poem and its literary dynamics as well, Ulysses also stands as a poetic voice himself; through his speech, Statius reflects upon the tensions of his epic and the poetic effort needed to channel the narrative from the peaceful setting of Scyros to the martial horizon of Troy.*

Keywords: Calchas; Ulysses; *improba uirgo*; *uates*; visuality and illusion; self-reflexivity; generic tensions; Statius' *Achilleid*

Despite its importance as a turning point in the plot, the episode of the mustering of the Greek fleet at Aulis in Stat. *Achil.* 1.397–559 has only recently begun to attract scholars' attention on account of its literary interest.[1] In this paper I would like to examine the section which contains Calchas' prophecy and Diomedes' and Ulysses' interventions (1.514–52). My aim is to show that in this passage the voices of these characters function as 'poetic voices', through which Statius reflects upon his poetic agenda. I will focus, in particular, on the traditional figures of Calchas and Ulysses, by considering their different degrees of adaptability in the complex system of literary genres with which the poem is engaged. Both Calchas and Ulysses belong to the epic tradition of the past, but in the new epic of the *Achilleid* they represent two opposite approaches

[1] See V. Moul, '*Quo rapis*? Tone and allusion at Aulis in Statius' *Achilleid*', *CQ* 62 (2012), 286–300; M. Fantuzzi, 'Achilles and the *improba uirgo*. Ovid, *Ars am.* 1.681–704 and Statius, *Ach.* 1.514–35 on Achilles at Scyros', in T.D. Papanghelis, S.J. Harrison and S. Frangoulidis (edd.), *Generic Interfaces in Latin Literature: Encounters, Interactions and Transformations* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 151–68; cf. also R. Parkes, 'The return of the Seven: allusion to the *Thebaid* in Statius' *Achilleid*', *AJPh* 129 (2008), 381–402, at 393–4; ead., 'The epics of Statius and Valerius Flaccus', in M. Heerink and G. Manuwald (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Valerius Flaccus* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), 326–39, at 335–6; G. Bitto, *Vergimus in senium: Statius'* Achilleis *als Alterswerk* (Göttingen, 2016), 274–85; F. Ripoll, 'En attendant Achille (Stace, *Achilléide*, 1.467–513): enjeux dramatiques, éthiques et politiques d'une scène "de transition"', *Dictynna* 16 (2019), https://doi.org/10.4000/dictynna.1826.

to the same genre. Calchas is so firmly rooted in the tradition of martial epic that he proves unable to adapt his prophetic skills to understand the fluid and ambiguous reality which is displayed in the *Achilleid*, and consequently the new literary dynamics of the poem as well. Therefore, his voice needs to be integrated and enriched by that of Ulysses, the *polytropos* hero, who once again demonstrates his ethos, namely versatility, and skilfully manages to control the generic tensions of the poem, so as to channel the narrative from the un-epic setting of Scyros to the martial world of Troy.[2]

I. THE VOICE OF A TRADITIONAL SEER

Calchas' prophecy at Aulis takes place after the voyage of Thetis and Achilles to Scyros in terms of *narrative* sequence, but almost simultaneously in terms of *chronological* sequence. From an internal point of view, therefore, Calchas' vision is necessary to provide the Greeks, who do not know where Achilles is, with useful indications on how to find him and counteract Thetis' *furtum*. From an external point of view, the revelation, which is a shortened rewriting of what has previously been narrated at length, allows the reader to re-experience the same story but through the focalization of the internal characters. In this sense, repetition creates a sense of diffraction. As we will see, the same content is presented through multiple points of view and interpreted in different ways. This offers a first glimpse of the 'multifocal' architecture of the *Achilleid*,[3] and at the same time it reveals the difficulty in decoding the divine message univocally by human characters who show different levels of understanding and sensibility.

As is known from *Iliad* Book 1, the prophet Calchas is consulted by Achilles about the causes of Apollo's wrath because 'he knows both the past, the present and the future' (Hom. *Il.* 1.70). In the *Achilleid*, a poem chronologically posterior to the *Iliad* but prior to it in terms of literary plot, Calchas, who is expected to be the omniscient *uates* of the Homeric tradition, is urged by Protesilaus to reveal the recent events involving Thetis and Achilles. However, when Protesilaus finishes his speech, Calchas seems to be in trouble: while he begins to be possessed by the god, he frantically turns to various mantic techniques, until he is completely overcome by prophetic frenzy (1.514–25). Ecstatic possession is an innovative element in Calchas' characterization: although in his Iliadic past he already interpreted divine signs and made prophecies,[4] now, for the first time in his literary biography, he receives Apollo within himself (*intrantemque deum*, 1.515) and his prophetic *furor*.[5] In other words, Calchas becomes a possessed mouthpiece for mysterious and often obscure divine knowledge which he cannot control in his own right.[6] In the detail of the *furor*, Calchas diverges from his Homeric self and rather aligns himself with the prototype of the female prophetess possessed by Apollo,

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[2] On Ulysses as an intertextually well-learned character and a double of the poet, see now F. Ripoll, 'Ulysses as an inter-(and meta-)textual hero in the *Achilleid* of Statius', in N. Coffee, C. Forstall, L. Galli Milić and D. Nelis (edd.), *Intertextuality in Flavian Epic Poetry* (Berlin and Boston, 2020), 243–58, whose insights are largely complementary to my reading of Ulysses as well.

[3] See F. Bessone, 'Visions of a hero: optical illusions and multifocal epic in Statius's *Achilleid*', *Helios* 45 (2018), 169–94.

[4] On Calchas as an augur inspired by Apollo, cf. Hom. *Il.* 1.69–72. On his expertise in various mantic fields, cf. Sen. *Tro.* 351–9.

[5] The word *furor* is repeated at the beginning (1.525) and at the end of the revelation (1.536).

[6] The state of possession makes the seer deprived of agency in his delivery of divine prophecies. As we will see, this deepens the interplay between points of view and voices within the poem. On the

namely the Virgilian Sibyl (Verg. *Aen.* 6.50–1 *adflata est numine ... | iam propiore dei*), as well as with the Lucanian Phemonoe (Luc. 5.161–77, 186–7 *plena laborat | ... Phoebo*).[7] The overall outcome of this mixture between experience of various mantic arts and visionary frenzy is that Calchas appears like a patchwork character, a 'super-*uates*', who combines in a single figure several traits of all the most famous epic and tragic prophets.[8] However, this solemn portrayal ends up clashing with the content of the revelation itself, thereby producing a consequent sense of bathos (*Achil.* 1.524–37):[9]

> tandem fessa tremens longis mugitibus ora
> soluit, et oppositum uox eluctata furorem est: 525
> 'quo rapis ingentem magni Chironis alumnum
> femineis, Nerei, dolis? huc mitte: quid aufers?
> non patiar: meus iste, meus. tu diua profundi?
> et me Phoebus agit. latebris quibus abdere temptas
> euersorem Asiae? uideo per Cycladas artas   530
> attonitam et turpi quaerentem litora furto.
> occidimus: placuit Lycomedis conscia tellus.
> o scelus! en fluxae ueniunt in pectora uestes.
> scinde, puer, scinde et timidae ne cede parenti.
> ei mihi, raptus abit! quaenam haec procul improba uirgo?'   535
> hic nutante gradu stetit amissisque furoris
> uiribus ante ipsas tremefactus corruit aras.[10]

As previously mentioned, Calchas speaks in the name of the god (*et me Phoebus agit*, 1.529).[11] The prophet received his mantic art from Apollo (Hom. *Il.* 1.72), and in this sense he seems to be a proxy for the poet, who in the proem asked Apollo to give him new sources of poetic inspiration as well (*da fontes mihi, Phoebe, nouos ac fronde secunda | necte comas*, 1.9–10). Again, Calchas' prophetic aim of discovering the

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differences between possessed seers and intellectual sign-interpreters, see E. Pillinger, *Cassandra and the Poetics of Prophecy in Greek and Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 2019), 9–12.

   [7] Calchas' gendered shift from masculine sign-reading to feminine divine possession is particularly interesting in a 'dual' poem such as the *Achilleid*. A similar oscillation partly affects the Virgilian Helenus, whose prophecy at Verg. *Aen.* 3.369–462 is none the less conveyed through a controlled inspiration: see Pillinger (n. 6), 157–65.

   [8] On the one hand, Calchas shares some traits of the possessed seer (bloodshot eyes, pallor, messy hair, etc.), which stem from the Virgilian Sibyl (Verg. *Aen.* 6.46–51) but also recur in the portraits of Cassandra (Sen. *Ag.* 710–15) and Phemonoe (Luc. 5.169–74, 209–18); on the impact of the Sibyl on these figures, see respectively Pillinger (n. 6), 205–7 and J. Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's 'Bellum Civile'* (Cambridge, 1992), 118–33. On the other hand, Calchas' wide-ranging divinatory skills make him closer to Helenus in Verg. *Aen.* 3.359–61; for ornithomancy (1.518–19), see Amphiaraus (*Theb.* 3.633–40), with Parkes (n. 1 [2008]), 393; for divination from smoke (1.509, 1.520–2), see Tiresias (*Theb.* 10.604–8), with Bitto (n. 1), 274–8. For an extensive survey of Calchas' models, cf. F. Ripoll and J. Soubiran (edd.), *Stace: Achilléide* (Leuven, 2008), 224; Parkes (n. 1 [2014]), 335–6.

   [9] Cf. the hair rising in horror and the fillet faltering on the top of the head (1.522–3); a similar reaction ominously affects Tiresias in *Theb.* 10.606–7, just before he announces the oracle's answer and the terrible request for Menoeceus' sacrifice (cf. also Cassandra at Sen. *Ag.* 710–19, with M.M. Perilli, 'Falsa canebat. Il modello di Cassandra nella Pizia lucanea', *Maia* 72 [2020], 374–89, at 383–5). On this basis, we might equally expect a tragic outcome in the case of Calchas as well, but no mournful event will happen after his revelation. Similarly, Statius exaggerates in a 'comic' and extravagant way the figure of his own Sibyl in *Silu.* 4.3: see C.E. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), 309–23, especially 310–12.

   [10] The text of the *Achilleid* is cited from D.R. Shackleton Bailey (ed.), *Statius: Thebaid, Books 8–12. Achilleid* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2003).

   [11] Cf. Amphiaraus' possession at *Theb.* 3.625–6 *sed me ... | Phoebus agit*. For this wording, cf. also Verg. *Ecl.* 3.62 *et me Phoebus amat*.

hiding places (*latebris*, 1.529) where Thetis has sought to conceal her son overlaps with Statius' poetic aim, namely to reveal the hero who is hidden (*latentem*, 1.5) at Scyros. Thus, Calchas, in his role of *uates*, is a figure of prophecy and poetic composition who is inspired by Apollo as patron of prophets and poets.[12] In this light, a passage which needs a close reading is the passage in which Calchas claims Achilles as his own: *meus iste, meus* (1.528). By these authoritative words, which echo the solemn style of the exclamation cried out to Apollo by the Sibyl, *deus, ecce deus!* at Verg. *Aen.* 6.46,[13] the *uates* declares his intention to take Achilles away from his mother and make him join the ranks of the Greeks.[14] However, given the 'polyphonic' arrangement of the revelation, Achilles is also *meus* to Calchas, because Apollo, who speaks through the voice of the *uates*, wants to ensure his control over the fulfilment of Achilles' literary destiny. In this sense, the exclamation *meus iste, meus* makes complete sense if we consider that, from the Homeric tradition onwards, it is Apollo who is going to kill Achilles at the hands of Paris, and that, in knowing this, Apollo's claim might serve as an allusion to the destiny of the young hero in the *Achilleid* as well.[15] Ultimately then, given that Achilles is the object of a poem inspired by Apollo, the divine voice claiming *meus* fades into the all-controlling voice of the inspired epic poet, who evokes the inescapable trajectory of *his* literary creation (that is, Achilles as well as the *Achilleid*) towards Troy.[16]

Calchas' speech touches upon all the remarkable events which have been narrated at length in the previous account by the narrator, and even shows straightforward connections with it. For example, Calchas' question to Thetis (*latebris **quibus abdere temptas***, 1.529) closely reworks Protesilaus' question (***quibus abditus** oris | quaue iubes tellure peti?*, 1.505–6) and matches exactly the moment when Thetis, emerging from Chiron's cave, is pondering where to go with her son (***quibus abdere terris** | destinet, huc illuc diuisa mente uolutat*, 1.199–200). But the content of the vision

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[12] On this topic, see in general J.F. Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets* (Cambridge, 2009); Pillinger (n. 6), 9–12. On the epic *uates* as a prophetic as well as poetic figure inspired by Apollo, cf. e.g. D. O'Higgins, 'Lucan as *uates*', *ClAnt* 7 (1988), 208–26; Masters (n. 8), 133–41. On the *uates* in Statius, see H. Lovatt, 'Statius, Orpheus, and the post-Augustan *uates*', *Arethusa* 40 (2007), 145–63.

[13] Cf. also the Statian Sibyl's address of Domitian as a god at *Silu.* 4.3.128 *en hic est deus*; see Newlands (n. 9), 313–14.

[14] On repetitions such as *meus iste, meus*, cf. B. Gibson, *Statius,* Siluae *5* (Oxford, 2006), 165. Cf. also *Silu.* 5.5.69 *meus ille, meus* referring to the dead slave boy whom Statius claims as his foster father; on this basis, P.J. Heslin, *The Transvestite Achilles. Gender and Genre in Statius'* Achilleid (Cambridge, 2005), 292 argues that 'Calchas disputes Thetis' right, even though she is his biological mother, to keep possession of Achilles'. On the contrasting attitude of Thetis, who shows off her motherly possessiveness as well (***meus** quaeretur Achilles*, 1.37), see now F. Bessone, 'Nimis … *mater*: mother plot and epic deviation in the *Achilleid*', in A. Keith and A. Sharrock (edd.), *Maternal Conceptions in Classical Literature and Philosophy* (Toronto, 2020), 80–112, at 88.

[15] See D.C. Feeney, '*Tenui … latens discrimine*: spotting the differences in Statius' *Achilleid*', *MD* 52 (2004), 85–105, at 88–9. For Achilles' death at the hands of Paris on behalf of Apollo, cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 21.277–8, 22.359–60; Verg. *Aen.* 6.56–8; Ov. *Met.* 12.597–609, 13.501. In this light, *meus iste, meus* could acquire an ominous tinge, since it alludes to the warrior's claim on the victim (or the enemy) who is due to him: cf. Verg. *Aen.* 10.442–3 *soli mihi Pallas | debetur*; Sil. *Pun.* 2.228 **meus ille** *hostis*. In addition, this marks an inversion of Apollo's words at Hom. *Il.* 22.13 οὔ τοι μόρσιμός εἰμι, when the god, revealing himself to Achilles, says that he is not marked by fate (i.e. not appointed to die at the hands of Achilles) because he is immortal.

[16] In this sense, Achilles is *meus* to Statius too: cf. *Silu.* 4.7.23–4 **meus** … | *haeret* **Achilles**; 5.2.163 *te* **meus** *absentem circumspectabit* **Achilles**.

needs to be considered in light of the personal point of view of the seer as the interpreter of that same vision, without neglecting the limits and prejudices by which he is affected.

Let us examine the opening apostrophe to Thetis: *quo rapis ingentem magni Chironis alumnum | femineis, Nerei, dolis?* (1.526–7). The theme of the *furtum* is immediately announced through the reference to the abduction of Achilles (*quo rapis*)[17] and to the female tricks (*feminei ... doli*) Thetis resorted to in order to carry her son away from Chiron.[18] This formulation also bears an allusion that helps to further explain Calchas' mindset. First, the verb *rapere* referring to Thetis' kidnapping of Achilles conjures up the traditional abduction of young women and the subsequent military expeditions they are unwittingly responsible for;[19] after all, Helen's abduction is still fresh in the Greeks' minds and is the very cause of their departure for Troy.[20] Second, the expression *feminei doli* activates sinister associations. This is, for example, the label by which Clytemnestra, who is planning a 'greater crime', designates the tragic deeds of unfaithful wives, nefarious stepmothers and women such as Medea at Sen. *Ag.* 116 *tecum ipsa nunc euolue **femineos dolos**.*[21] It is immediately clear how Calchas' vocabulary appears disproportionate to its real object. What Calchas calls *feminei doli* does not actually represent a case of mortal deceit with tragic effects, in the manner of Clytemnestra's *feminei doli*, as the prophet suspected. Thetis' *feminei doli* are rather *materni doli* which just stem from the art of deception, that defensive strategy in which the goddess—since her Ovidian encounter with Peleus in *Metamorphoses* Book 11—proved to be well versed and which she now exploits to protect her son.[22]

Calchas then moves on to the exposition of the vision proper (*uideo*, 1.530), which is made up of a sequence of 'frames', as it were. An interesting aspect of this section is the way in which Calchas depicts Thetis' trip across the sea. He describes her as 'searching for' (*quaerentem*, 1.531) a place that can accommodate the *turpe furtum*.[23] It seems that

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[17] *quo rapis* recalls similar questions asked by prophets (or poets) in a state of possession: cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.25.1–2 *quo me, Bacche, rapis tui | plenum?*, with Moul (n. 1), 296–7.

[18] Namely the fake account of her anxious dreams about Achilles' destiny and Proteus' advice to purify the boy in the farthest regions of the Ocean (cf. in particular 1.141 *sic **ficta** parens*).

[19] The overlap between Achilles' abduction, as depicted by Calchas, and the traditional pattern of female abduction (the *raptus* of Helen, Europe, Io, etc.) is pointed out by Moul (n. 1), 286 and 290. The expression *turpi ... furto* in Calchas' speech recalls the way in which Thetis indicates Paris' theft of Helen: *en aliud furto scelus* (1.66).

[20] On Paris' abduction of Helen in the poem, see 1.20–1, 1.66–7, 1.399–403, 2.58–71.

[21] Phaedra's crime against Hippolytus is also defined as a *dolus*, an evil intent arranged by means of female deceit (Sen. *Phaed.* 828). For *dolus* referring to Thetis' action, cf. Sen. *Tro.* 213 and 569–70 *uicimus matrum dolos | etiam dearum* (here, interestingly, the words are spoken by Ulysses himself); see also E. Fantham, 'Statius' Achilles and his Trojan model', *CQ* 29 (1979), 457–62, at 459–60.

[22] While in the *Achilleid* Thetis' deception essentially consists of a series of wiles and *furta* (see G. Rosati, 'L'*Achilleide* di Stazio, un'epica dell'ambiguità', *Maia* 44 [1992], 233–66, at 241–2), in the *Metamorphoses*, by contrast, Thetis performs a sequence of proper transformations in order to escape Peleus' rape (Ov. *Met.* 11.241–2 *uariatis saepe figuris | ad solitas artes*; 11.253 *nec te decipiat centum mentita figuras*; 11.261 *nouat formas*). Perhaps, her Ovidian ability at metamorphosing could be a source of inspiration when she decides to dress her son as a girl in order to save him from his call-up to Troy (cf. also Ov. *Met.* 13.162–4 *praescia uenturi genetrix Nereia leti | **dissimulat** cultu natum et **deceperat** omnes | ... sumptae **fallacia** uestis*). On Thetis who 'moulds' Achilles and sets in motion his first metamorphosis, see F. Bessone, 'The hero's extended family: familial and narrative tensions in Statius' *Achilleid*', in N. Manioti (ed.), *Family in Flavian Epic* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 174–208, at 188–9; Bessone (n. 3), 177–8. On Thetis' literary role in the poem, see Bessone (n. 14).

[23] Thetis' choice of Scyros is not casual and extemporaneous (as one might infer from the expression *attonitam ... quaerentem litora*, 1.531), but has been planned *before* the journey (1.201–11). The 'imaginary voyage' of Thetis while evaluating the most suitable island (*placet ire*

Calchas, inspired by Apollo, envisages Thetis' trip as the ignoble and debased version of another famous journey, one which is much more familiar to the god, namely the wanderings of Apollo's mother Latona who, after being unjustly refused, had to travel around the same islands in order to find a shelter to give birth.[24] It is tempting to trace a crypto-allusion to this mythical referent in the place name *Cyclades*. The Callimachean *aition* attested in the *Hymn to Delos*, indeed, suggests an etymological interplay between the name *Cyclades* and the fact that these islands gathered *in a circle* all around Delos, after the island had hosted Latona and had been anchored to the bottom of the sea: Ἀστερίη θυόεσσα, σὲ μὲν περί τ' ἀμφί τε νῆσοι | κύκλον ἐποιήσαντο καὶ ὡς χορὸν ἀμφεβάλοντο (Callim. *Hymn* 4.300–1).[25] In this sense, then, the name *Cyclades* not only provides a set of geographic coordinates but also functions as a marker of mythical chronology: the landscape is reminiscent of its history and even in its topography it bears the vivid marks of its literary past.

The revelation goes on in the next section. Among all the islands of the Aegean Sea, Scyros is the final choice (*placuit Lycomedis conscia tellus*, 1.532). It comes as no surprise that, to Calchas, even the land which Thetis opted for seems itself to be an accomplice to the *furtum*. But in fact the juxtaposition of *Lycomedis* and *conscia* sounds somewhat like an antiphrasis, considering that King Lycomedes himself will later fall victim to that deceit. There is also something more to add here. Calchas, without even realizing it, is offering a longer-term prophecy: Scyros, which is henceforth considered to be *conscia* of Thetis' *furtum*, will soon be *conscia*—according to the meaning of the adjective in erotic contexts[26]—of another *furtum*, the *furtum* of love between Achilles and Deidamia.

Calchas then moves on to the cross-dressing scene in a characteristically selective style: *o scelus! en fluxae ueniunt in pectora uestes* (1.533). Everything is reduced to the single detail of the clothes (*uestes*, a word further emphasized by the alliteration of *ue-*): clothes that in the eyes of a Greek (but a Greek of quasi-Roman inflexibility) evoke first of all a trait of oriental effeminacy.[27] A similar expression, for instance, recurs at Luc. 8.367–8 *illic et **laxas uestes** et **fluxa** uirorum | **uelamenta** uides*, referring precisely to the clothes of men from Asia.[28] But the most disturbing and intolerable aspect of them in Calchas' speech is that these *uestes ... ueniunt in pectora*, they 'come upon Achilles' breast', which is the symbolic shorthand for his strength.[29] That breast, which in the Homeric tradition used to be covered by the corslet or the

per artas | Cyclades, 1.204–5) now, in Calchas' vision, ends up being visualized as her actual wanderings (*per Cyclades artas | ... quaerentem litora*, 1.530–1).

[24] Cf. e.g. Callim. *Hymn* 4.153–4; Ov. *Met.* 6.188–91 and *Pont.* 4.14.57–8. On the myth of Latona in the *Achilleid*, cf. C. McNelis, 'In the wake of Latona: Thetis at Statius, *Achilleid* 1.198–216', *CQ* 59 (2009), 238–46; Heslin (n. 14), 134–7.

[25] On the key motif of the circle in these lines, see W.H. Mineur (ed.), *Callimachus: Hymn to Delos* (Leiden, 1984), 235–6. See also Dionys. Per. 525–6.

[26] See G. Rosati (ed.), *P. Ouidii Nasonis Heroidum Epistulae XVIII–XIX* (Florence, 1996), 98–9.

[27] On the tensions between the Greek, Roman and Trojan points of view, cf. Moul (n. 1), 292, 295–9 and 300; on the dichotomy of Europe/Asia, see A. Augoustakis, 'Achilles and the poetics of manhood: re(de)fining Europe and Asia in Statius' *Achilleid*', *CW* 109 (2016), 195–219.

[28] The adjective *fluxus* is also found with reference to the wedding dress of the bride at Luc. 2.362 *fluxos ... amictus*. Moul (n. 1), 290 notices that Achilles' flowing garments resemble the clothes of Europa at Ov. *Met.* 2.875 *tremulae ... uestes*; this detail gains an allusive tone if we consider that Achilles, just like Europa, is also being abducted.

[29] According to Catullus, Achilles will be *forti pectore notus* (64.339); see Feeney (n. 15), 95–6. Achilles' *pectus* is also a metonym to indicate his heroic prowess: cf. Prop. 4.11.39; Manil. 2.3; Sil. *Pun.* 11.450.

shield,[30] is now to be concealed under female garments, in order to validate the new gender identity of the character. But when the deceit is over and Achilles suddenly turns into a great hero, the clothes will fall down by themselves and his breast will be uncovered again with a spectacular unveiling: *illius intactae cecidere a pectore uestes, | iam clipeus breuiorque manu consumitur hasta | (mira fides) Ithacumque umeris excedere uisus | Aetolumque ducem* (1.878–81).[31] Let us compare the first line of this passage with line 533:

> o scelus! en *fluxae ueniunt* **in pectora uestes** (1.533)
> illius *intactae cecidere* **a pectore uestes**   (1.878)

The end of the two hexameters (*in pectora uestes* and *a pectore uestes*) and the matching opposition of the words depicting the garments (*fluxae ueniunt* and *intactae cecidere*) stage the circular mirroring of two key moments that visibly echo each other in the wider frame of the poem: the beginning and the end of the 'masquerade'. Indeed, the whole story of Achilles' disguise is the story of a dress—a female dress that carelessly shows off Achilles' breast in the presence of the Greeks during the banquet at Lycomedes' palace (*nudataque pectora*, 1.768),[32] and that once again loosens at the trumpet blast, when the epic *tuba* announces by a *coup de théâtre* the end of the 'comedy' and the martial turn of the narrative (*iam pectus amictu | laxabat, cum grande tuba sic iussus Agyrtes | insonuit*, 1.874–6).[33]

   The revelation, right at the peak of its tension, suddenly ends with a question, leaving the major element in suspense: *quaenam haec procul improba uirgo?* (1.535). In the first instance, this riddle prompts us to reflect upon the multifaceted dynamics of focalization and the complex system of vision which is cleverly exploited by Statius in order to create an Ovidian 'poetics of illusion' which ensnares the reader (and the internal characters as well) in a play of conflicting perspectives.[34] In other words, the narrator designs a brilliant closure for a prophecy—one of Sibylline obscurity—that perfectly mimics, with its final flash, the fleeting uncertainty of the situation itself combined with the pleasant effect of theatricality and irony. In addition, this final question also aligns Calchas with many other prophets of the tradition, who often show a limited understanding of their own prophecies and lack clarity of expression,[35] as is clear in particular from the phrase *quaenam ... procul?*.[36] Yet, while the ambiguity typically fits the oracular

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[30] Cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 19.371, 22.313 (*sc.* Achilles) **πρόσθεν** δὲ σάκος **στέρνοιο** κάλυψε.

[31] Only from now can Achilles' *pectus* be covered again with the armour (*et iam punicea nudatum pectora palla | insignemque ipsis, quae prima inuaserat, armis | Aeaciden ... | ... prospectant*, 2.5–8).

[32] Ulysses was keeping his eyes fixed on the *uultus* and, of course, on the *pectora* of the Scyrian ladies to identify the intruder in disguise (1.761–2).

[33] Cf. also 1.724–5 and 2.39; on the *tuba* as an 'epic device', see A. Barchiesi, 'Genealogie letterarie nell'epica imperiale. Fondamentalismo e ironia', in E.A. Schmidt (ed.), *L'histoire littéraire immanente dans la poésie latine* (*Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique* 47) (Geneva, 2001), 315–62, at 343–8; and id., 'Masculinity in the 90s: the education of Achilles in Statius and Quintilian', in M. Paschalis (ed.), *Roman and Greek Imperial Epic* (Heraklion, 2005), 47–75, at 65–6.

[34] On the *Achilleid* as 'poetics of illusion', see Bessone (n. 3).

[35] Cf. e.g. the Sibyl, who sings *horrendas ... ambages ... | obscuris uera inuoluens* (Verg. *Aen.* 6.99–100); Helenus, who admits the limits to his own prophetic intelligence (Verg. *Aen.* 3.379–80, with Pillinger [n. 6], 160–3); and especially Phemonoe, who has only partial control over what she says (Luc. 5.174–7, 197, 210, 222–4, with O'Higgins [n. 12], 211–17; on Pythia's deceitfulness, see Perilli [n. 9], 385–8).

[36] Questions such as *quaenam ... procul?*, etc. make the prophets seem closer to any other character enquiring about anything obscure or mysterious (cf. e.g. Anchises' rhetorical question at Verg. *Aen.*

context, here it betrays a deeper difficulty of interpretation as well. Calchas himself either does not understand the last image of the vision or, if he does understand it, he does not reveal it in full. So, what does the seer mean by the expression *improba uirgo*? We cannot provide a definite answer. The problem is that *improba uirgo* wittily expresses the issue of sexual ambiguity, pointing exactly to one of the main paradoxes in the poem.[37] One possibility is that *improba uirgo* designates Deidamia, as has been suggested by the majority of scholars.[38] In this case, from the Greek viewpoint, Deidamia would be *improba* because she is the object of Achilles' erotic desire and, therefore, she is responsible for Achilles remaining at Scyros and not joining the mustering troops.[39] However, it seems more likely to me that what Calchas sees and is unable (or unwilling) to name is not Deidamia but Achilles, who has seemingly left the stage after being abducted (*raptus abit*, 1.535) only to come back immediately afterwards in the guise of a *uirgo*.[40] But why should Achilles look like an *improba uirgo* in the eyes of the prophet?

We should keep in mind the context of the *vision*. From this perspective, *improba* probably hints at a physical trait of the body or the bearing that visibly looks unnatural at first sight, as well as at an air of boldness which is not befitting of a young lady.[41] In this sense, the adjective *improbus*[42] is highly appropriate here, if we think that Achilles

6.808 *quis procul ille ... ?*, and especially Aeneas' question at 6.863 *quis, pater, ille … ?*) than to the divine knowledge they convey.

[37] Cf. 1.336–7 *fallitque tuentes | ambiguus tenuique latens discrimine sexus*; 1.605. See Rosati (n. 22), 236–50; Feeney (n. 15), 90–5; Barchiesi (n. 33 [2005]), 57–8; Heslin (n. 14), 237–76; M. McAuley, '*Ambiguus sexus*: epic masculinity in transition in Statius' *Achilleid*', *Akroterion* 55 (2010), 37–60. It is not only Achilles that is affected by a cross-gender fluctuation; also Deidamia and her sisters show some masculine traits (*formae species permixta uirili*, 1.811): cf. S. Hinds, 'Essential epic: genre and gender from Macer to Statius', in M. Depew and D. Obbink (edd.), *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons and Society* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 221–44, at 237–40.

[38] See Ripoll and Soubiran (n. 8), 226–7; L. Sanna, 'Achilles, the wise lover and his seductive strategies (Statius, *Achilleid* 1.560–92)', *CQ* 57 (2007), 207–15, at 210; Bitto (n. 1), 278–9. Other scholars acknowledge the ambiguity of the expression *improba uirgo* and its possible twofold reading (cf. Moul [n. 1], 296), but in the end they tend to refer it to Deidamia: see Fantuzzi (n. 1), 160–6; Parkes (n. 1 [2014]), 336 with n. 55, who considers *uirgo* as a reference to Deidamia on the ground of some intertextual echoes from Valerius Flaccus. Interestingly, *improba ... uirgo* defines Medea at Val. Fl. 6.681–2 *imminet e celsis audentius improba muris | uirgo*; in this case, however, the adjective relates to the shameless passion that affects Medea at the sight of Jason.

[39] Cf. Fantuzzi (n. 1), 160 and 163. In this case, then, we should suppose that Calchas is already aware of Achilles' love for Deidamia.

[40] Expressions such as *raptus abit* and *quaenam haec procul improba uirgo*, which announce the arrival of a character 'on the scene' (or his departure), contain a fair slice of theatricality; cf. also the disappearance of the female Achilles (*Peleaque uirgo | quaeritur*, 1.884–5). On theatricality as a key feature of the prophecies in Flavian epic, see H. Lovatt, 'Competing visions: prophecy, spectacle, and theatricality in Flavian epic', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2013), 53–70.

[41] Other scholars imagine that if *improba uirgo* refers to Achilles, then *improba* 'will point to the "morally unsound" new sex of Achilles' (Fantuzzi [n. 1], 162; cf. also 160); Moul (n. 1), 296. If we imagine that *improba* expresses Calchas' condemnation, likewise we must admit that Calchas *did recognize* Achilles in cross-dress. But Calchas seems to have been wrong-footed by the sight of the mysterious virgin: that is the reason why we should not underrate the *visual* aspects that the adjective, even with its possible tinge of moral blame, conjures up in the first place.

[42] '"Shameless", of anything unnatural', thus O.A.W. Dilke (ed.), *Statius: Achilleid* (Cambridge, 1954), 84. Interestingly, thirty-four lines after Calchas' mention of the *improba uirgo*, the adjective *improbus* recurs with reference to Achilles in cross-dress and maliciously glancing at Deidamia (*illam sequiturque premitque | improbus, illam oculis iterumque iterumque resumit*, 1.568–9); *improbus* also refers to Achilles at *Achil.* 1.41, with R. Uccellini (ed.), *L'arrivo di Achille a Sciro. Saggio di commento a Stazio, Achilleide 1.1–396* (Pisa, 2012), 69. Noteworthy too is Deidamia's

is stifling (albeit somewhat awkwardly) his own masculine nature in order to look like a real girl of refined manners, thereby accomplishing his mother's vow (**sit uirgo** *pii Lycomedis* **Achilles**, 1.396), but still remaining the boy who grew up in the wilds of Pelion and Ossa.[43] That Achilles has something strange in his physical appearance and demeanour is also demonstrated by the special attention which is paid to him by the maidens of Lycomedes' court. In their eyes (notice the insistence on the sphere of visual perception), he appears to be a *uirgo noua*:[44] *noua* not only because she is the last one to join their group, but also because she is unusual and different from the other girls, as is clear from her height, her shoulders and, once again, her breast (*quantumque umeros ac pectora fundat*, 1.369). Lycomedes' daughters (who denote a female, youthful and curious eye) see as *nouitas* what Calchas (a male voice of the epic-tragic tradition) sees as *improbitas*. After all, in this flowing continuity of literary chronologies, we should keep in mind that the Calchas of the *Achilleid* is the same prophet who appeared in *Iliad* Book 1, and who knew the martial Achilles of the Homeric narrative. This is the *only* Achilles he can imagine. Unsurprisingly, therefore, when talking of Achilles, Calchas is always looking at his standard representation of the epic hero who is destined for great achievements. First, he calls him *ingentem magni Chironis alumnum* (1.526);[45] then, with a proleptic glimpse of the future, he calls him *euersorem Asiae* (1.530).[46] As we can see, Calchas' rigid, Homeric viewpoint is mirrored in his own rhetorical style. In this sense, his language follows in the footsteps of traditional epic vocabulary: the expression *euersor Asiae*, in particular, resounds with the echo of the Homeric epithet πτολίπορθος ('sacking or wasting cities')[47] and especially with the memory of Verg. *Aen.* 12.545 *Priami regnorum euersor Achilles*.

Moreover, Calchas' attitude is to be considered not only as a self-standing manifesto of the Greeks' heroic aspirations but also as an answer to the anti-epic threat of the female antagonist Thetis. Calchas' awareness of the risk of Achilles' deviation emerges clearly when he begs him to choose war and to reject the clothes and his anxious mother's wishes: *scinde, puer, scinde et timidae ne cede parenti* (1.534).[48] But no

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claim at 1.942 *i felix nosterque redi! nimis improba posco*; whether *improba* here refers to Deidamia as a feminine singular or to the 'overbold' demands she makes in the neuter plural (which seems to me more likely), the meaning is an ironic one: the princess (just like a *relicta*-to-be) is legitimately asking Achilles not to betray her while away at Troy, even though she is well aware that she is making a 'hard' request (cf. also 1.940); see Rosati (n. 22), 257–9.

[43] Conversely, in *Silu.* 1.6.53–4 the female sex is qualified as *improbus* when, during the Saturnalia, some women engage in manlike fighting and feign a virile attitude: *stat sexus rudis insciusque ferri:* | *ut pugnas capit improbus uiriles!*, with A. Pittà, 'Il prefetto risanato e i Saturnali. Stazio, *Siluae* 1.4 e 1.6. Testo, traduzione e commento' (Diss., Scuola Normale Superiore, 2016), 286–7.

[44] *nec turba piarum* | *Scyriadum cessat* **nimio defigere uisu** | *uirginis ora nouae*, 1.366–8. On the Scyrian maidens' visual attitude at the sight of the transvestite Achilles, see Bessone (n. 3), 178–9.

[45] Cf. also Ulysses' words at *Achil.* 1.868 *tu semiferi Chironis alumnus*. The mention of Chiron (*magni Chironis*)—instead of Peleus—underlines the extraordinary nature of Achilles' upbringing (**ingentem** ... **alumnum**). See E. Fantham, '*Chironis exemplum*: on teachers and surrogate fathers in *Achilleid* and *Siluae*', *Hermathena* 167 (1999), 59–70; on the poetic programme with which Chiron is associated in contrast with Thetis, see Bessone (n. 22), 177–83.

[46] See also Ulysses' flattering apostrophe to the young hero at *Achil.* 2.32 *magnae uastator debite Troiae*; here Ulysses is reworking his previous speech to Achilles at Ov. *Met.* 13.169 *quid dubitas ingentem euertere Troiam?*

[47] LSJ s.v. πτολίπορθος; this epithet is often used with reference to Ares and, among the various heroes, to Achilles (cf. Hom. *Il.* 8.372, 15.77, 21.550, 24.108).

[48] Calchas' injunction (**scinde** [sc. *uestes*] ... **ne cede**) is a perfect reply to Thetis' previous invitation to Achilles to yield and accept her clothes: **cedamus** ... | *atque* **habitus dignare meos** (1.259–60). Cf. Bessone (n. 14), 93–5.

sooner has the seer delivered his warning than the young hero yields to the other side. In that exact moment, as if by magic, Thetis' *son* disappears and then he comes back as Thetis' *daughter*. This foretold metamorphosis is also sealed—as the reader can notice from his detached and amused perspective—by the ring composition between the first line (*quo **rapis** ingentem magni **Chironis alumnum**?*, 1.526) and the last line of the prophecy (*ei mihi, **raptus** abit! quaenam haec procul **improba uirgo**?*, 1.535).[49] The effect of Thetis' abduction (*rapis* ∼ *raptus*)—which is reflected in Achilles' shift from *Chironis alumnus* to *improba uirgo*—is thus conveyed within the prophecy itself, but ironically the seer still seems to be too disturbed by the uncanny spectacle of the transformation to realize what has happened.

Since Calchas fails to acknowledge Achilles in cross-dress (or does not even dare to imagine such a scenario), he is ultimately exposed as being too tightly bound to outdated systems of interpretation that prevent him from reading the core of the vision correctly. In other words, Calchas is too one-dimensional in his role of interpreter. Perhaps the phrase *fessa … ora* (1.524), which referred to the seer struggling to convey the divine message, offers a subtle allusion to a tradition that is now exhausted and needs to be refreshed with a new perspective which will soon be provided by Ulysses' versatile intuition and perceptive foresight, as is shown in his following speech and especially in the embassy at Scyros.[50]

II. CALL TO AN EPIC *LABOR*

Calchas' limited and defective sight will be supplemented by Ulysses' insightful 'eye'. Ulysses, in fact, is the only one who is able to fully decipher the vision by means of his cunning mind. His speech is actually delayed by Diomedes' exhortation (*Achil.* 1.538–45):

> tunc haerentem Ithacum Calydonius occupat heros:
> 'nos uocat iste labor: neque enim comes ire recusem,
> si tua cura trahat. licet ille sonantibus antris   540
> Tethyos auersae gremioque prematur aquosi
> Nereos, inuenies. tu tantum prouidus astu
> tende animum uigilem fecundumque erige pectus:
> non mihi quis uatum dubiis in casibus ausit
> Fata uidere prior.'   545

In its essential traits, this scene harks back to the assembly preceding the famous *Doloneia* at Hom. *Il.* 10.218–53. But while in the *Iliad* it is Diomedes who chooses Ulysses as his companion (10.241–7), now—in a much more condensed scene—it is Diomedes who volunteers to be Ulysses' wingman.[51] Turning to Ulysses, who is still hesitant, Diomedes claims that a *labor* is summoning them; obviously, he could not

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[49] I owe this suggestion to Federica Bessone.

[50] *fessus* refers to Calchas' physical weakness owing to his struggle to endure divine possession (cf. *oppositum uox eluctata furorem est*, 1.525; *nutante gradu*, 1.536; *tremefactus corruit*, 1.537). But, in a metaliterary sense, *fessus* can also allude to the 'exhausted' literary tradition Calchas belongs to (notice also the rare patronymic *Thestorides* at line 516, which pointedly looks back to the 'ancient' Homeric *epos* [*Il.* 1.69]; occurrences in Latin poetry before Statius are found only in Ov. *Met.* 12.19 and 27; *Il. Lat.* 52 and 59). The widespread sense of weariness that affects Statian *epos* is best symbolized by Jupiter's *taedium* at *Theb.* 1.216–17 *taedet saeuire corusco | fulmine*: see D.C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic. Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1991), 343.

[51] On the comparison with the *Doloneia*, see Ripoll (n. 2), 244–5 and 250.

refuse to undertake this mission at Ulysses' side (*neque enim comes ire recusem*, 1.539).[52] Diomedes thinks that he will have to face a fully fledged epic task, a sort of new Ulyssean journey to the end of the earth or, better, to the depths of the Ocean, in the caverns of Tethys and Nereus (*sonantibus antris | Tethyos auersae gremioque ... aquosi | Nereos*, 1.540–2).[53] This image has no close parallels, but it possibly recalls, in its majestic tone, the Homeric scene in which Hera goes to visit the Halls of Ocean and Tethys.[54] Diomedes' prediction is hyperbolic and counterfactual, but it outlines one of the possible alternative developments of the *Achilleid* itself, namely the proper mission that would have awaited the two heroes if the prophecy Thetis had falsely attributed to Proteus had been true (*iubet ... | Carpathius uates puerumque sub axe peracto | secretis lustrare fretis, ubi litora summa | Oceani et genitor tepet illabentibus astris | Pontus*, 1.135–9).

   Even though he is not really aware of the meaning of Calchas' revelation, Diomedes is eager to entrust the leadership to Ulysses, because Ulysses is *prouidus* (1.542), that is, because he can foresee.[55] By making this remark, the Statian Diomedes subtly recalls the Homeric Diomedes, who wanted to find a companion because, when two go together, one 'perceives before' the other (σύν τε δύ' ἐρχομένω καί τε **πρὸ** ὃ τοῦ **ἐνόησεν** | ὅππως κέρδος ἔῃ, Hom. *Il.* 10.224–5).[56] But being *prouidus* is typical of prophets as well: Calchas himself, for instance, is said to be *ueri prouidus augur* at Ov. *Met.* 12.18.[57] In this sense, therefore, when Diomedes claims that no prophet would dare to see the Fates before Ulysses (*non mihi quis uatum ... ausit | Fata uidere prior*, 1.544–5), he is acknowledging the *prouidus* Ulysses as the only true and reliable *uates*. In addition, he establishes a symbolic succession and points out the need to switch from a traditional seer, Calchas, whom he deems inadequate, to a new, superior seer, Ulysses.[58] Ultimately, it is the foreseeing Ulysses (*prouidus astu*, 1.542), not the sightless and absent Calchas (*caecus et absens*, 1.517), who will first *see* and recognize the *improba uirgo* and then figure out how to reveal her own nature.

III. ULYSSES' PLAN, OR HOW TO MAKE ACHILLES AN EPIC HERO

Ulysses' reply to Diomedes represents his first intervention in the *Achilleid*. Hence, this passage deserves close attention since it potentially contains a programmatic agenda of the hero's intentions in the next section of the poem (*Achil.* 1.545–52):

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[52] Cf. Anchises' reply to Aeneas pleading with him to leave Troy: *nec, nate, tibi comes ire recuso* (Verg. *Aen.* 2.704); see Moul (n. 1), 298–9. Claiming to be Ulysses' *comes*, Diomedes perfectly complies with the cliché of friendship stated by Ulysses himself at Ov. *Met.* 13.239–40 *at sua Tydides mecum communicat acta, | me probat et socio semper confidit Vlixe.*

[53] This image will be reworked by Claud. *Rapt. Pros.* 3.316–20.

[54] Hom. *Il.* 14.200–1 εἶμι γὰρ ὀψομένη πολυφόρβου πείρατα γαίης, | Ὠκεανόν τε θεῶν γένεσιν καὶ μητέρα Τηθύν. Cf. also Ov. *Met.* 2.509–10.

[55] For *prouidus* referring to Ulysses, cf. also *Achil.* 1.698; Hor. *Epist.* 1.2.19. Indeed, in the *Achilleid* Ulysses will recognize the transvestite Achilles thanks to his 'visual' skills: *uisu perlustrat ... | scrutaturque*, 1.742–3; *ceu miretur*, 1.746; *intentus ... | perlibrat uisu*, 1.761–2; *defigit comitique obliquo lumine monstrat*, 1.766; *aspicit*, 1.794. On Ulysses' eye, see Bessone (n. 3), 184–6; Ripoll (n. 2), 245–8. The only other character of the poem who is described as *prouidus* is Deidamia (1.802), who, having perfectly understood Ulysses' goal to arouse Achilles' desire for war, leaves the table clasping the boy in cross-dress. Her *prudentia* makes her side with Thetis' literary programme and clash with Ulysses' project.

[56] The Homeric Diomedes adds that with Ulysses the return will be safe even from fire 'because he is wise in understanding' (Hom. *Il.* 10.247 ἐπεὶ περίοιδε νοῆσαι).

[57] See also Verg. *Aen.* 3.433 (Helenus); Stat. *Theb.* 4.197 (Amphiaraus); 10.639 (Manto).

[58] Likewise, at Ov. *Met.* 13.363 Ulysses himself claims his *cura futuri*.

subicit gauisus Vlixes: 545
'sic deus omnipotens firmet, sic annuat illa
uirgo paterna tibi! sed me spes lubrica tardat:
grande quidem armatum castris inducere Achillem,
sed si Fata negent, quam foedum ac triste reuerti!
uota tamen Danaum non intemptata relinquam.   550
iamque adeo aut aderit mecum Peleius heros,
aut uerum penitus latet et sine Apolline Calchas.'

Despite his ostensible uncertainty, Ulysses appears self-confident and satisfied with Diomedes' flattering appeal (*gauisus*, 1.545).[59] So, he wishes that Jupiter and Minerva could fulfil Diomedes' purpose and support their common pursuit. By calling Minerva *illa | uirgo paterna tibi* (1.546–7), Ulysses bestows on Diomedes the special link that existed between the goddess and Diomedes' father, Tydeus, as is well known from the tradition as well as from Statius' own *Thebaid*.[60] But, of course, Minerva is also Ulysses' tutelary deity, and this was one of the reasons why the Homeric Diomedes wanted Ulysses by his side (φιλεῖ δέ ἑ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, Hom. *Il.* 10.245).

Not without some hesitation, Ulysses declares his mission and comments upon it: *grande quidem armatum castris inducere Achillem* (1.548).[61] Ulysses' statement complies with the plans of the poet, who had himself already announced something similar in the proem: *tota iuuenem deducere Troia* (1.7), namely to bring Achilles to Troy and lead him all the way through the war.[62] Ulysses' words can thus be read, beyond their literal meaning, as an authorial remark: his military mission stands somehow as the equivalent of the literary mission of composing an epic war poem about Troy. The language is indeed characterized by a reflection on poetics. *grande* hints at the measure of an *epos* that is expected to 'embrace' the greatest hero of all, that hero whose *uis festina*, as Chiron said at *Achil.* 1.147–8, foreshadows *nescio quid magnum*.[63] In addition, *grande* points to the tension between the first part of the

[59] *gauisus* could recall the Homeric formula ὣς φάτο, γήθησεν, which often introduces Ulysses' reply (cf. e.g. Hom. *Od*. 7.329, 8.199, 13.250, 18.281). Elsewhere in the poem Ulysses turns out to be satisfied with his charismatic appeal and cunning resolutions: *subridens*, 1.718; *contentus*, 2.85.

[60] On *paterna*, see Dilke (n. 42), 122. The fact that Minerva, who was Tydeus' goddess in the *Thebaid*, now offers protection to his son Diomedes highlights not only the genealogical succession between father and son but also the symbolic succession between the *Thebaid* (the first *epos*) and the *Achilleid* (the second *epos*). For a similar notion of metaliterary continuity, see *Achil.* 1.468–9 *famamque auida uirtute paternam | Tydides Sthenelusque premant*, where Diomedes and Sthenelus 'press' the fame of their fathers (respectively Tydeus and Capaneus), namely the fame of the *Thebaid* and the previous tradition; cf. also *Achil.* 1.732–3. On the self-aware 'secondariness' of the *Achilleid*, cf. S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext. Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998), 91–6; A. Barchiesi, 'La guerra di Troia non avrà luogo: il proemio dell'*Achilleide* di Stazio', *AION(filol)* 18 (1996), 45–62, at 50; Feeney (n. 15), 86–8; Heslin (n. 14), 76–8; McAuley (n. 37), 40–2.

[61] At Hom. *Il.* 9.225–306 Ulysses' duty was to persuade Achilles to *come back* to the Greek camp. Now, in this sort of Statian prequel to the *Iliad*, Ulysses is in charge of *leading* the young Achilles to Troy. This might seem a bit paradoxical at first sight, if we consider that Ulysses himself was a draft dodger when called up for the Trojan expedition: cf. Ajax's charge at Ov. *Met.* 13.35–9 and Ulysses' reply at 13.296–305, when the hero shrewdly associates himself with Achilles for their common delayed participation.

[62] On this trope, according to which the poet, in programmatic contexts, claims to do the same action that is being described in the poem, cf. Heslin (n. 14), 75; J.C. McKeown (ed.), *Ovid: Amores. A Commentary on Book Two* (Leeds, 1998), 388.

[63] *nescio quid magnum* adopts 'the sense of a comparison, no more between minor and grand genres, but between more or less grandiose versions of the same epic genre': thus Bessone (n. 22), 183; cf. also Bessone (n. 3), 173. For the programmatic meaning of *nescio quid magnum*, cf. e.g.

poem and the second, as does the Dulichian trumpet with which Agyrtes *grande* … | *insonuit* (1.875–6), thereby announcing the impending passage to the expected-to-be martial section.[64] In the *Thebaid* too, *grande* stands as a signpost to the climactic increase in the poetic agenda: when Tisiphone summons Megaera to rouse the brothers Eteocles and Polynices to their mortal combat, she claims that her plan is a 'grand deed' (*grande opus*, 11.100), thereby marking a narrative and poetic twist that, with a surge of tension, plunges the plot into the intimately tragic core of the poem.[65] Not only that, the adjective *armatus* (1.548) also guarantees that the *Achilleid* should be in line with traditional martial epic, that is, the epic of *arma uirumque*; and at the same time it ensures that the characterization of the young hero should be in tune with the Horatian recommendation according to which Achilles 'should claim everything by force of arms' (*nihil non arroget armis*, Hor. *Ars P.* 122).[66] In this programmatic reading of Ulysses' statement, *inducere* (1.548) also gains renewed prominence, since it is also a technical verb to depict the staging process.[67]

The choice of Ulysses as a mouthpiece of the most strictly epic issues of the poem could not be more adequate. Throughout the narrative, in fact, he is represented as the poetic repository of the Homeric tradition.[68] This is consistent with the ancient rhetorical tradition, in which it is Ulysses who most epitomizes the 'grand style' (in this case, the style appropriate to sing of Achilles in arms), of which the label *grande* at the beginning of line 548 is a clear assertion.[69]

Prop. 2.34.66; Ov. *Her.* 12.212 *nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit*, with F. Bessone (ed.), *P. Ouidii Nasonis Heroidum Epistula XII* (Florence, 1997), 32–6. For the notion of grandeur associated with Achilles, cf. also Chiron's hyperbolic statement at *Achil.* 1.151–2 *nunc illum non Ossa capit, non Pelion ingens | Pharsaliaeue niues* (notice too the allusion to the 'sublime' topography of the Gigantomachy mentioned in this passage).

[64] Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 7.45 *maius opus moueo*, in which *maius opus* announces the beginning of the Iliadic half of the *Aeneid*, the 'greater' epic within the epic.

[65] The Muses withdraw from the Theban camp and the Furies become the new agents of the plot which is going to be driven to its tragic peak, namely the fratricide: cf. Feeney (n. 50), 386; on Tisiphone's programmatic speech, cf. F. Bessone, *La Tebaide di Stazio. Epica e potere* (Pisa and Rome, 2011), 95–101.

[66] See D. Kozák, 'Si forte reponis Achillem: Achilles in the *Ars poetica*, the *Metamorphoses*, and the *Achilleid*', *MD* 72 (2014), 207–21; on the *Achilleid*'s engagement with Horatian prescriptions, see K.S. Myers, '*Ambiguus uultus*: Horatian echoes in Statius' *Achilleid*', *MD* 75 (2015), 179–88. In general, claiming to arm a hero's hand is a metaphor for traditional epic poetry: cf. Prop. 2.1.17–18 *si tantum … fata dedissent | ut possem heroas ducere in arma manus*, in the context of a *recusatio*.

[67] *TLL* 7.1.1232.69–1233.7 and 1239.67–1240.16 s.v. *induco*. With its technical meaning, *induco* is commonly attested in commentators' language as well: cf. e.g. Serv. Dan. *Aen.* 1.446, 4.694. I would like to thank Francesco Busti and Stefano Poletti for this remark.

[68] At *Achil.* 1.785–7 Ulysses conveys in an abridged version the essence of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*: see Bessone (n. 3), 185–6; cf. also the proleptic glimpse of the κλέα ἀνδρῶν (*tantae … copia famae | fortibus*, 1.792–3) and the battle camp of Troy (*campo maiore*, 1.793, a metaphor for the *Iliad* itself). Similarly, at 2.49–83 he sings, just like an epic *uates*, of the beginning of the war (*primordia belli*, 2.47; on *primordia* as a term of the poetic agenda, see e.g. *Theb.* 1.4), going back (*repetito longius orsu*, 2.49) to the pre-Iliadic subject of the *Cypria*, namely the wedding of Peleus and Thetis and especially the judgement of Paris.

[69] Interestingly, the first word spoken by Ulysses in his speech to Lycomedes is *magna* (1.728). On the grandeur of Ulysses' eloquence, cf. e.g. *Silu.* 5.3.114–15, with Gibson (n. 14), 309–10 for further references on this topic. Moreover, Ulysses specifically represents one of the three types of Homeric oratory, the sublime one: cf. e.g. Quint. *Inst.* 12.10.64; Gell. *NA* 6.14.7 *magnificum in Vlixe et ubertum*. On Ulysses as a traditional epic voice in the *Achilleid* and his symbolic role in the rhetorical tradition, see Barchiesi (n. 33 [2005]), 65–70; Ripoll (n. 2), 248–50.

None the less, to bring Achilles into camp is an ambitious project which seems risky and no longer appealing.[70] This awareness is pointed out by a clear allusion to the very beginning of Ovid's *Amores* 2.18, as noted by A. Barchiesi (*Am.* 2.18.1–2):[71]

> carmen ad **iratum** dum tu per**ducis Achillem**
> primaque iuratis induis arma uiris

The words used by Ovid to describe the poetry of his friend Macer, who practises the traditional (and quite exhausted) epic genre in the style of Homer and the Epic Cycle,[72] now surface as a foil in the Statian line spoken by Ulysses (*Achil.* 1.548):

> **grande** quidem **armatum** castris in**ducere Achillem**

This allusive clue to the Ovidian criticism, on the one hand, problematizes the current difficulty in writing a traditional epic poem; on the other hand, it warns the reader about the novelty of Statius' poetic project. Unlike Macer's *iratus* Achilles (the Homeric hero of μῆνις), Statius' Achilles is *armatus*, not in the sense that he is already 'in arms' but rather in the sense that he is to be provided 'with arms'. In other words, he is to be transformed into a real epic hero and possibly, given the sexual symbolism of *arma*, will thereby become a male in the proper sense.[73] Clearly, it turns out, there will be a return to the war epic but only through a new metamorphosis: from being a lover at Scyros to becoming a soldier at Troy. This shift is officially signalled by the 'metamorphic' adjective par excellence, *mutatus*, at *Achil.* 2.10.[74] After all, the destination—just like the corresponding poetic way to reach it—is clear: Achilles is to be brought to the *castra*, the military camp. None the less, if we keep in mind the elegiac intertext of Ovid's *Amores* 2.18, the epic word *castra* cannot but recall by contrast the *castra* of Love, the camp of the erotic battles to which Ovid wanted to draw Macer (*si bene te noui, non bella libentius istis* [sc. the love stories associated with the Trojan War] | *dicis,*

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[70] In this sense, in fact, 'the use of *grande* has dangerous overtones of bombastic sublimity': Barchiesi (n. 33 [2005]), 69; cf. e.g. Hor. *Ars P.* 27 and 80; Ov. *Rem. am.* 375; Pers. 5.7. For *grande* as a stylistic category in rhetorical contexts, see *TLL* 6.2.2185.52–2186.36 s.v. *grandis*. Morerover, the notion of *grande* with regard to poetry can also recall the Callimachean notion of μέγα and the negative evaluation with which it is linked.

[71] Barchiesi (n. 33 [2005]), 68–9. A wider discussion on similar collisions between quintessential *epos* and minor genres that apparently threaten the consistency of Statius' poetic project is found in Barchiesi (n. 33 [2001]), 331–2; see also Barchiesi (n. 60), 57–8.

[72] On Macer and his *Antehomerica* (and *Posthomerica*), see McKeown (n. 62), 382–3. Cf. also Ov. *Pont.* 4.16.6 *Iliacusque Macer*; 2.10.13–14 *tu canis aeterno quicquid restabat Homero, | ne careant summa Troica bella manu.*

[73] For *arma* as a sexual euphemism, cf. e.g. Prop. 1.3.16, 4.8.88; Ov. *Am.* 1.9.26; J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982), 19–22. In this sense, it is interesting to consider the description of the young Achilles, who **patria iam se metitur in hasta** (*Achil.* 1.41). Phallic jokes can be detected in the representation of Achilles in disguise as well, especially regarding the *thyrsus* (which is a 'softer' equivalent of the masculine *hasta*) in the Bacchic scene: see Heslin (n. 14), 238–42; Bessone (n. 3), 181–3. For Achilles as a symbol of sexual power, see also e.g. Petron. *Sat.* 129.1.

[74] As shown by Bessone (n. 3), 184, this metamorphosis is actually a 'counter-metamorphosis' that realigns Achilles with his true nature after Thetis' intervention. His desire to comply with 'new' male heroic models, such as Ulysses and Diomedes, is also betrayed at *Achil.* 1.754–5 **auidusque nouos heroas** et arma | **uel talis uidisse cupit**; cf. also Hinds (n. 37), 240–1. *mutatus*, then, like *uersutus* used of Ulysses in Livius Andronicus (on which, see Hinds [n. 60], 61–2), could also evoke the process of 'translating' Achilles from the Greek *Iliad* to the Latin *Achilleid*, and here again from lover to warrior, in order to recapture a Homeric spirit, which is now, after this Roman 'bath', inevitably changed from the original.

*et a uestris **in mea castra** uenis*, 2.18.39–40).[75] Likewise, the court of Scyros, since it was suitable not for the battles of Mars but for the battles of Love,[76] has also determined the first deviation in the heroic career of Achilles in love.[77] The task of redirecting the young hero and, at the same time, of setting off the epic turn of the plot is now up to Ulysses.[78] He has to engage not only with a new endeavour but also with a new epic, which challenges the balance of internal tensions in the poem (the themes of love and war, as well as the mixture of different generic elements).[79] None the less, the grandeur of this pursuit is not devoid of uncertainties. Notice especially the use of expressions such as *haerentem* (1.538) and *spes lubrica tardat* (1.547). Once again, the reading is twofold: *haerentem* and *tardat* are reminiscent of the critical vocabulary of poetry making. The same verbs tellingly recur at *Silu.* 4.7, the lyric ode to Vibius Maximus, in which Statius, referring to the composition of the *Achilleid*, states that Apollo comes more sluggishly than usual (*tardius ... uenit*, 4.7.22), and that his Achilles, namely his *Achilleid*, is stuck (*haeret*, 4.7.24) just after the first turn of the racecourse (*Silu.* 4.7.21–4):

> torpor est nostris sine te Camenis,
> **tardius** sueto **uenit** ipse Thymbrae
> rector et primis meus ecce metis
>   **haeret** Achilles.

In this case, the delay formally depends on the absence of the patron who is the primary source of inspiration for the poet;[80] but the sense of compositional lethargy and stalemate might also outline his difficulty in arranging the new epic project. In the

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[75] On the image of *castra Amoris*, see J.C. McKeown (ed.), *Ovid: Amores. A Commentary on Book One* (Leeds, 1989), 49. On the presence of Love in Macer's epic poem, see Ov. *Am*. 2.18.35–8; Hinds (n. 37), 227–8.

[76] Cf. *imbelli ... Lycomedis ab aula*, 1.207; *hic thiasi tantum et nihil utile bellis*, 1.393. On Scyros as 'an emblematically unwarlike land', see Hinds (n. 37), 236–7.

[77] Love is ultimately the force that prompted Achilles to yield to his mother's will. On the implicit presence of the god of Love in the disguise scene at *Achil.* 1.283–4 (*quis deus attonitae fraudes astumque parenti | contulit?*) and on his intervention in the plot, see Bessone (n. 22), 184–6; Bessone (n. 14), 92–9. Moreover, given Achilles' future dalliances (cf. e.g. Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* or Ovid's *Heroides* 3), there is good reason to think that eros would have been anything but missing in the unfinished part of the *Achilleid*: cf. Rosati (n. 22), 263–4; Hinds (n. 60), 135–44; Feeney (n. 15), 97–8; Barchiesi (n. 33 [2005]), 70–1; Heslin (n. 14), especially 84–6; Bessone (n. 22), 183.

[78] Calchas has been considered the '"protector of the plot" of the Trojan War' (Fantuzzi [n. 1], 161; see also 166), but in the same fashion Ulysses proves to be the one who really keeps the epic plot on track.

[79] The new poetic project which Statius (and Ulysses) is involved in combines different kinds of epics: on the one hand, Homeric and Virgilian epics: on the other, Ovidian epic, or rather Ovidian poetry (epic as well as erotic elegy). This generic blend responds to the issue of dealing with Achilles' identity in his twofold nature of lover and soldier: see Rosati (n. 22), 250–5. But the challenge is also related to the structure of the poem: the *Achilleid* is not a standard Homeric poem focussing upon a single action (i.e. the war at Troy or Ulysses' wanderings), according to Aristotelian recommendations, but a poem focussing upon a single character, whose life is supposed to be narrated at length from the beginning to the end (*ire per omnem | ... heroa*, 1.4–5); cf. Rosati (n. 22), 233 with n. 3; Heslin (n. 14), 80–2; Kozák (n. 66), 217–19; Myers (n. 66), 180–1.

[80] See T.M. O'Sullivan, 'Waiting on a friend: Statius, *Siluae* 4.7', *MD* 60 (2008), 125–43, at 132–4; on the poetic programme of *Silu.* 4.7 and on Statius' search for inspiration in the passage from the *Thebaid* to the *Achilleid*, see E. Merli, *Dall'Elicona a Roma. Acque ispiratrici e lima poetica nell'Ovidio dell'esilio e nella poesia flavia di omaggio* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 91–4. The image of Achilles getting stuck *primis ... metis* implies the metaphor of the chariot race, on which see K.M. Coleman (ed.), *Statius: Siluae IV* (Oxford, 1988), 203; Heslin (n. 14), 61.

same way, Ulysses initially feels uncertain about his duty to set off the martial plot. Yet this is only a momentary (and perhaps artfully simulated) hesitation and soon the hero appears resolute in carrying out his mission: *uota tamen Danaum non intemptata relinquam* (1.550). These words sound once again like a programmatic statement exploiting the language of metapoetic reflection: to accomplish the vows of the Greeks means to accept the challenge of leading Achilles to Troy and, at the same time, provide the new subject of the poetic song—namely, to deal with a military as well as literary *labor* (to use Diomedes' words) that has not yet been experienced. It is no coincidence that the litotes *non intemptata* contains the verb *tempto*, the same verb that Statius used to depict the newly undertaken process of writing the *Achilleid* in the authorial statement at *Silu.* 4.4.94 *magnusque mihi* **temptatur** *Achilles*.[81] Moreover, *tempto* is frequently associated with the experimentation of new poetic paths, starting from the famous 'proem in the middle' at Verg. *G.* 3.8–9 **temptanda** *uia est, qua me quoque possim | tollere humo uictorque uirum uolitare per ora*.[82] With reference to the literary activity, equally noteworthy for our comparison is the wording at Hor. *Ars P.* 285 **nil intemptatum** *nostri* **liquere** *poetae*.[83]

Aware of these risks from a poetological dimension, Ulysses envisions the chance of a successful outcome (*aderit mecum Peleius heros*, 1.551),[84] as well as the possibility of failure in the event that *uerum penitus latet et sine Apolline Calchas* (1.552).[85] The possibility that Calchas is *sine Apolline* outlines the portrait of a fake seer, who is not truly possessed by the god and who is, therefore, devoid of *prophetic* inspiration.[86] But there is also a second level of interpretation: being without Apollo—the same Apollo that was invoked in the proem—also means suffering from a lack of *poetic* inspiration. A similar expression recurs in another passage from *Silu.* 5.3, in which Statius presents himself as still in need of poetic guidance from his dead father (*Silu.* 5.3.289–93):

> somnique in imagine monstra
> quae solitus. sic sacra Numae ritusque colendos   290
> mitis Aricino dictabat nympha sub antro,
> Scipio sic plenos Latio Ioue ducere somnos
> creditur Ausoniis, sic **non sine Apolline** Sulla.

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[81] On this occasion, the hesitation of the poet is not to be traced back to the novelty of the project but rather to the perpetually delayed urge to compose a solemn and ambitious *epos* devoted to Domitian, as is declared in the immediately following lines (4.4.95–6). Cf. G. Rosati, 'Muse and power in the poetry of Statius', in E. Spentzou and D. Fowler (edd.), *Cultivating the Muse. Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature* (Oxford, 2002), 229–51, at 235; Merli (n. 80), 124.

[82] For this image, which bears a certain Callimachean flavour, cf. e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 3.2.22; Sen. *Oed.* 392 *alia temptanda est uia*, with N. Palmieri, '*Alia temptanda est uia*: allusività e innovazione drammatica nell'*Edipo* di Seneca', *MD* 23 (1989), 175–89. For *tempto* in programmatic contexts, cf. also Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.164; Stat. *Theb.* 12.816.

[83] For *intemptatus* as a loanword from the Greek ἀπείρατος in contexts of literary innovation, see C.O. Brink (ed.), *Horace on Poetry. The 'Ars Poetica'* (Cambridge, 1971), 318–19.

[84] By referring to Achilles as *Peleius heros*, in his heroic dress, Ulysses implicitly shows himself to be confident about the positive result of his own mission.

[85] Similarly, Ulysses had tested Calchas' reliability at Hom. *Il.* 2.299–300 μείνατ᾽ ἐπὶ χρόνον ὄφρα δαῶμεν | ἢ ἐτεὸν Κάλχας μαντεύεται ἦε καὶ οὐκί.

[86] On Calchas as an unreliable figure and the wider distrust of prophets and seers, cf. e.g. Eur. *Hel.* 744–57; *IA* 518–21 and 956–8. At Verg. *Aen.* 2.122–9 Sinon describes Calchas as an accomplice of Ulysses and implies that his revelation is a farce: see S. Casali (ed.), *Virgilio, Eneide 2* (Pisa, 2017), 145–6.

Taken at face value in the context of this simile in which Statius lists three examples of divine support, the reference to Apollo (*non sine Apolline*, 5.3.293) points to the fact that, before the Battle of the Colline Gate, Sulla appealed to the god for victory and kissed a golden image of him; in this sense, then, he was 'not without Apollo'.[87] But Apollo's appearance in the last line of a poem dealing with issues of inspiration (and the temporary lack thereof) tellingly suggests poetry as well, and seals the *carmen* with a glimmer of hope for a future creative comeback.[88] Moreover, in both passages, *sine Apolline* recalls, albeit only formally, the standard expression *sine te* (or *sine* plus a proper name), which is typical not only of hymns to the gods but also of proemial contexts of request for poetic inspiration from a deity (or a patron).[89] If Calchas' revelation is truly inspired by Apollo—that is, Calchas is not *sine Apolline*—then the project (understood as both military and literary) with which Ulysses has been entrusted as interpreter and executor of the message of the vision is also likely to prove successful. However, despite his doubts about the authenticity of Calchas' *divine* inspiration, Ulysses is intimately aware that the first fundamental mission of the *Achilleid* ultimately depends on himself and the resources of his own *human* intelligence.

In conclusion, this section of the poem, through Calchas' and Ulysses' speeches, stages the interplay between two poetic voices, which belong to the same generic system, namely epic poetry, but diverge considerably from one another in their interpretative approach to reality within the narrative. On the one hand, Calchas appears to be closely bound to strictly traditional practices of prophetic art so that, in the new challenging context of the *Achilleid*, he conveys Apollo's divine message but then fails to interpret it in light of the complex dynamics of deceptions which stand at the heart of the plot. On the other hand, Ulysses, who has grasped the meaning of the revelation, outdoes Calchas, thereby presenting himself as the true *uates* and the leader of the upcoming expedition. But Ulysses' plan bears signs of poetic self-reflexivity as well. So, his first intervention within the *Achilleid* functions as a kind of 'poetic proem':[90] through Ulysses' promise not to leave the Greeks' request for Achilles (the *uota Danaum*) unfulfilled, the poet reflects upon the difficulty of managing the epic, but, in the end, he reassures his readers about his loyalty to the epic programme declared in the opening of the poem—the awaited move from Scyros to Troy. In this light, if we imagine that everything that has been narrated up to this point represents a sort of 'false start' in terms of the epic plot,[91] Ulysses' speech also provides an ideal proem for the second part of the *Achilleid*, that is, the martial beginning.

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[87] For this episode, cf. Plut. *Sull.* 29.11–12.

[88] Cf. Gibson (n. 14), 377–8, who points out the symbolic link with poetry that characterizes the gods mentioned in this passage (Jupiter, Egeria and Apollo). The implicit focus of this threefold comparison is Statius' dead father, who was a poet himself and mentor for his son's poetic activity.

[89] For this expression and its tradition, cf. R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard (edd.), *A Commentary on Horace* Odes*, Book I* (Oxford, 1970), 307. Cf. e.g. *Silu*. 1.4.19–20 *mihi surda sine illo* [*sc.* Phoebus] | *plectra*; 4.7.21 *torpor est nostris sine te* [*sc.* Vibius Maximus] *Camenis*; 5.3.5 *te sine* [*sc.* Statius' father], with Gibson (n. 14), 268–9.

[90] On Statius' experimentation with multiple starting points in the *Achilleid*, see R.T. Ganiban, 'The beginnings of the *Achilleid*', in W.J. Dominik, C.E. Newlands and K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 73–87, at 84–6.

[91] That is, a 'false start' in the light of the Trojan War, which stands on the horizon as the ultimate *telos* of the Greek expedition and of Achilles' heroic consecration as well. For this reason, the experience of the female and eroticized microcosm of the peaceful court of Scyros is to be erased through a sort of collective *damnatio memoriae* performed by the internal characters (especially Achilles): see Hinds (n. 37), 241.

Ulysses pulls the strings of the plot and holds together two different sections (and dimensions) of the poem. Thanks to his epic identity as the *polytropos* hero and his experience of a great variety of generic situations—traits which seem tailored to the blended identity of the *Achilleid* itself—Ulysses proves that he is perfectly equipped for his *poetic* goal of unblocking the impasse of the Scyrian court and redirect Achilles onto his martial track.

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