

STATIUS' ACHILLES AND HIS TROJAN MODEL

Statius' last, unfinished poem, the *Achilleid*, is a more varied and charming work than readers of the *Thebaid* could ever have imagined, and is perhaps the most attractive approach to this highly imitative and professional poet. It is generally agreed that both Statius' diction and his narrative form are greatly influenced by Virgil and Ovid: but if he considered the Theban poem as his own *Aeneid*, we might fairly see the *Achilleid* as more akin to the *Metamorphoses*;¹ diction and epic devices may remain recognizably Virgilian, but the relaxed tone, the gentle irony and open humour take us into Ovid's world.² As an illustration, the brief episode in which Thetis conveys her sleeping son from Thessaly over the sea to Scyros probably draws its original inspiration from Venus' substitution of Cupid for Ascanius in *Aeneid* 1: Venus' son procures his own arrival, but she spirits away the sleeping Ascanius; 'at Venus Ascanio placidam per membra quietem/irrigat et fotum gremio dea tollit in altos/Idaliae lucos' (*Aen.* 1. 691–3). But the tone of *Ach.* 1. 228–31 ('ipsa dehinc toto resolutum pectore Achillem . . . ad placidas deportat aquas et iussa tacere/litora') is made Ovidian by the magical (almost science-fiction) speed of the dolphin-drawn water-craft and the incongruity of Chiron's affection with his equine nature:

prosequitur divam, celeresque recursus
securus pelagi Chiron rogat, udaeque celat
lumina, et abreptos subito iamiamque latentes
erecto prospectat equo, qua cana parumper
spumant signa fugae, et liquido perit orbita ponto. (232–5)

But principles of genre have probably been the obstacle deterring Statian scholars from considering another thematically relevant influence on this poem: I am referring to Senecan tragedy, and particularly to the *Troades*. Of recent editors Dilke notes in passing the phrase *trux puer*, applied to Achilles at *Ach.* 302, also found at *Tro.* 832 'iam trucis Chiron pueri magister'; but the epithet is natural enough to have been an independent choice. Méheust (p. xxix) speaks of 'des traits empruntés à la tragédie de Sénèque', but his footnote directs us only to references in the play³ to the story of Achilles—the prophecy which decided Thetis to hide him on Scyros (*Tro.* 213–14) and the home of Neoptolemus, his child, on Scyros itself. Mere allusion to the same well-known mythological event is not evidence of imitation or even influence. It is only when we meet echoes of phrasing or imaginative turns of thought that it makes sense to suspect

¹ The discovery of Achilles by Ulysses is handled in *Met.* 13. 162–8 as part of Ulysses' list of his services to the Greeks: Ovid also presents Achilles' seduction of Deidamia as an *exemplum* in *Ars.* 1. 679–700.

² I base my statements about recognized influence initially on the two recent editions of the *Achilleis*; O. A. W. Dilke (Cambridge, 1954), and Jean Méheust, *Éditions Les Belles Lettres* (Paris, 1971). Negative claims about diction or imagery in Virgil and Ovid have

been cross-checked by consultation of the concordances: for Virgil, *A Vergil Concordance* H. H. Warwick (Minneapolis, 1975) for Ovid, *A Concordance of Ovid*, Deferrari Barry and Maguire (Washington, 1939). Only the *Thebaid* is used by J. H. Mozley, 'Statius as an Imitator of Virgil and Ovid', *CW* 22 (1933), 33–8.

³ I can see no good reason for Méheust (p. xxix n. 6) quoting *Tro.* 223 'Captaeque tellus nobilis Briseide', or 350, 'meus captis quoque/scit parcere ensis'.

imitation. For instance, in *Tro.* 439–40, listed by Méheust, the phrase *cognati maris* may be the inspiration of *cognata . . . aequora* in *Ach.* 2–3. But the verbal affinity is slight and the context unrelated. How do we judge the two later passages exploiting Achilles' kinship with the sea-goddess to glorify his seduction of Deidamia? At 655–6 the hero comforts her in her pregnancy 'quid defles magno nurus addita ponto?/quid gemis ingentis caelo paritura nepotes?' Confronting her father, he offers this variation (897–8) 'Peleus te nato socerum et Thetis hospita iungunt/adlegantque suos utroque a sanguine divos'.

Statius is advancing the same arguments which Seneca gave to Helen at *Tro.* 879–82, when she brings Polyxena the false report of her betrothal to Achilles' son:

te magna Tethys teque tot pelagi deae
placidumque numen aequoris tumidi Thetis
suam vocabunt, te datam Pyrrho socer
Peleus nurum vocabit et Nereus nurum.

Here we have a similar context, but since it is a recognized *topos* of both courtship and consolation after seduction⁴ to praise the suitor's family, the common argument need not entail imitation. Only the similar formulation of *Ach.* 897 and *Tro.* 880–2 suggests reminiscence. We must reserve judgement, but each new coincidence of phrasing will increase the probability that Statius has used his predecessor's treatment of the material.

Let us examine another cluster of mythological allusions common to both works. At *Ach.* 86 f. Jupiter foretells Achilles' greatness to Thetis, as Catullus' Parcae had foretold the future of their unborn child to Peleus and Thetis at their wedding. There are four elements in the Statian prophecy: the first, but only the first, is directly modelled on Catullus.⁵ Here are the others

modo crassa ire vetabit
flumina, et Hectoreo tardabit funere⁶ currus
impelletque manu nostros, opera inrita, muros.

Hectoreo funere is a startling, mannered, phrase, and the commentator Placidus quotes the slightly easier *pondere*; but either comes very close to *Tro.* 414–15 'cum . . . gravi gerneret sono/Peliacus axis *pondere Hectoreo tremens*'; in each passage the chariot is hampered and straining with the hero's powerful corpse.

⁴ For the *topos* in courtship compare Ov. *Ars.* 1. 555–6, *Her.* 16. 171–78, as consolation for seduction, Hor. C. 3.27, 73–6 (Kiessling-Heinze's parallel from the scholiast on *Od.* 11.322 makes a different point, offering marriage to Dionysus as consolation for desertion by Theseus), and Ov. *Met.* 5.525 f. I owe the last three references to the kindness of the anonymous referee.

⁵ Cat. 64.344 'cum Phrygii Teucro manabunt sanguine campi': cf. *Ach.* 86 'tepido modo sanguine Teucros undabit campos'. Compare also the imitation in *Culex* 306 'Teucris cum magno manaret sanguine tellus/et Simois Xanthique liquor'.

⁶ Though unaware of the Senecan parallel, Dilke and A. Marastoni (Leipzig, 1974) are inclined to adopt *pondere*, the reading in Lactantius Placidus' commentary, since *funere* may have crept into the text of 88 from 85 above. The adjective *Hectoreus* is Virgilian, cf. *Aen.* 1.273, 3.301 and 488, 5.190 and 634, and 2.543 '*corpusque exsangue Hectoreum*'; this is transferred by the *Culex* to the context of Achilles' mutilation and chariot-ride; 324–5 'Aeacides . . . *Hectoreo lustravit corpore Troiam*'. Did Statius know the *Culex*? He is uninfluenced by 306, so it would seem there is no need to assume dependence here.

Statius' innovation is the extended use of *tardare*, but even this may be provoked by Seneca's version of Achilles choking the rivers,

corporibus amnes clusit, et quaerens iter
tardus cruento Xanthus erravit vado. (Tro. 186–7)

Finally *impelletque manu* surely echoes Tro. 204–6 'cuius unius manu/impulsa Troia . . . dubia quo caderet stetit', and the god's allusion to the god-built walls of Troy, echoing an Ovidian phrase, prefers Seneca's synonym 'muri', as in Tro. 478 'arx illa pollens opibus et *muris deum*'.⁷

However, what first drew my attention to Statius' use of Seneca was not the application of similar phrases to the same mythological events, but the treatment of a similar mythological episode, where situation and rhetorical purpose can be transferred; for as the fearful Thetis disguises the young Achilles, but must first persuade him to accept the womanish clothes, so the fearful Andromache, in Seneca's play, had tried to hide the young Astyanax in his father's tomb, but needed first to persuade him to accept the shame of hiding. Compare now from Thetis' speech in Statius

cedamus, paulumque animos submitte viriles
 atque habitus dignare meos (259–60)

and

cape tuta parumper
 tegmina nil nocitura animo. Cur ora reducis
 quidve parant oculi? Pudet hoc mitescere cultu"? (270–2)

with Andromache's words;

succede tumulo nate—quid retro fugis
 tutasque⁸ latebras spernis? agnosco indolem,
 pudet timere. spiritus magnos fuga
 animosque veteres, sume quos casus dedit,
 . . . cedendum est malis. (503–6)

Can we doubt that Thetis has learned from Andromache? But there is more: In the same sequence compare *Ach.* 269 'progenitum Stygos amne severo/armavi—*totumque utinam*' ('if only I had not left the heel undipped') with Hector's words at Tro. 453–5, 'Troia quod cedit gemis?/*utinam* iaceret tota' ('if only no tower were left standing'). Seneca's meaning is concealed from the listening Andromache, but that last standing tower will be fatal to Astyanax; the motif is identical.

Statius resumes his narrative at 283: '*quis deus attonitae fraudes astumque parenti/contulit?*' Each element of this introductory phrase finds a precedent in

⁷ As with *undare*, Statius has given a new construction to *tardare*, which is applied by Virgil (*Aen.* 5.453, 12.746, etc.) and Ovid (in *Met.* only at 13.81 and 283) to heroes hampered by wounds or grief. On the walls of Troy compare the formulation of *Met.* 12.587 '*inrita* qui mecum posuisti moenia Troiae'. Note that *Ach.* 811 '*ipsa iam dubiis nutant tibi Pergama muris*' may be influenced by Tro. 206 '*dubia quo caderet stetit*'.

⁸ Editors (most recently Giardina) prefer the reading of A, *turpesque*, or Ritschl's *turpesne*; but see Leo's defence of *tutas* (read only by Ambr. D 276) in *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae*, (Berlin, 1878) Vol. i, p. 2; for Andromache to admit the shelter is *turpis* is to beg her own question, nor can we interpret *turpes* as *tanquam turpes*, implying only the child's motive.

Seneca's Astyanax-scene: at 569 where Ulysses recalls his detection of Achilles: 'vicinus matrum dolos/etiam dearum', at 627, 'fraude materna abditum', and at 736, 'matris maeror attonitae'. In addition the inflected accusative of *astus* is conspicuously rare. While Virgil and Ovid use only the conventional adverbial ablative *astu*,⁹ Seneca in this scene of *Troades* uses both *astu* (752) and the accusative plural *astus* (523 and 613): he is the first author known to have done so.

There is a clear echo of one image from Seneca to Statius at *Ach.* 385–6 when Thetis entrusts her precious child to the land of Scyros:

cara mihi tellus, magnae cui pignora curae
depositumque ingens timido commisimus astu . . .

Andromache had made the same appeal to the earth of Hector's tomb, and with more point, since treasures were so often preserved by burial underground. After the old servant has confirmed that her son is safe within, using the first element of the metaphor, 'claustra commissum tegunt' (512) she turns to the tomb and shade of her husband

dehisce tellus, tuque coniunx . . .
sinu profundo conde depositum meum;
adest Ulixes, et quidem dubio gradu,
vultuque, nectit pectore astus callidos. (519–23)

As a coda to this matching of scenes, we might note that when Ulysses is addressed by Diomedes at *Ach.* 542,

tu tantum providus astu
tende animum vigilem, fecundumque erige pectus

the main inspiration of Statius' diction is not Seneca, despite casual affinities with 523, but Ovid; for both Seneca and Statius drew elements of their portrayal of Ulysses from his magnificent self-justification in the *Armorum Iudicium* of *Metamorphoses* 13. 128–370.¹⁰

Instead of hunting verbal echoes, which may leave the impression that Statius created his poetry like a jackdaw's nest, I want to cap my arguments with Statius' highly individual adaptation of a solemn and heroic simile, applied by Seneca to the young Astyanax; again Astyanax becomes Achilles (this time Seneca is printed first):

sic ille magni parvus armenti comes
primisque nondum cornibus findens cutem
cervice subito celsus et fronte arduus
gregem paternum ducit et pecori imperat (*Tro.* 537–40)

Statius reserves this hint of the young hero's future leadership for the moment when the transvestite Achilles sights Deidamia, and feeling his first sexual urge,

⁹ *Astu* occurs three times in Ovid, at *Met.* 4.776, 7.419, and 13.193. It may also be the correct reading at *Her.* 9.45, 'irae Iunonis iniquae', where *astu* was conjectured by Bentley and independently by Housman. It occurs four times in Seneca, but only once outside this scene of *Troades*, at *Phae.* 153.

¹⁰ From this speech, note 13.193 'matrem

quae astu decipienda fuit', and 326 'nec . . . cessante meo pro vestris pectore rebus . . .' 369–70 'nec non in corpore nostro pectora sunt potiora manu, vigor omnis in illis. At vos, o procures, vigili date praemia vestro'. Both *vigil* and *providus* are Ovidian: cf. *F.* 4.764, *Met.* 12.18.

suppresses it out of respect for his mother—pure comedy.

ni pudor et iunctae teneat reverentia matris,
ut pater armenti quondam ductorque futurus
cui nondum toto peraguntur cornua gyro,
cum sociam pastus niveo candore iuencam¹¹
aspicit, ardescunt animi primusque per ora
spumat amor, spectant hilares obstantque magistri.¹²

(*Ach.* 312–17)

One would expect to find influential similes based on the young steer in Virgil or Ovid; Méheust adduces *Aen.* 12.715 and *Met.* 9.46, but these represent only the classic conflict of two bulls fighting for domination symbolized by the coveted cow; the *color* and the formulations bear some resemblance to *Ach.* 316–18, but omit the element of human analogy with the young future leader. Only Seneca anticipates the idea of 313–14. Astyanax' future will be cut short, and the symbolic simile revived for the moment of his tragic seizure in *Tro.* 794–8; but Achilles is about to blossom, and Statius, borrowing the Senecan image, has converted it by the change of context into a glorious forward-looking evocation of energy, fertility, and hope. The steer's inexperience adds Ovidian piquancy to the situation, like the cowherds' earthy delight in the prospect of a pedigree hero to be sired.

To drag in other possible allusions would be an anticlimax; for the sake of completeness I append in a last footnote¹³ other similar turns of phrase in *Troades* and *Achilleis* which may be related. But Senecan tragic diction can be glimpsed in so many places in the *Achilleis*; I have confined my attention to the single play *Troades*, in order to show how the precedent of Andromache's attempt to

¹¹ Méheust rightly notes an echo of Ovid. *Am.* 2.12.256, 'vidi ego pro nivea pugnantes coniuge tauros:/spectatrix animos ipsa iuvenca debat'.

¹² A last word on Achilles and Astyanax; the physical description of Hector reflected in Astyanax at *Tro.* 466 'sic tulit fortes manus/sic celsus umeris, fronte sic torva minax/cervice fusam dissipans iacta comam', and of Astyanax, as steer at 539 'cervice subito celsus et fronte arduus', may be recalled by Statius at *Ach.* 339 'sic ergo gradum, sic ora manusque/nate ferēs' and 368–9 (where Achilles stands out among the maidens) 'quantum cervice comisque/emineat, quantumque umeros et pectora fundat'; but may be mere variations on epic portrayal of young heroes.

¹³ Possible echoes: *Tro.* 40 (cf. also 1060–2) 'meus ignis iste est, facibus ardetis meis': cf. *Ach.* 31 'me petit haec, mihi classis, ait, funesta minatur'. *Tro.* 1165 f. 'petite iam tuti domos. optata velis maria diffusis secet/secura classis': cf. *Ach.* 63 'eunt tutis terrarum

crimina velis'. *Tro.* 475 'tam magna timeo vota': cf. *Ach.* 145 'superant tua vota modum' (both of vows made by the mother for her heroic son). *Tro.* 1141–2; 'astra cum repetunt vices/premiturque dubius nocte vicina dies': cf. *Ach.* 242 'iam premit astra dies' (dawn, not dusk as in Seneca). *Tro.* 391 'iuratos superis . . . lacus': cf. *Ach.* 291–2 'iurandaque nautis insula'. *Tro.* 56 'columen eversum occidit/pollentis Asiae': cf. *Ach.* 530 'eversorem Asiae'; but the primary inspiration is *Aen.* 12.545 'Priami regnorum eversor Achilles'. *Tro.* 507 'intuere turba quae sumus super' (the few survivors'). cf. *Ach.* 910 'turba sumus' ('my son and I are already a fighting band'). But both probably derive from Ovid. *Met.* 1.355 (Deucalion and Pyrrha realize they alone survive); 'nos duo turba sumus'.

Most of these should be regarded merely as coincidences of diction; only at *Tro.* 475/*Ach.* 145 do situation and diction coincide sufficiently to suggest that this pair may belong with the sure cases of imitation above.

hide her threatened child led Statius to adapt specifically from the brilliant third act of the tragedy, and apparently to borrow traits of characterization for his Achilles, not only from direct Senecan description of Achilles, but also from the portrayal of the doomed Trojan child.

University of Toronto

ELAINE FANTHAM