

## *Incohat Ismene:*

# The Dream Narrative as a Mode of Female Discourse in Epic Poetry\*

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**SUMMARY:** This article examines Ismene's nightmare in book 8 of Statius's *Thebaid* by contextualizing it within the epic's narrative, comparing it with the dream narrations of other female characters in epic poetry, and aligning it with other typically female modes of subjective expression in epic, such as weaving, teichoscopy, and lamentation. My analysis shows that by exposing the difficulties inherent in retelling a dream, Statius demonstrates sympathy with the female perspective on the horrific war that constitutes the central action of his poem and foreshadows the subsequent inadequacy of words in reaction to such horror.

## I. INTRODUCTION: ISMENE BEGINS

ISMENE, DAUGHTER OF OEDIPUS, IS A CHARACTER WHO HAS VIRTUALLY NO presence in the narrative of Statius's *Thebaid* either before or after the small section devoted to the retelling of her dream and its aftermath (8.607–54); for this reason, the intricacy and allusiveness of this passage are all the more striking. In this scene, Ismene recounts to her sister Antigone a dream she has had, in which her wedding to her fiancé Atys is violently interrupted by a fire. After questioning the dream's origin, Ismene discounts its meaning as incongruous with her understanding of her own waking reality and resumes

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her silence. Statius inserts the dream scene between the wounding and the death of Atys, and thus from the perspective of the reader, Ismene's vision is a two-way portal between these tragic events. It is a premonition (narrated after the fact) of both the fatal encounter between Atys and Tydeus on the battlefield (8.577–96) and of the scene that follows her retelling of the dream, in which the dying Atys is brought into Ismene's home (8.636–54). There are a number of factors that contribute to the intense pathos of this passage, including, for example, its emphasis on the senseless loss of a young soldier's life in the context of a relentless but unavoidable war. But it is equally important for offering insight into the female perspective on a war that excludes women, contained in a genre of poetry dominated by the concerns of men.

Statius introduces Ismene unassumingly in 7.535 as *rudis Ismene(s)*, in a scene where she stands alongside her mother and sister in their attempt to prevent the inevitable clash between her brothers. Her name is mentioned at 8.555, but her next appearance comes in 8.607, the beginning of the dream episode. By comparison with her more assertive and famous sister Antigone, Ismene hardly registers in Statius's treatment of the story of the rivalry between Oedipus's sons. Analyses of Ismene's dream episode have had to reconcile this attitude with the unmistakable impact of her dream. Antonino Grillone, for example, remarks upon the unobtrusiveness of Ismene's dream vis-à-vis the plot of the *Thebaid*, while noting its effects upon the reader: "questo sogno, che non incide nella trama dell'opera, commuove il lettore per la delicatezza dei sentimenti di Ismene" (1967: 147). We see a similar stance in the more recent comments of Jean Bouquet: "ce rêve hybride n'est d'aucune importance pour l'action, mais il est l'occasion d'une fine analyse où Stace montre à nouveau son intérêt pour la psychologie féminine" (2001: 126). While acknowledging Statius's interest in female psychology, both commentators fail to note that despite this narrative unobtrusiveness, which is mirrored by Ismene's physical detachment from the battlefield, Ismene's dream allows her considerable insight into the war, while the passage that contains it affords the reader an important perspective on Statian poetics. The deceptive simplicity of the dream passage underscores the dream's significance as a portal that allows the war's fighters and its spectators to converge.

Treatments of Ismene's dream in broad studies of dreams in Latin epic such as those of Grillone and Bouquet have tended to isolate the dream's content from its surrounding context. By contrast, the work of Hershkowitz (1998: 282–90) and Micozzi (2001/2) has broadened the scope of inquiry beyond the dream's subject matter to explore the role of *pudor* in Statius's characterization of both Ismene and Atys. By contextualizing Ismene's dream within the events that surround its retelling and focusing on the act of re-

telling itself, my study moves beyond analysis of the dream simply for clues to the dreamer's psychological or emotional state. Statius's description of the retelling of the dream, I argue, provides important information not just about Ismene's character, but also about the complex function of dreaming and dream narration in the *Thebaid*. Through her dream, Statius allows Ismene unique perspective on a war from which she is otherwise excluded. But Ismene's physical seclusion from and utter ignorance of events of the war obstruct interpretation of her dream. This is compounded by the fact that her dream is not merely prophetic of the death of Atys, but also represents in symbolic form his injury on the battlefield.

Statius imbues the narration of the dream with imagery and references that evoke two distinctive modes for subjective female commentary upon the military concerns of epic poetry, weaving and teichoscopy, thereby encouraging a connection between the dynamics of these typical epic scenes. Of particular interest is a simile Statius uses to characterize the discourse between the daughters of Oedipus in their chamber. By comparing the sisters' discussion of the dream to the mournful chatter of the birds who were once the daughters of Pandion, Procne and Philomela, Statius does more than just compare their obscure manner of communication. I suggest that Statius reminds the reader of Philomela's tapestry, an earlier mode of communication between the sisters that provided an alternative to speech. As this study will make clear, the dream narrative functions in a manner similar to the act of weaving in that it allows female characters a mode for conveying their subjective perspective on violent events. Like weaving, dream narration involves a vocabulary of symbols.

Micozzi 2001/2 has already identified key intertextual connections at play in this passage, looking closely at the dreams of female characters in the works of other epic poets. In this article, I discuss three important precedents for Ismene's dream, demonstrating that these episodes present the dream narration as a type of discourse between siblings that negotiates the difficulties of translating the visual experience of seeing a dream into the verbal (or textual) mode of recounting it. Furthermore, my investigation reveals that non-dream scenes, such as Medea's teichoscopy in Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*, are as important to consider as intertexts for Ismene's dream as the dreams themselves. Teichoscopy provides a compelling parallel to the dream experience in that it allows marginalized, often female, characters visual access to combat from a liminal viewpoint. I conclude this article by arguing that Ismene's inability to interpret her dream or to communicate its contents to her sister in a way that enables Antigone's interpretation is echoed in Ismene's ultimate failure to express her grief at Atys's death in words. By making Ismene's last

vocal gesture one of lament, Statius comments on the difficulty of responding to war's violence with comprehensible language, an impediment that the poet himself will confront as he attempts to describe the outpouring of grief that attends the end of his narrative.

## II. MODES OF FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN EPIC POETRY

Dreams are typical features of the epic repertoire, and can be broadly divided into two categories. One is the visitation dream, in which a character's sleep is invaded by a vision of either a god or the shade of a dead person. This type of dream is usually narrated to the reader as the character experiences it and most often contains a message or a lesson for the dreamer to follow. The first dream episode of the *Thebaid* belongs to this category (2.89–119): the ghost of Laius, Eteocles' grandfather, appears to Eteocles with a warning that his brother Polynices is in Argos making plans to raise an army and attack Thebes. This type of dream is more characteristic of the male dream experience in epic.<sup>1</sup> The second type is what we might call a symbolic dream, one that the dreamer narrates to a listener after waking, and whose images, once translated into words, require interpretation. The type-2 dream, which involves the intermediate step of interpretation by the dreamer and thus allows for the intrusion of subjectivity, is most often experienced by female characters in epic.<sup>2</sup> Ismene's dream is of the second type. Her dream contains no clear warning, but rather encodes a premonition, appearing at first to reflect Ismene's individual waking anxieties as she confides in her sister. Statius constructs the scene so that the relation of her dream becomes her bold entry into a narrative that has thus far excluded her.

Dreaming is by nature a private experience, and thus the retelling of a dream by necessity involves casting something personal into terms that make it accessible to a listener. When a dreamer herself, rather than the third-person narrator, relays the dream, this act of retelling is accordingly subjective, as the dreamer creates a second narrative in choosing what to reveal; the dreamer's most common impulse, as we shall see, is to connect the action of the dream to the circumstances of his or her waking reality. Therefore, the manner of the retelling is as significant for the narrative as the purported content of the

<sup>1</sup> Agamemnon's vision of Nestor in *Iliad* 2, Aeneas's vision of Hector in *Aeneid* 2, and Turnus's encounter with Allecto disguised in *Aeneid* 7 are examples of type-1 dreams. Athena's visit to Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6 is an example of a female dreamer who has a type-1 dream. See Dodds 1951, Ch. 4 as a starting point for the classification of dream-types. See also Walde 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Penelope's dream of the geese in *Od.* 19.535–58 is an early example of the type-2 dream.

dream. We can profitably compare the retelling of dreams with other modes of communication in epic, particularly those that involve subjective representation. Two complementary examples of this are teichoscopy and weaving. In the former, a viewer narrates what she sees for the benefit of an audience, whereas a weaver represents a narrative on a visual plane. In each case the subjective perspective of the actor (viewer or weaver), like that of the dreamer, can affect the representation she creates or the scene she describes.

An example from Homer that combines both modes of narration will illustrate important similarities between weaving and viewing from the walls. Towards the beginning of book 3 of the *Iliad*, we encounter Helen in her room weaving into a robe a pictorial narrative of the battle between the Argives and the Trojans enacted for her sake (*Il.* 3.125–28)<sup>3</sup>:

τὴν δ' εὖρ' ἐν μεγάρῳ· ἥ δὲ μέγαν ἱστὸν ὕφαιεν  
δίπλακα πορφυρέην, πολέας δ' ἐνέπασσεν ἀέθλους  
Τρώων θ' ἵπποδάμων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων  
οὓς ἔθεν εἵνεκ' ἔπασχον ὑπ' Ἄρης παλαμάων.

She found Helen in the women's quarters; Helen was weaving a great web, bright and folding, and into it she wove the many contests of the horse-taming Trojans and the bronze-clad Achaeans, which they endured for her sake at the hands of Ares.

Iris approaches Helen disguised as her sister-in-law and urges her out to the city walls. Iris's description of what Helen will see on the battlefield matches what she was weaving onto her robe (*Il.* 3.130–33):

δεῦρ' ἴθι, νύμφα φίλη, ἵνα θέσκελα ἔργα ἴδῃαι  
Τρώων θ' ἵπποδάμων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων·  
οἱ πρὶν ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι φέρον πολύδακρυν Ἄρηα  
ἐν πεδίῳ.

Come here, dear girl, so that you may see the amazing deeds of the horse-taming Trojans and the bronze-clad Achaeans, who earlier bore lamentable war against one another on the battlefield.

<sup>3</sup> On this scene, see Bergren 1979/80: 22–23. De Jong 1989: 120 says of the relative clause in line 128 that it “should be analyzed as focalized by Helen ... She projects her own feelings of guilt into the motifs of her weaving ...” Keith 2000: 2, in her study of women in Latin epic, asserts that Helen's inclusion of her own place in the war narrative “implies that women and their activities are central themes of epic song.” Lev Kenaan 2008: 168 calls Helen's textile “an early antecedent of the autobiographical text.” See also Clayton 2004: 33–34 for brief mention of the complex technique of weaving a “storytelling cloth,” with reference to Penelope's shroud for Laertes.

We then learn that the battle has ended, but Iris promises Helen that she will witness a duel between Menelaus and Paris “for your [Helen’s] possession” (περὶ σεῖο, 137), which reminds us of Helen’s earlier subjective stance, when weaving battles enacted “for her sake” (ἔθεν εἶνεκ, 128), a qualifying phrase conspicuously absent from Iris’s description of the view from the walls. Thus Helen has translated her (seemingly accurate) perception of the war into her weaving, and as she emerges from her inner chamber towards the battlefield, she abandons her representation of the events and confronts the war as it is being fought outside her secluded space.

As Helen moves from the loom to the walls, her authorial statement about herself as cause of the conflict, which she had woven into her tapestry, is picked up by her authoritative perspective on the array of Argive leaders. Weaving her tapestry, she is aware of her role in the entire battle, affecting the lives of unnamed soldiers, while in the scene she watches from the walls, she is confronted with the conflict at the level of the individual men involved. Helen’s transition from weaving images of the battle to viewing the battle’s warriors marks other important transitions: first, from visual representation of the war’s events to actual vision of the warriors involved; second, from non-verbal to verbal representation of the fighters; and third, from a woman’s chamber to the edge of the battlefield (the realm of men)—a passage from isolation to liminality. When a female epic character comes to the wall, she is at a threshold—able to see and report on, but not participate in or affect, the battle scene she is witnessing. This provides a helpful analogy with the boundary of consciousness breached by dreams.<sup>4</sup>

The transitions embodied by Helen’s actions in this section of *Iliad* 3 have parallels in the dream episode of Ismene, where the representation of events in visual symbols (i.e., the dream of a wedding ceremony interrupted by fire) yields to actual vision of violent events (i.e., the entry of the dying Atys). One integral difference is that Helen weaves her vision of what has been happen-

<sup>4</sup>In a study of the wall in 20th-century German literature, Garrett 1996: 219 has defined the wall as “simultaneously an immutable and yet magically permeable border separating and connecting two disparate realities.” Expanding the term “teichoscopy” to mean “wall-viewing” in reference to scenes in which the wall is a barrier to be transcended by a novel’s characters, Garrett writes that these novels contain “a wealth of teichoscopic imagery, that is, metaphorical language linking walls with optical devices, such as lenses, mirrors, and the human eye, and also plot structures, which can be elucidated with reference to optical relationships” (215). The dynamic of the teichoscopy is useful as a metaphor for other types of seeing, such as dreaming, as it employs the “mind’s eye,” which can breach physical barriers across the boundary of sleep without actually moving through physical space.

ing on the battlefield, which she has the privilege of viewing herself, while the dream experience of Ismene is marked specifically by the disconnection between what she envisions in her dream and the fatal sight that is brought before her in reality. Obscured by symbolism, the message of the dream fails to resonate with the dreamer, who, with no firsthand knowledge of the battle itself, is distracted by the dream's incongruity with her own self-image.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to the "section view" that the soldiers have in battle, where they are immersed in the action, the viewer from the walls, like the epic narrator, has a "bird's-eye view" afforded by distance and detachment. This dichotomy is taken up in Helen Lovatt's recent analysis of *Antigone* and *Medea* as viewers in Statius's *Thebaid* and Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*, respectively (2006). Here Lovatt concludes that the gender of the character that views from the walls is paramount. To Lovatt, the teichoscopic gaze is transgressive because it offers a female perspective that deviates from the male "narrator's picture of the world" (78).<sup>6</sup> The gaze of the teichoscopic viewer usurps the narrator's voice from the poet. In the following pages, I will argue that Ismene's dream, her "oneiroscopy," so to speak, and its aftermath in Statius's *Thebaid* have a similar rhetorical structure, but that in shifting the perspective from narrator to female character, Statius actually underscores the negative picture of the war that he, as narrator, maintains throughout his epic.

<sup>5</sup>In this aspect, Ismene's dream episode also shares features with the scene of Andromache weaving while oblivious to Hector's demise on the battlefield in *Il.* 22.437–46. As Kirk 1985: 280 notes, Homer uses similar language to describe Helen's and Andromache's work: δίπλακα πορφυρέην, ἐν δὲ θρόνα ποικίλ' ἔπασσε (22.441). But by contrast with Helen's, this scene establishes a link between (female) weaving and ignorance of (male) activities in battle; Andromache weaves patterns into her cloth as Hector loses his life. Lev Kenaan 2008: 165–67 explains the difference as one between "representational/transgressive" and "non-representational/isolated" female weavers, terms she applies to Helen and Andromache, respectively. Ismene shares features of both: although her dream gives her privileged knowledge of the events on the battlefield, her waking ignorance of the battle inhibits her from comprehending the relevance of the seemingly incongruous images of her dream.

<sup>6</sup>This is particularly true in the case of *Medea*, whose love for Jason is kindled on the walls. She does not answer questions about the warriors on the field, but rather uses the opportunity to ask questions about, seek out, and gaze upon Jason. See Fucecchi 1997: 23 on *Medea*'s "intrusion" upon the narration ("ella incide sulla narrazione in modo indiretto, focalizzando lo sguardo su un obiettivo unico (579 s.) ..."). He cites several precedents in which authors mingle elements from the genres of love elegy and epic to depict young women falling in love with soldiers as they watch them from the walls (23–24).

### III. DREAMING OF DESTRUCTION: THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND SETTING FOR ISMENE'S NIGHTMARE AND ITS RETELLING

Statius has just narrated the demise of Ismene's fiancé Atys at the hands of the Argive warrior Tydeus and the subsequent recovery of his body by Menoeceus (8.554–606) when he locates the sisters Ismene and Antigone, daughters of Oedipus, within the confines of the women's quarters of the Theban palace (*thalami secreta in parte*, 8.607). Thus the vast expanse and dangers of the battlefield are immediately contrasted with the isolation and confinement of the women's chambers. Furthermore, Ismene's physical seclusion reflects her mental detachment from the events of the war that rages outside the palace walls. The juxtaposition of these scenes is also important because the gruesome story of Atys's fatal injury is described in sexual and matrimonial terms and thus ominously foreshadows the wedding imagery of Ismene's dream. After Atys taunts the Argive hero Tydeus, Tydeus effortlessly hurls a javelin at the boy, wounding him in the groin (8.583–86):

simul audacem non ense nec hasta  
dignatus leviter digitis imbellis solutis  
abiecit iaculum: latebras tamen inguinis alte  
missile, ceu totis intortum viribus, hausit.

At the same time, having deemed the brazen boy worthy of neither sword nor spear, (Tydeus) lightly hurled from his loosened fingers an unwarlike javelin: still, the projectile drank deeply the recesses of (Atys's) groin, as if it had been hurled with all his might.

The sexual connotations of this penetration would be difficult to overstate: the location of the wound in the deepest recesses of the groin, which attests to the profundity of the violation, also conjures the image of the penetration of female genitalia.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the verb *hausit* evokes the image of a virgin bride's blood loss. Thus the virginal Atys has been deflowered by his enemy, as

<sup>7</sup> Hershkowitz 1998: 285 has already noted the sexual connotations of the nouns *iaculum* (585) and *vis* (586). Furthermore, *inguen* can refer to the female genitalia (Adams 1982: 47–48). The noun *latebrae*, although there is no evidence that it was used specifically to refer to the internal female genitalia, certainly hints at this meaning, especially given the popularity of terms for caves and ditches as metaphors for the female genitalia (Adams 1982: 85–86). Thus the combination of the nouns *latebrae* and *inguinis* is suggestive of the anatomy of the female genitalia (cf. *fossas inguinis* to describe the vagina at *Priapeia* 46.9).



though a bride on her wedding night.<sup>8</sup> But unlike a bride, Atys is subsequently left to die. In this way Atys's death is also like a rape; it is a violent deflowering followed by a quick abandonment.

This analogy is strengthened by the earlier description of Atys's preparation for battle, for which his mother dressed him in finery appropriate for a wedding, as we learn in 564–69:

triplici velaverat ostro  
surgentes etiamnum umeros et levia mater  
pectora; tunc auro phaleras auroque sagittas  
cingulaque et manicas, ne coniuge vilior iret,  
presserat et mixtum cono crispaverat aurum.  
talibus (heu!) fidens vocat ultro in proelia Graios.

His mother had draped his still growing shoulders and smooth chest with a threefold purple garment; then she had covered his quivers with gold, as well as his arrows, sword-belt, and manacles, so that he would not appear inferior to (his) bride, and she had entwined gold into his helmet's peak. Trusting, alas, in such things, Atys summons the Greeks into battle.

Statius's references to Atys's purple garments and gold accoutrements convey the incredible richness of his attire. The description of Atys's performance on the battlefield reveals how inappropriate this dress is for someone of his stature and experience (summarized succinctly by the phrase *talibus (heu!) fidens*, 569), but there is another dimension to his appearance that contributes to our reading of his encounter with Tydeus as a wedding. It is not merely that we learn that he is dressed by his mother, an interaction that is more common between a mother and daughter in preparation for a wedding,<sup>9</sup> but

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ausonius's description in the *Cento Nuptialis* of the groom deflowering the bride (18.117–18 Green): *intorquet summis adnexus viribus hastam./ haesit virgineumque alte bibit acta cruorem*. (I thank Anthony Corbeill for bringing this parallel to my attention.) See Fowler 1987 on the Virgilian precedents for associating the slaying of virginal youths on the battlefield and the defloration of a bride on her wedding night.

<sup>9</sup> Compare with this the scene between Atalanta and Parthenopaeus in 4.309–44, where Atalanta fears for her son's entry into battle, but has no hand in his preparation. In fact, she denies that she will be able to help him by giving him any of her weapons. The clothing also bears similarities to the garment (*peplum*) that the Argive women weave for Juno in 10.56–64. While this is not properly a wedding garment, it is purple and gold like Atys's garment and contains imagery of Juno as a young unmarried girl, who is still virginal like Atys and not yet aware of or harmed by Jupiter's dalliances. In his description of Juno as she is represented on the garment, Statius echoes the vocabulary of the Tydeus-Atys episode with reference to the *thalamus* (61) and to the inexperience and modesty of the bride-to-be (*expers conubii ... timide ... lumine demisso*, 62–63).

that her motivation for dressing her son in such finery is to prevent her son from being seen as inferior to his bride-to-be (*ne coniuge vilior iret*, 567), which encourages a connection between his attire and his status as a youth on the brink of marriage. It seems logical to read the *coniunx* referred to in this clause as Ismene, Atys's fiancée, who is, after all, a king's daughter.<sup>10</sup> But since this reference is not explicit, it is possible to infer from this line that Atys's mother dresses him up as she does so that he not look less impressive than a bride, that is, so that he appear dressed like a bride on her wedding day. At the very least, with this reference to their status, Statius forges a connection between the dress of the bride- and groom-to-be and their imminent wedding when referring to Atys's appearance. Atys's misplaced finery ensures his incongruity with the other warriors on the battlefield, and it is thus fitting that rather than die in heroic fashion, he is cut down like a bride, whose first night becomes her last.

Tydeus's final taunt to his victim reinforces the allusions to marriage and gender reversal present in the injury scene. The wedding imagery is echoed in Tydeus's claims that his conquest's spoils would not be worth showing even to his wife Deipyle had she herself left the *thalamus*, that is, the proper place for a bride, to join him in battle (8.589–91):

ait "procul arceat ipsum  
ferre pudor; vix, si bellum comitata relictis,  
Deipyle thalamis, illi inludenda tulissem."

He says, "may shame keep me far from taking [these spoils] for myself; even if Deipyle had accompanied me on the campaign, having abandoned the women's quarters, I would hardly have given her these spoils as amusements."

Thus the wife's bedroom stands in direct contrast to the battlefield. Perhaps ironically, the bride's wedding-night modesty is transferred from the injured Atys to the victor Tydeus, as he claims that *pudor* ("shame," in this case) prevents him from despoiling the dying soldier (590).<sup>11</sup> The end of his taunt revisits the theme of gender reversal, when Tydeus refers to Atys's armor and

<sup>10</sup> This is how Shackleton Bailey 2003, for example, reads the reference.

<sup>11</sup> This is the first of three references to *pudor* in the Atys-Ismene interlude. The others come at 626 (*pudet heu!*) and 645 (*saevus pudor*). Tydeus's *pudor* here refers to his shame at gloating over the effeminate spoils of a lesser opponent rather than to his modesty; but when applied to Tydeus, any type of *pudor* seems incongruous with his character. Thus, when its use is contrasted with the later examples, the word choice strikes the reader as not only out of place, but as actually displaced from Atys, its more appropriate referent. For more on the theme of *pudor* in the story of Atys and Ismene, see Micozzi 2001/2, Hershkovitz 1998: 287–90, and Vessey 1986: 2993–3000.

dress as *inludenda* (591), claiming that they would be playthings even for Deipyle should he deign to give them to her as a gift. Even if a woman such as Deipyle were to come to battle she too would act the male to Atys's female of inferior strength.

By reminding us of the impropriety of transgressing the divisions established for male and female space, Statius's use of the word *thalamus* in this earlier context (591) anticipates both subsequent uses of the word: the literal (*thalami secreta in parte*, 607, where the word *thalami* appears in the same place in the line as in the earlier instance) and abstract (625–26, where Ismene uses *thalamus* as a metonym for marriage in her description of the dream, also in the same line position). As Tydeus's wife Deipyle has properly stayed in her place during battle, so has Ismene. But as war rages outside her door, Ismene's *thalamus* is invaded by a violent dream, whose very images force her to confront the connotations of the *thalamus*, which shame has hitherto prevented her from doing. Atys, on the other hand, having ventured prematurely onto the battlefield, will now return to the home of his betrothed not for marriage or sexual consummation, but for death.<sup>12</sup> Thus Tydeus explicitly shows recognition of the proper place for women, whereas Atys violates this separation both consciously (by bringing himself to battle as a "bride") and unconsciously, by appearing in Ismene's dream while she sleeps in the *thalamus*. Atys commits a third violation by invading Ismene's *domus* injured and about to die.

Statius conducts the reader from the battlefield into the home by way of a brief description of the rescue of Atys's body. The poet uses the simile of a lion passing up easy victims in search of greater prey to describe Tydeus's abandonment of Atys in 592–95:

et belli maiora ad praemia mente  
ducitur, innumeris veluti leo forte potitus  
caedibus imbelles vitulos mollesque iuvencae  
transmittit: magno furor est in sanguine mergi.

And he is driven by the thought of greater war prizes just as a lion, who by chance having the opportunity for great slaughter, passes up unwarlike calves and weakling heifers; he is mad to be covered in the blood of a more worthy victim.

<sup>12</sup> Atys is not brought directly into the *thalamus*, but rather into the *domus* (637). Statius marks the *domus*, however, as distinctly female space by mentioning the exclusively female characters who witness Atys's arrival, Jocasta (641), Ismene (642), and unnamed *famulae* (644).

The adjectives *imbelles* and *molles* reinforce the notion of Atys's weakness, while the nouns *vitulos* and *iuvencas* recall his youth and inexperience; the gender of *iuvencas* reminds us of his effeminacy. The battle narrative ends with the Theban troops rallying around Atys in 597–606, at which point the focus shifts to the physical seclusion of Oedipus's daughters in the recess of the *thalamus* (607). The sisters' isolation from the war is further underscored by their ignorance of the realities of the war and their ambivalence surrounding its outcome. As Statius tells us, the sisters do not concern themselves with present woes, but rather with the history of misery that has long plagued their family and led them into war (610–13):

nec mala quae iuxta, sed longa ab origine fati,  
haec matris taedas, oculos ast illa paternos,  
altera regnantem, profugum gemit altera fratrem,  
bella ambae.

They lament not the present woes, but beginning from the distant origin of their fate, one bemoans their mother's wedding torches, the other, their father's eyes; one, the brother in power, the other, their exiled brother; both lament the war.

Statius defines the sisters' concerns explicitly in 610, by using the conjunctions *nec* and *sed* to distinguish between present events and history; furthermore, the adverb *iuxta*, used here to contrast with *longa* in describing temporal distance, has a double meaning, for it also underscores the physical proximity of the war's violence, while emphasizing how distant this is from the sisters' minds. So while their brothers are acting out the family curse on the battlefield, the sisters are divided in their grief over the events leading up to it (611). This foreshadows Ismene's inability to interpret the meaning of her dream: she shuns awareness of the present while she dwells on the past, unable to connect the two. The contrast between the sisters' disregard for the matters at hand and their memories of the past is emphasized by the list of their concerns, which moves from mother, to father, to the individual circumstances of each brother. The sisters mutually lament the war in general (*bella ambae*, 613), but the list of their worries shows that they have no knowledge of the specific events of the war (*mala ... iuxta*; most recently the injury of Atys), while they are indeed preoccupied by the circumstances that led up to it (the misfortunes precipitated by the family curse).

#### IV. THE DAUGHTERS OF PANDION AND ALTERNATIVE MODES OF FEMALE COMMUNICATION

In 616, Statius compares the discourse between Ismene and Antigone to the chatter of the *Pandioniae volucres*, a reference to the metamorphosis of the

daughters of Pandion, the sisters Procne and Philomela, who were turned into birds (here both become nightingales), as Ovid tells the story in *Metamorphoses* 6.<sup>13</sup> As the daughters of Oedipus recapitulate between themselves the familial woes that have led up to the war raging outside of the parameters of their observation, they evoke the daughters of Pandion, who, returning to their nests, review the horrors of their past (8.616–20):

sic Pandioniae repetunt ubi fida volucres  
hospitia atque larem bruma pulsante relictum  
stantque super nidos veterisque exordia fati  
adnarrant tectis: et truncum ac flebile murmur  
verba putant, voxque illa tamen non dissona verbis.

So when the daughters of Pandion, turned into birds, seek again trusted shelters and homes left behind when winter's cold turned them out, and stand above their nests narrating to the household the origins of their ancient misfortune: they think their broken and mournful warblings are words, and indeed their noises are similar to words.

In fact, the very term Statius uses to describe the subject of the sisters' chatter, *exordia (fati)*, "the origins (of their misfortune)," provides a further link between the stories of the two sets of sisters. The choice of the noun *exordium* to describe the content of the indiscernible chatter of these sister-birds draws an analogy between the shared concerns of the pairs, namely the wretched family circumstances that have led them to this point of misery. But furthermore, as the noun *exordium*, related to the verb *exordior*, has as its primary meaning "the warp set up on the loom before the web is started" (*OLD* s.v. *exordium* 1), the word strongly alludes to weaving, the mode for communication used by the daughters of Pandion before their transformation. As Ovid tells the story, Tereus, after raping Philomela, cut out her tongue and sequestered her, so that she would be unable to expose his crime. As an alternative to verbal communication, Philomela wove a tapestry explaining the story to her sister in a mode that subverted Tereus's efforts to keep her mute.

<sup>13</sup> Statius also looks back to Homer's precedent for linking the warbling of a nightingale with the prelude to revealing a significant, predictive dream. The simile of the nightingale for a mournful woman first occurs in *Od.* 19.518–24, where Homer compares the anxious Penelope with the nightingale (ἀηδών, 518), here the transformed daughter of Pandareus (Πανδαρέου κόρη, 518), lamenting the accidental murder of her son. See Rutherford 1992: 192 for discussion of this passage. The nightingale analogy precedes Penelope's fraught deliberation between staying in the familiar house and marrying one of the suitors (524–34), which is followed by Penelope's description of her symbolic dream of the geese to the disguised Odysseus (535–53).

Statius's description of the way the Pandioniae communicate with one another is also significant for my discussion of alternative female modes of discourse. First of all, Statius says that they communicate in a mode comprehensible only to them, not with words, but in a way that is familiar as a mode of communication, as we see in 619–20. Furthermore, this reference to their indiscernible but yet word-like chirping recalls their initial non-verbal communication, Philomela's woven narrative.<sup>14</sup> Thus Statius's analogy in this context evokes both the initial non-verbal communication of Procne and Philomela, the textile, and the later non-verbal communication between them, the chirping. In both cases, because of their circumstances and exclusion from the realm of mainstream (male) activity, the sisters have been forced to seek alternative ways of conveying their horrific memories to one another. The Pandioniae communicate through the symbols woven into a tapestry, while the daughters of Oedipus murmur about a dream's encoded message.

## V. THE NIGHTMARE RECALLED

After the analogy with the Pandioniae, in which the sequestered sisters communicate in a manner comprehensible only to themselves, Ismene finally reveals her dream. This revelation comes after a long period of silence (*longa silentia*, 621), which separates the sisters' joint, warbling lamentation from Ismene's individual account of her dream. Up until this point the sisters' lamenting voices have been impersonal, although clearly distinct, as emphasized by Statius's choice of the pronouns *haec/illa* and *altera/altera* to distinguish their concerns in 612–13. Now the relationship becomes one of narrator and listener, or potential interpreter. In 622, Statius introduces Ismene's speech with the phrase *incohat Ismene* ("Ismene begins"). The use of the verb *incohare* has a double meaning here, for this is both the beginning of her speech and the first instance of her speech in the entire narrative. Her subjectivity is established at this point as she emerges, or begins to exist, when she commences her speech. This verb is also significant because it foreshadows the interruption of her story and her interpretation of it by the intrusion of the war's reality. That is to say, Ismene's noteworthy entry into the narrative through the revelation of her dream will be unmatched by a comparable exit. In fact, as her dream's horrors are realized with the death of Atys, thus

<sup>14</sup> Statius's choice of the adjective *truncum* (619) to describe the sisters' chirping is particularly evocative of the original deprivation of language, namely Philomela's mutilated tongue.

destroying her prospects for marriage, she essentially ceases to exist. Having begun, Ismene remains unfinished.<sup>15</sup>

Ismene prefaces her narration with a series of questions that immediately draw attention to the possibility of the dream's deceptiveness (622–24):

incohat Ismene: "quisnam hic mortalibus error?  
quae decepta fides? curam invigilare quieti  
claraque per somnos animi simulacra reverti?"

Ismene begins: "What does this deception mean for mortals? What is the meaning of this deceived trust? Do our cares haunt us while we sleep and do images of the mind's worries return clearly in sleep?"

By interrupting her narration with these questions, Ismene predisposes Antigone (and the reader) to disconnecting her dream from reality, as she underscores her detachment from external events. The final question (623–24) builds on the references to deception in *error* and *decepta fides* in the first two questions, highlighting the betrayal and thwarting of expectation that accompany a dreamer's attempt to account for the incongruity between self-image and persona in the dream. In the third question, the contrast between the verb *invigilare* and the phrase *per somnos* makes explicit her sense of outrage: rest is supposed to furnish an escape rather than be a time for the animation of one's waking preoccupations. The fact that she calls the dream-images clear (*clara*) emphasizes the ability of the dream to translate accurately the waking mind's preoccupations into convincing visual experiences and thus to simulate waking reality.<sup>16</sup> The verb *reverti* (624) also hints that the dream's images are not new, but rather a *return* to the day's concerns. This acknowledgment of a connection between dream and reality is especially jarring given Ismene's act of self-deception in her description of the dream that follows.

<sup>15</sup> The final mention of Ismene by name in the *Thebaid* comes at 11.643, where we see her silently weeping over her mother's corpse and following her mother's example in taking her own life, as we learn only from a simile that makes reference to Erigone's suicide beside her father's corpse (11.644–47). By contrast with her sister Antigone then, who emerges as a central character in the action of books 11 and 12, Ismene "stagnates into oblivion" (Hershkowitz 1998: 296).

<sup>16</sup> In a note to his translation of this line, "Can it be that care keeps vigil over repose and clear images of our minds return in sleep?" Shackleton Bailey comments, "Our waking thoughts take visual form" (2003: 49n54). Where Shackleton Bailey translates *simulacra* as "images" and contrasts them with "thoughts" in his note, Mozley chooses to render *animi simulacra* with "fancies" (1928: 241); Melville chooses "the mind's imaginings" (1992: 211), which strikes a middle ground. This discrepancy points out the inherent difficulty in Statius's choice of *simulacra* (images) to refer to the contents of the waking mind (images and thoughts) that then return (as images) in dreams.

As she begins to narrate her dream, Ismene claims to be shocked that the images she has seen in her dream reveal the very thoughts she has tried to repress in her waking life. She confesses (625–27) that she has seen her wedding (*conubia*), while professing that in her waking life she is too modest even to think about the wedding chamber (*thalamus*):

ecce ego, quae thalamos, nec si pax alta maneret,  
tractarem sensu, (pudet heu!), conubia vidi  
nocte, soror.

There I was! I, who could not bear the thought of the wedding chamber even in a time of peace, saw during the night—I'm ashamed to admit—my wedding, sister.

This use of *thalamus* as a metonym for married life, especially loss of virginity, is pointed. It contrasts with the literal use of the word, seen earlier in 607, to describe the location of the women isolated from the world of the men on the battlefield. Here, because it is used in a context that draws a line between the circumstances of peace and war, and of waking life and dreaming, it is directly contrasted with the word *conubia* (626), which refers specifically to the wedding. The verbs Ismene uses, *tractare sensu* and *videre*, also contribute to the distinction: the former seems to express the notion of visualizing an image in one's mind or contemplating,<sup>17</sup> while the latter refers undeniably to a perceptual visual experience. The sense of immediacy conveyed by *vidi* picks up the deictic *ecce* (625), which creates the sense of tangible presence. The interjection *pudet heu!* in the middle of line 626 intercedes between the hypothetical world of an unmarried girl's decorum and the incontrovertible implication of her terrifying dream-image: herself as a bride. This invocation of modesty is Statius's commentary upon the rupture between Ismene's self-image from waking life, and the brutal intrusion of a dream that forces her to confront the anxiety she had tried to ignore.

Rather than dwell upon what Ismene's (perhaps false) claims to modesty may reveal about her "actual" modesty, let us focus upon what these insistences represent in terms of the dichotomy between the world of the war and that of the interior space of the women; between what is perceived and what one believes. Ismene's attempt to account for incongruities is indicative of the negotiation between the realities of the war and the ignorance of those who do not participate. As Ismene recounts it, the dream consisted of a vision of herself as a bride and Atys, her fiancé, as a groom. Their meeting is inter-

<sup>17</sup> See *OLD* s.v. *tractare* 19, "to ponder, to go on considering." Mozley translates the phrase with "bear the thought of" (1928: 241).



rupted by a sudden fire, which causes Atys's mother to pursue Ismene in an attempt to retrieve her son (626–28; 630–33). There is very little narrative component to this dream; rather, as I have mentioned above, Ismene's retelling is a meditation upon the visually deceptive powers of the dream, which contribute to the fluctuation between Ismene's sense of modesty and her incredulity. Thus the way she chooses to comment on her dream is equally important as its content.

Ismene's disbelief is perhaps best expressed by the question that interrupts her telling of the dream: *sponsum unde mihi sopor attulit amens / vix notum visu?* ("From where has crazed sleep brought to me my fiancé, who was hardly known to me by sight?," 627–28). This question temporarily distracts us from the intensely personal nature of Ismene's dream. But while Ismene locates the origin of the dream's disturbing images (*unde ...?*) in a force outside of herself (*sopor amens*), she is arguably herself *amens*, out of her own mind. What are the implications of this transferred epithet? I think that the confusion between referents underscores the disconnection between the images her mind sees in the dream and her self-perception. *Sopor* itself renders its victim, Ismene, vulnerable, and the adjective *amens* reinforces her loss of control as this premonition is thrust upon her. This question, like its predecessors, exposes the perplexing nature of the dream: its contents seem real as the dreamer sees (and experiences) them, but when confronted by the images of the dreamer's waking reality, their reconciliation becomes difficult. What caused Ismene to see her fiancé in a dream, when his existence was hardly defined for her by sight (the implication of *vix notum visu*, 628)? This is a matter of importance for her, especially since, as she explains in the commentary which follows, she had only seen him once (*semel*, 628), and this was an accidental sighting that occurred while their parents were negotiating their betrothal, as we learn in 628–30:

semel his in sedibus illum,  
dum mea nescio quo spondentur foedera pacto,  
respexi non sponte, soror.

Once I glanced at him, sister, involuntarily; it was in these halls while by some agreement, we were being committed to one another in marriage.

The phrase *respexi non sponte* (630) refers here to this earlier encounter, but could arguably double as a comment upon her reaction to the invasive image of her dream, as Ismene is forced to look upon Atys unwillingly yet again.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The verb *respicio* may also evoke the scene of Orpheus's ascent from the underworld with Eurydice in tow. Vergil uses the verb in *Georgics* 4 to describe Orpheus's fateful glance

When Ismene resumes the narration of her dream, she uses another verb of perception, *cernebam* (631) to describe what she has seen in the dream. The scene is chaotic, and quickly turns dangerous (630–33):

turbata repente  
omnia cernebam, subitusque intercidit ignis,  
meque sequebatur rabido clamore reposcens  
mater Atyn.

I noticed that everything was suddenly thrown into confusion and a fire immediately divided us, and Atys's mother was following me, demanding Atys with wild shouting.

The couple is immediately divided by a sudden fire, and, contributing to the commotion, Atys's mother pursues Ismene in search of her son (632). The loud noise of the mother's pursuit is presumably what roused Ismene from sleep and brought the dream to its abrupt end. Ismene's reaction to the dream's end comes in the form of a question: *quaenam haec dubiae praesagia cladis?* ("What uncertain doom do these images foretell?," 633). Here she appears to solicit interpretation from her sister, the presumed addressee of this story, as we know from the vocatives *soror* (627 and 630), but Ismene thwarts this opportunity by seemingly answering her own question. With a reassurance that she is not afraid of the dream's possible implications, Ismene seems to deny the dream any relevance for the present. But the proviso clause that follows hints at an opportunity for fear, by enumerating her tenuous wishes for the outcome of the conflict in a tricolon: *nec timeo, dum tuta domus milesque recedat / Doricus et tumidos liceat componere fratres* (634–35). So long as her house is safe (as thus far it has been; of course, this very wish is about to be shattered by the intrusion of the dying Atys and his men), the invading army retreats, and the sisters are able to unite their brothers in peace (as they have tried to do), Ismene has no reason for fear. Thus, while hinting at the possibility that the dream portends negative events, Ismene's reaction continues the detachment from the war by displacing the dream's relevance from her personal situation to that of her brothers. By refusing to interpret the dream

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(*Eurydicenque suam iam luce sub ipsa / immemor heu! victus animi respexit*, 490–91). This association contributes to the funereal portent of the dream. Looking upon Atys again in her dream (i.e., "seeing," albeit in symbolic terms, what has happened to him on the battlefield) in a sense ensures his death. Ismene's second look at Atys in reality will be the one experienced just before he fades into death. For Statius's use of the "Orphic gaze," in the *Thebaid's* sphragis (and elsewhere), see Pagán 2000: 439–46. Although she cites other instances of the verb *respicio* in the *Thebaid*, Pagán does not refer to this passage.

in light of her own circumstances and by thwarting Antigone's possible interpretation, Ismene reveals her inability to connect this dream to what is happening on the battlefield, thereby underscoring the lack of connection between the sequestered sisters and the action of the war. Her detachment and her displacement of the dream's possible meaning onto the action of her brothers is reinforced by the next image.

In 636, we learn that Ismene and Antigone, who has not spoken up until this point, have reverted to their interlocked discussion; the sisters are again described as bound together, away from the activity of the outside world: *talia nectebant* ("they were intertwining such words") writes Statius, using a verb that alludes to the process of weaving as a metaphor for communication. This phrase has a precedent in *Theb.* 5.36, where Hypsipyle asks, *quid longa malis exordia necto?* ("Why do I bind together a long preface to my woes?"), at the beginning of an extended recollection of her history. Here Hypsipyle uses the phrase *exordia nectere* in reference to beginning a story about origins, establishing the act of weaving as a metaphor for communicating a story. Jessica Dietrich (1999) notes the irony in Statius's use of the metaphor of weaving at the outset of Hypsipyle's lengthy verbal narrative, which is particularly striking given that the same character actually weaves the narrative of her woes in Valerius Flaccus's account of the story (*Arg.* 2.408–17). Observing that instances of women weaving are notably sparse in the *Thebaid*, Dietrich offers the following explanation for this absence, "Statius consciously demarginalises the female voice by *separating* it from the process of weaving" (49). Hypsipyle speaks in defiance of weaving and thus proceeds to occupy close to 500 lines of verse with her tale. But this is not the case for Ismene. In fact, there is a distinct difference between Hypsipyle's narration and that of Ismene. While the interludes of both women divert the reader's attention from the central battle narrative, Hypsipyle narrates her story to a group of men, Polynices and his Argive forces, while Ismene speaks alone to her sister. We have already seen *exordium* ("the warp of a web") used figuratively to describe the subject matter of the discussion between the daughters of Pandion (618), which, I have argued, is evocative of their earlier communication through the medium of a tapestry; the allusion to weaving in *talia nectebant* (636) reinforces the metaphor. Statius refers at the beginning and end of Ismene's dream to the sisters' muddled conversation as a type of weaving because it, like weaving, is a mode of discourse particular to female interlocutors. The dream does not stand in opposition to weaving, but rather shares with it features that are not immediately apparent.

Finally, just as Ismene's dream did, the reality of the violent war intrudes upon the sisters' intimacy (8.636–40):

taliam nectebant, subito cum pigra tumultu  
 expavit domus, et multo sudore receptus  
 fertur Atys, servans animam iam sanguine nullo,  
 cui manus in plaga, dependet languida cervix  
 exterior clipeo, crinesque a fronte supini.

They were intertwining such words, when the languid house was jolted by a sudden frenzy, and Atys was brought in, recovered after great exertion, clinging to life now with little blood left; his hands were on his wound, his lifeless neck hung down over his shield, and his hair spilled straight down from his forehead.

The adjective *subito* (636) echoes the adverb *repente* (630) and repeats *subitus* from 631, where the fire of the dream was described as sudden. Much as her dream was interrupted by commotion, so are Ismene's telling of the dream and its subsequent interpretation. This interruption, caused by those bearing Atys's wounded body into the palace, brings closure to the dream description, which was clearly marked at its beginning by the verb *incohat*. The only link between the dream and its aftermath is the destruction of the sisters' intimate isolation by the invasion of the war's violence.

From the perspective of the reader, Ismene misinterprets her dream. That is, she refuses to acknowledge the possible connection it might have to her waking perception of herself. Debra Hershkowitz has read Ismene's disavowal of her dream's image as evidence for her refusal to realize that what she dismisses as madness is actually "the true state of her mind, revealed to her only when she is asleep and unable to repress it" (1998: 287). While it may be the case that Ismene is trying to protect her compromised modesty by refusing to ponder the dream's relevance, I believe that by connecting the dream structurally to what ensues while linking it thematically to what has preceded, Statius utilizes the dream as a telescope onto the action of the battlefield. Thus, by dreaming of a destroyed marriage rather than a union with Atys, her dream is as much retrospective as it is premonitory. While the action and setting of Ismene's dream foreshadow the dying Atys's admission into the palace, the dream's theme of the disrupted marital union and Ismene's consequent invocation to *pudor* are actually reflected in what has just happened on the battlefield, where Ismene's husband-to-be has been deflowered by his opponent, thus acting out her dreamed violation. Ismene's dream of premature interaction with a fiancé whom she has only seen once inadvertently (*respexi non sponte*, 630) reenacts Atys's premature death on the battlefield in which he is violated by an enemy who turns to look at his conquest only by chance (*forte refert oculos*, 581) before deflowering him. Without recognizing it, Ismene has wit-

nessed and internalized for herself the act of humiliation that has just been committed on the battlefield against her promised husband.

Returning to the device of the teichoscopy, I would like to suggest that Statius substitutes Ismene's dream for the anticipated teichoscopy scene, typical for female characters in epic, as discussed above. The *Thebaid* does in fact contain two scenes of teichoscopy, both performed by Ismene's sister Antigone, who ascends the walls of Thebes in books 7 and 11. But neither of these examples is typical, for neither gives the reader insight into Antigone's perspective on the war or warriors. In the first, she merely listens to Phorbas's catalogue of warriors; in the second, Antigone uses the wall as a speaker's platform in an attempt to intervene in the war between her brothers. She does not report on any observed action.<sup>19</sup> Contrast these instances with the scene in 8.564, where Atys is said to fight *ceu spectetur* ("as though he were being watched"). On the surface, this declaration by Statius implies that Atys was fighting with a flourish unnecessary for combat, but one that would distinguish him from the crowd of warriors on the field. The fact that he is dressed in his gold and purple finery, as discussed above, also hints at his spectacular appearance. But this statement strongly suggests a connection between Ismene's dream and the act of teichoscopy because of its implication that Atys expects to be viewed. But who was his imagined audience? Shackleton Bailey in his note to this line suggests Ismene as spectator, thus implying that Atys is showing off specifically for his betrothed (2003: 43n40). This interpretation fits nicely with the image of Atys dressed as a bride approaching his marriage/battle with a "betrothed," his opponent Tydeus, who barely glances at him, while imagining himself under the gaze of Ismene, his real fiancée.

So if Atys is indeed preening for Ismene, he must imagine her watching him from the walls of Thebes, the familiar epic locus for a female character's visual engagement with the events of the war, particularly duels, such as that between Menelaus and Paris, or Tydeus and Atys. But unlike Helen's direct engagement, this teichoscopy is merely imagined from the perspective of the one being watched as Atys envisions, perhaps, Ismene catching sight of her beloved fighting and reporting his actions to interested onlookers. But in fact, what Atys imagines Ismene to be viewing from the walls is conveyed to her symbolically through the images of her dream. Thus Statius thwarts the reader's expectation by including in his epic two unconventional teichoscopy scenes and displacing the typical work of the teichoscopy onto the dream scene of Ismene.

<sup>19</sup> For detailed analysis of these scenes, see Lovatt 2006.

## VI. PRECEDENTS FOR ISMENE'S DREAM

Given that the Romans believed that the dead could appear to the living in dreams, it seems appropriate that a poet should exploit this property in making his characters' dreams channels for recalling dreams from earlier texts.<sup>20</sup> As Philip Hardie has argued that the *Iliad* invades the *Aeneid* via Aeneas's dream-vision of Hector in *Aeneid* 2, thus alluding to Homer's influence on Virgil (1993: 102ff.), I will show that while Ismene dreams of destruction on the battlefield and in her home, she is also conjuring images dreamed by her forebears in epic poetry, as Statius marks these texts as important precedents. Comparison with some of the precedents for Ismene's dream episode in the epic tradition will enable us to examine the dream episode as a specifically female experience in epic, in which the translation of the visual experience of the dream into a mode for communication is paramount. Furthermore, this analysis will reinforce the connection between dreams and teichoscopy by identifying traces of Medea's dream from Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautica* in Valerius Flaccus's account of Medea's teichoscopy in his *Argonautica*.

*Medea in Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus: Dream and Teichoscopy*

Both Nita Krevans (1993) and Alessandro Perutelli (1994) have already drawn attention to the blend of epic and tragic paradigms in Apollonius of Rhodes's depiction of Medea's dream of Jason in book 3 of the *Argonautica*. This dream contains what we might call an interior, psychological representation of the young girl's desires. Perutelli has identified the dream of Medea as representative of the point at which the Homeric prediction-dream transforms into a powerful means for gaining psychological insight, "uno strumento particolarmente incisivo di indagine interiore," which is to become the paradigm for the dreams of female characters in later epic poems (1994: 35). Medea's dream foreshadows the intensity of her desire for Jason, which will eventually lead her to abandon her family and escape with him. There are three passages from Apollonius with direct relevance for the analysis of Ismene's dream: the first is the analogy of the dream (3.443–47), the second is the dream itself (3.616–35), and the third, Medea's reaction to and retelling of the dream (3.645–64).

Medea sees Jason for the first time shortly after the arrival of the Argonauts in Colchis. Apollonius describes their first encounter and its subsequent power over her by analogy with a dream (3.443–47):

<sup>20</sup> Barchiesi 1995: 61 calls the dream "una finestra intertestuale."

θεσπέσιον δ' ἐν πᾶσι μετέπρεπεν Αἴσονος υἱὸς  
κάλλει καὶ χαρίτεσσιν· ἐπ' αὐτῷ δ' ὄμματα κούρη  
λοξὰ παρὰ λιπαρὴν σχομένη θεήτο καλύπτρην,  
κῆρ ἄχεϊ σμύχουσα· νόος δέ οἱ ἦύτ' ὄνειρος  
ἐρπύζων πεπόττη μετ' ἵχνια νισσομένοιο.

The son of Aeson stood out from all as divine in beauty and grace: upon him Medea fixed her sideways glance, having pushed aside her shining veil, smoldering, she grieved in her heart; like a dream, her mind flew, creeping after the footsteps of Jason as he departed.

Medea's dream-like experience results from her longing to perpetuate her vision of Jason after he has left the room. Medea actually pushes her veil aside to see him more clearly (445), following him with her sidelong gaze until he has vanished from her sight. But where her sight cannot go, her mind does; what cannot be seen with the eye can be imagined in the mind's eye. Thus we are left with the impression that, where Medea's vision fails her, her imagination, as in a dream, can extend the boundaries of what is physically possible but also what is socially acceptable. Christine Walde reads the dream simile as a representation of Medea's loss of control over her mind, and asserts that this disconnection from reality is reflected in the dream she reports later in the narrative, where she revises Jason's motivation for coming to Colchis (2001: 176).

In her dreams, which Apollonius calls "deceitful" (ἡπεροπῆες, 3.617), Medea imagines herself as boldly saving Jason and his men from her father's plots because, as Jason admits in the dream, he traveled to Colchis not for the fleece, but for the purpose of bringing her away with him as his bride (3.619–32). Medea sees herself as a substitute for Jason in the fight with her father's fearsome bulls: οἶετο δ' ἀμφὶ βόεσσιν / αὐτὴ ἀεθλεύουσα μάλ' εὐμαρέως πονέεσθαι ("She seemed to herself to fight the bulls herself and to be winning easily," 3.623–24). This image represents symbolically the assistance she will eventually give Jason with her magic potion, as it recalls the implication of the earlier dream analogy, in which her soul, longing for union, flies after Jason, transgressing (physical) boundaries in order to join with him. The frustration of Medea's inability to accompany Jason physically in the earlier passage is remedied by this dream-fantasy in which she actually becomes Jason by substituting her own body for his.

The image of Medea's traveling gaze is recast by Valerius Flaccus in book 7 of his *Argonautica*, as we see in 103–10:

at trepida et medios inter deserta parentes  
virgo silet, nec fixa solo servare parumper

lumina nec potuit maestos non flectere vultus,  
 respexitque fores et adhuc invenit euntem,  
 visus et heu miserae tunc pulchrior hospes amanti  
 discedens; tales umeros, ea terga relinquit.  
 illa domum atque ipsos paulum procedere postes  
 optat, at ardentem tenet intra limina gressus.<sup>21</sup>

But the girl (Medea), trembling and left alone among her family, remains silent, nor was she able to keep her eyes cast on the ground for a short time or prevent her sad gaze from fixing upon him, and she looked towards the doors and caught him still going out; and alas! as he left, the guest seemed more handsome to the wretched girl; such shoulders, this back he leaves behind. She wishes that the house and the doorposts themselves would budge a little, but she checks her burning steps inside the threshold.

The context is similar to that of Apollonius: Medea follows Jason with her eyes as he takes leave of Aeetes after being challenged to yoke the fire-breathing bulls. In this instance, however, Medea is not seeing Jason for the first time as she watches him walk from her father's halls *en route* to what could be his final battle. Without using the explicit analogy of the dream, Valerius describes Medea following Jason with her eyes compelled by a force greater than her own will (104–6).<sup>22</sup> Again, she yearns to pursue him visually beyond the limits of her gaze (109–10). In a perplexing inversion, however, Medea's desire is actually conveyed as a wish that the house and its doors would defy their *own* physical boundaries to accommodate her desire to continue watching Jason. Valerius's Medea couches her frustration by referring to the impossibility of altering these inanimate structures. This Medea emphasizes the fact that she is physically bound by the threshold to her house and cannot follow Jason to his battle; her immobility, captured by the phrases *fixa lumina* and *maestos non flectere vultus*, establishes a vocabulary of fixity that is echoed in her desire for the house and doors to move.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> I follow here (and throughout) the text of Spaltenstein 2005. For alternate readings of line 109, see Perutelli 1997, who follows the emendation of Delz 1991 to *illa domo adque ipsos paulum procedere postes*, making Medea the would-be agent of the complementary infinitive *procedere*.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Valerius's use of the verb *respexit* (106) to describe Medea's response to the almost magnetic pull of Jason's presence with Statius's use of the same verb in reference to Ismene's involuntary glimpse of Atys in her home (*respexi non sponte*, 8.630; cf. n18 above). Micozzi 2001/2: 272n36 compares these passages, citing the importance of the gaze in each.

<sup>23</sup> The tension between the boundaries of home and what lies outside of the sightlines of this space is revisited when Medea's fitful dreams and sleep are described 30 lines later



Given Statius's thorough knowledge of Alexandrian authors, it is likely that Apollonius's portrayal of Medea directly influenced his characterization of Ismene.<sup>24</sup> In particular, Statius exploits Apollonius's connection between Medea's first sight of Jason and her dream-vision in his description of Ismene. As we have seen, the source of Ismene's shame is the fact that her vision of Atys in the dream violated the reality of her situation, namely that she had only ever seen him once, and that time involuntarily. But this link between seeing and subsequently dreaming of the same person also emphasizes more generally the important role of vision in symbolic, subjective dreams, in particular a type of vision that enables the viewer to transcend boundaries. While Medea's mental image of Jason allows her, as in a dream, to cross the boundary of what is physically possible, it is her actual dream that sanctions and enables this crossing in Apollonius's telling.<sup>25</sup> In Valerius's account, Medea wishes for the removal of physical boundaries, but remains in body (and mind) on the proper side of the threshold. Likewise, Ismene's dream violates boundaries both physical and social, but the dream is seen as contradictory to, rather than fulfilling, her latent wish. Furthermore, Ismene's vision of Atys in the dream, which represents symbolically both his injury on the battlefield and his death in her home, transcends the boundary of physical space as the dreamer is able to "see" beyond the walls of her secluded chamber.

An earlier passage from Valerius's *Argonautica*, in which Medea performs a teichoscopy from the walls of Colchis (6.427–760), highlights the connection between vision, dreaming, and boundary-crossing.<sup>26</sup> In this passage, Medea is summoned to the walls by Juno (in the guise of Medea's sister Chalciope), who is armed with the girdle of Venus in order to ensure that Medea falls in love with Jason as he fights alongside her father's forces against those of her uncle. Before we encounter Medea herself atop the walls, Valerius invokes the

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at 7.141–52. Here the tormented Medea dreams of the rivalry between Jason and her father as they vie for her loyalty (*supplex hinc sternitur hospes, / hinc pater*, 143–44). These poles are manifested again in the contrast between her dream-image of *Thessalicas urbes* (146) and the familiar domestic surroundings, *famulas carosque penates* (145), which greet her upon waking. This is Medea's second described dream in the *Argonautica*.

<sup>24</sup> See McNelis 2007 for discussion of Statius's engagement with Alexandrian authors, particularly Callimachus.

<sup>25</sup> Medea's dream also contains a transgression of prescribed gender boundaries as she inverts male and female roles by taking on her father's bulls. The combination of physical and gender transgression is also a feature of Atys's foray onto the battlefield as a male soldier-bride.

<sup>26</sup> For detailed analyses of the teichoscopy scene, see Fucecchi 1997 and Lovatt 2006.

Muse to relay information about the battle. At 575, the focus shifts from the battlefield to Medea on her perch; at Juno's urging, she discerns Jason among the fighting crowd. In fact, Valerius claims that because Medea is so focused upon and favorably disposed towards Jason, she is thus able to anticipate his movement before he acts (578–83):

Iunone magistra  
conspicit Aesonium longe caput, ac simul acres  
huc oculos sensusque refert animumque faventem  
nunc quo se raperet, nunc quo diversus abiret,  
ante videns, quotque unus equos, quot funderet arma,  
errantesque viros quam densis sisteret hastis.

With Juno guiding her, she (Medea) spies Jason's head at a distance, and at the same time brings her sharp eyes and senses and favorable mind to him; now she sees in advance where he would move, now where he would go in another direction, how many horses, how many weapons he alone would scatter, and with how thick a shower of spears he would pin down wandering men.

The beginning of Medea's teichoscopy has the prophetic qualities of a dream. The repetition of words connoting vision (*conspicit* and *oculos*) and mental focus (*sensus* and *animum*) implies that this combination of intense focus and joint engagement of the senses enables Medea to foretell events (*ante videns*). This expressed link between desire, vision, and foresight also features in Ismene's dream-vision of Atys. Although the dream does not explicitly reveal Ismene's desire for her fiancé, her concern for his safety and her wish for their eventual marriage certainly account for his presence in her thoughts. Ismene's dream, by contrast to Medea's teichoscopy, is an inadvertent visual encounter. Nevertheless, it allows Ismene to foresee, albeit symbolically, the injury of Atys before it happens and before its consequences become apparent for her.

Lines 6.601–89 of Valerius develop the interplay of Medea's focused observation of Jason and Jason's bravado as he fights. Jason's dominance on the battlefield reaches its apex in 618–20:

tunc et terrificis undantem crinibus Hebrum  
et Geticum Priona ferit; caput eripit Auch  
bracchiaque et vastis volvendum mittit harenis.

Then he strikes both Hebrus with frightful hair flowing in waves and Getic Prion; he slashes the head and arms of Auchus and sends him rolling on the wide sands.

The combination of Jason's mutilation of his opponent's corpse and the description of Auchus's body falling on the wide sands evokes the scene in an arena. The spectacular quality of the descriptions of Jason's violence is emphasized both by the eye-catching ways in which Jason kills his opponents and by Medea's reaction to this display. Valerius uses specifically visual language to describe Medea's activity on the walls; as she follows Jason with her eyes, the fighting before her is described as an *imago* (657–59):

at regina virum (neque enim deus amovet ignem)  
persequitur lustrans oculisque ardentibus haeret.  
et iam laeta minus praesentis imagine pugnae.

But the queen, scanning the scene, followed the man and clung to him with burning eyes (for the god kept the fire on her). And now she was less cheered by the image of the fight before her.

As Medea's desire for Jason grows, her observation of him reaches new levels of intensity. Observing him fighting, Medea empathizes physically with Jason, feeling his blows as he receives them (683–85):

at quotiens vis dura ducum densique repente  
Aesoniden pressere viri cumque omnis in unum  
imber iit, totiens saxis pulsatur et hastis.

But as many times as the harsh force of the leaders and the numerous men swiftly attack Jason, and when all of their weapons rain down against him alone, that many times she is beaten by stones and spears.

Thus Medea appears able to transcend the physical limits of viewing from safety by joining Jason on the battlefield; she does not merely fear for him, but feels as though she is fighting in his place. This scene foreshadows the encounter described in 7.103–10, discussed above, where Medea longs (unsuccessfully) to manipulate the properties of physical space to join Jason as he departs.

The discrepancy between the scenes is made apparent by comparing the locations of Medea's visual encounters: in the teichoscopy scene of book 6, Medea has already ventured outside her home, the context appropriate for women during war, while in the later passage, during her second visual encounter with Jason, she is circumscribed by the walls of her father's hall. The locus for the teichoscopy, that is, the city walls themselves, the final barrier between the domestic and martial worlds, allows actual visual interaction that mimics physical interaction, whereas in the home, Medea is inhibited by the structural components of the house itself (*domum, postes, limina*, 7.109–10).

Such physical boundaries will of course be of no use when Medea decides to aid Jason in battle and flee with him, as she does in both the Hellenistic and Flavian accounts. But what of the boundary of consciousness? In Apollonius, Medea transcends neither city walls nor the threshold of her father's home, but rather the boundary between sleep and wakefulness as she dreams of fighting in Jason's stead against her father's vicious bulls.

This comparison of passages from Apollonius and Valerius has identified a link between vision, transcending boundaries, and dreaming in their accounts of Medea's early encounters with Jason. We have seen that Valerius foregrounds the visual in his descriptions of Medea's desire to gain proximity to Jason through her gaze both on the walls in book 6 and in her father's halls in book 7. While the latter passage has an important intertext in Apollonius 3.443–47, discussed above, where Medea's gaze, as it follows Jason from the room, is compared to a dream, Medea's *teichoscopy* scene in Valerius's account recalls a particular feature of her counterpart's actual dream in Apollonius's version, namely her ability to participate in place of Jason as he struggles against her father's forces. Reading these passages in conjunction is especially important when we consider both Medea's precedents for Statius's description of Ismene's dream episode, for it is not just Medea as a dreamer, but as a viewer in both Apollonius and Valerius, that Statius seems to draw upon in his characterization of Ismene. Statius incorporates into Ismene's dream passage elements of Medea's visual engagement with Jason as she catches sight of him in her father's halls, as she gazes upon him from the city walls, and as she dreams of fighting in his place. By condensing these disparate scenes of viewership into Ismene's dream scene, Statius designates the dream as a locus for visual interaction between the peripheral and mainstream elements in his epic.

## VII. RETELLING A DREAM AS A MODE OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SIBLINGS

Returning to Apollonius, let us consider the simile he uses to describe Medea's internal conflict over whether she ought to share the dream's contents with her sister Chalciope.<sup>27</sup> In 3.645–64 Medea frets about revealing her rebellious

<sup>27</sup> Another important connection between Valerius's *teichoscopy* scene and Apollonius's account of Medea's dream is the contrasting role of Medea's sister in both episodes. In the first instance, Juno disguised as Chalciope leads Medea to the walls, acting as her interlocutor and goading her desire for Jason. By contrast, Apollonius's Chalciope is a more passive figure, who is initially hesitant to entreat Medea on behalf of her sons and merely listens while Medea recounts her dream.

and unchaste fantasy to her sister, as she tries to leave the room many times without success, while shame on account of her desire for Jason prevents her movement. The dream, while it communicates Medea's desires clearly to the reader, becomes an impediment to communication with her sister. To elucidate the nature of her conflict, Apollonius compares Medea's grief and uncertainty to that of a bride whose husband, this time a man approved by her parents (in contrast to Jason), has been killed before the consummation of their marriage (656–64):

ὡς δ' ὅτε τις νύμφη θαλερὸν πόσιν ἐν θαλάμοισιν  
μύρεται, ᾧ μιν ὅπασσαν ἀδελφεοὶ ἢ τοκῆες,  
οὐδέ τί πω πάσαις ἐπιμίσγεται ἀμφιπόλοισιν  
αἰδοῖ ἐπιφροσύνη τε· μυχῶ δ' ἀχέουσα θαάσσει·  
τὸν δέ τις ὤλεσε μοῖρα πάρος ταρπήμεναι ἄμφω  
δῆνεσιν ἀλλήλων· ἡ δ' ἔνδοθι δαιομένη περ  
σῖγα μάλα κλαίει χῆρον λέχος εἰσορώσα,  
μή μιν κερτομέουσαι ἐπιστοβέωσι γυναῖκες—  
τῇ ἱκέλη Μήδεια κινύρετο.

Just as a bride weeps in her chamber for her youthful husband, to whom her brothers and parents have promised her, inhibited by shame and prudence from mingling with all the attendants; but she sits in the innermost part of the house, lamenting him, whom fate destroyed before they could take pleasure in one another; burning with love in her heart, she cries, silently looking at her bereft bed lest the other women mock and taunt her—similar to her, Medea lamented.

Statius cleverly recasts the content of this simile as reality in the sad story of Ismene and Atys. In Apollonius's image, a sense of alienation from her peers restricts the young bride from emerging from the recesses of the house, and she is thus reduced to tears, which she sheds in silence. The nameless bride's isolated weeping provides a powerful analogue for Medea's desperation, and her story has significant parallels in Ismene's tale of loss. Medea's impasse results from her inability to communicate with her sister out of shame, and is eventually circumvented by the fabrication of a lie. Likewise, Ismene's feelings of shame over her dream's content cause her to doubt the dream's relevance and its need for interpretation by her sister. In this section, I will examine the relevance of retelling a dream as a mode of communication between sisters.

In contrast to Ismene's narrative, Medea's dream episode in Apollonius does not end with her lamentation. Rather than admit that she is convinced by her dream to aid her visitors for her own benefit, Medea eventually convenes

with her sister and agrees to help the Argonauts for the sake of saving her sister's sons. Lying to her sister about the content of the dream, Medea claims that the dream foretold the sons' destruction (681–92). Therefore, her dream becomes the mode of discourse through which Medea negotiates with her sister and plots the decisive action that follows. Medea's dream is not simply misinterpreted, but rather cunningly reinvented. In fact, her decision substitutes for the interpretation of her dream: by lying, Medea averts conflict and avoids the burden of acknowledging her self-serving motive while appearing to be helpful. Although the content of her original dream is narrated in the third person, Apollonius presents her retelling, the lie, in the first person, a shift that illustrates the inherent difficulty of conveying the interior, visual experience of the dream in verbal terms. While Medea's lonely weeping is a reaction to the paralysis her dream has caused in her ability to communicate, Ismene, after she has misinterpreted her dream and thwarted the opportunity for counter-interpretation, and thus dialogue, is eventually brought to tears by the intrusion and death of the injured Atys (*fassa pios gemitus lacrimasque in lumina fudit*, *Theb.* 8.654). Although the sequence of events in each episode differs, lamentation occurs in both. For Medea and Ismene, lamentation follows the difficulty of articulating a dream's implications and the subsequent faltering of communication caused by this difficulty.

As the examples of the Hellenistic and Flavian Medeas have demonstrated, Statius engages with the tradition of the "symbolic" dream as well as that of the *teichoscopy* in creating the scene of Ismene's nightmare. But rather than focus on the dream as motivation for action, as is typical, he emphasizes the problem of using the dream as a means for communication, which is directly related to the difficult task of translating visual experience into other terms. Ismene cannot appreciate the larger implications of her dream, for she is impeded by the dream's apparent (visual) incongruities. Her misinterpretation of the dream as she recounts it demonstrates that it is only partially successful as a mode for communication, both within herself, between her subconscious and waking mind, and between herself and her sister. This is confirmed when her tenuous notion of safety is shattered as the reality of the war intrudes upon female space. Ultimately, her attempt at retelling the dream is overshadowed by the voiceless lamentation to which she succumbs and which finds a parallel in the poem's end, when the Argive and Theban women are finally permitted to mourn their dead. By turning briefly to the dissimilar dreams of Ilia in Ennius's *Annales* and of Byblis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, I will illustrate specifically the importance placed upon the retelling of a dream to a sibling, and the frustration and ultimate lamentation that result from the inability to comprehend or communicate the meaning of a dream.

*Ilia's Rape: The Dream as a Vehicle for Communicating Horror*

Ilia's dream from Ennius's *Annales* is the earliest of its kind in extant Latin poetry.<sup>28</sup> Clearly influenced by Apollonius's account of Medea, it in turn serves as a paradigm for the dream scene of Ismene. The passage connects the moment of the legendary conception of Romulus and Remus through a rape by Mars with the ancestral founder of Rome, Aeneas, using the young Ilia's dream experience as link. Given the fragmentary nature of the passage, we can speculate neither about the possible symbolic nature of the dream nor about the scenes that preceded or followed it, but it is obvious that Ennius uses the dream as a vehicle for communicating disturbing information. Much like in the conversation between Ismene and Antigone, in this scene a frightened Ilia recounts her mysterious night visions to her sister. Like Antigone, Ilia's sister merely listens without replying, but her presence is established by Ilia's three direct addresses to her at measured intervals throughout the passage. She is called *Eurydica prognata* in a reference that emphasizes their shared descent from Aeneas despite having different mothers (*Eurydica prognata, pater quam noster amavit*, 36), she is addressed as *germana soror* (40), and finally simply as *germana* (46).

Ilia's dream narrative consists of a description of her abduction, her wandering, the prophecy pronounced by her father Aeneas, and her attempt to see Aeneas after his speech. While the rape by Mars is not explicitly mentioned, Ilia's obvious fright and disorientation, typical of a disturbing dream, convey the severity of her experience. Ennius calls Ilia *exterrita* (35), and she describes her own state of being as follows: *vires vitaeque corpus meum nunc deserit omne* ("Strength and life have now abandoned my entire body," 37). As is the case with both Medea and Ismene, Ilia's dream also terrorizes the dreamer with its imagery. The verbs *raptare* (39) and *errare* (40) impart a sense of menace, while images of futile pursuit and instability convey the desperation of the confused dreamer (40–42):

errare videbar  
tardaque vestigare et quaerere te neque posse  
corde capessere: semita nulla pedem stabilibat.

<sup>28</sup> For the text see *Ann.* 1.34–50 Skutsch. Krevans 1993, in her analysis of Ilia's dream in Ennius's *Annales*, coined the term "seduction-dream" to describe a type of female dream that occurs in epic from Homer onward, in which virginal characters dream of their impending marriages. The dream narratives she touches upon as comparanda include those of Nausicaa in the *Odyssey*, Medea in Apollonius's *Argonautica*, Europa in Moschus's *Europa*, and Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*. For the most recent treatment of Ilia's dream, see Elliott 2007.

I seemed to wander and to follow late upon you and to seek you, but I was unable to achieve my desire: no path offered me sure footing.

Regardless of the circumstances reflected by Ilia's dream, which are anything but clear, its retelling becomes the vehicle for defining its importance to the dreamer.<sup>29</sup>

The dream's retelling occurs in a distinctly female space and is shared by female characters (Ilia, her nurse, and her sister), while the action of the dream itself plays out in the unfamiliar external world inhabited by her anonymous male abductor (*homo*, 38) and father (*pater*, 43 and 46). The words *locos novos* (39), used by Ilia to describe the location of her abduction, emphasize the physical distance between her bedroom, where the dream is retold, and the dreamscape.<sup>30</sup> This opposition between female-familiar and male-unfamiliar space is further highlighted by the arrival of the old attendant who fills the bedroom with her illuminating light, in essence banishing the obscure visage and cryptic words of Aeneas in the dream (*et cita cum tremulis anus attulit artubus lumen*, 34). This scene establishes a female environment in which female dreamer, sister, and nurse stand across the threshold of wakefulness from the male figures that populate the dream. It also establishes the dreamer's desire for her sister's interpretation, expressed by the repeated appeals of lines 36, 40, and 46.

Ilia's dream ends with signs of the dreamer's thwarted attempt at communication. After Aeneas imparts his cryptic message to Ilia, thus contributing to her already confused state, she claims to have turned her hands to the skies in an attempt to respond to him (47–49):

<sup>29</sup> Skutsch 1985: 194 observes, "Probably then, strange though it may seem, we must imagine that Ennius made Mars visit Ilia in her bedchamber, and that her awakening and telling of her dream followed his departure." Goldberg 1995: 101 posits that Ilia is not describing an actual dream, but rather uses the dream narrative as a medium for describing the unfamiliar and frightening experience of rape.

<sup>30</sup> Connors 1994: 108n25 suggests that the phrase could allude both to the newness of Ilia's sexual maturity and to Ennius's innovation in staging the rape in the bedroom as opposed to by the river bank, as was traditional for Ilia's story. Hence this phrase, by revealing the conflict between the locations for the action of the dream and the dream itself, actually points in reverse to the very problem that Statius is dealing with in Ismene's dream account: the crossing of boundaries via the dream. Here, however, the dreamscape (and its distance from the dreamer's bedroom) may actually mask the event (rape) that takes place in the very spot where the dreamer dreams, whereas Ismene dreams of an event that takes place within her home but is actually symbolic (in part) of an event occurring at a distance on the battlefield. Regardless of the possible reference to poetic innovation in these lines, what is relevant for her connection to Ismene is Ilia's claim of the newness of the dream's spaces in contrast with the familiarity of her waking surroundings.



nec sese dedit in conspectum corde cupitus  
quamquam multa manus ad caeli caerula templa  
tendebam lacrumans et blanda voce vocabam.

And he could not present himself to be seen as I wished him to, although in tears I raised my hands to the deep blue vaults of the sky and called out with coaxing words.

The individual words of her frustrated plea (*blanda voce*, 49) with a male listener are indiscernible amidst her tears (*lacrumans*, 49). Ilia's retelling also began with lamentation (*talia tum memorat lacrimans*, 35). We can imagine that as the dreamer begins her tale, she attempts to clarify the dream's ambiguity by articulating her dream verbally to a female listener. But both the challenge of retelling a frightening dream and her frustration as a speaker within the dream itself reduce Ilia to tears, thus bookending the passage with lamentation. Similarly, Ismene, this time after retelling her dream, speaks indiscernibly with her sister, and the next utterances to come from her mouth are lamentations.

### *Byblis in Ovid: Incest and Thwarted Communication*

Debra Hershkowitz (1998: 288) has shown a connection between Ismene's dream and that of another virginal female character, Byblis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (9.468–71).<sup>31</sup> Hershkowitz hinges the connection between the two passages mainly on the questions Byblis asks of her dream experience, in which she has imagined a sexual encounter with her brother. Byblis's concern about the veracity of dream-images foreshadows Ismene's: *me miseram! tacitae quid vult sibi noctis imago?/ quam nolim rata sit! cur haec ego somnia vidi?* ("I am wretched! What does this image of the silent night intend for me? May it not have any significance! Why have I seen such dreams?," 474–75). In Hershkowitz's reading, both dreams reveal the "repressed desire" of the dreamer. The central difference is seen in the dreamers' reactions to their dreams: Byblis welcomes the dream as an escape for acting upon her incestuous desires while Ismene's avowedly unintentional dream causes her to feel that her chastity has been violated by imagining her marriage before it is sanctioned. But there are further comparisons to be made between the two dream experiences, particularly in the dreamers' responses.

<sup>31</sup> Studies of the Byblis passage have focused on its intertextual relationship with other texts of Ovid such as the *Heroides* and *Amores*. See, e.g., Raval 2001, Farrell 1998, and Janan 1991.

Both dreams emphasize illicit visual encounters, and verbs connoting the act of seeing are paramount. In Byblis's story, the contrast between the realm of the dream and that of waking life is cast as one in which the visual experience of the dream resolves the problems of social decorum. The dreamscape allows the dreamer to abandon certain forms of address, which define appropriate types of interaction in the dreamer's waking life.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, the dream provides a space in which the words that articulate the siblings' blood relationship, and thereby mark their relationship in the dream as inappropriate, are powerless. Byblis's resistance to conventional forms of address is explicit in 466–67: *iam dominum appellat, iam nomina sanguinis odit, / Byblida iam mavult, quam se vocet ille sororem* ("Now she calls him master, as she despises the names that connote their blood relationship, now she prefers that he call her Byblis rather than sister"). In Byblis's dreams, however, the siblings relinquish sexual and societal inhibition (469–71):

placida resoluta quiete  
saepe videt, quod amat; visa est quoque iungere fratri  
corpus et erubuit, quamvis sopita iacebat.

While relaxed in peaceful sleep she often sees what she desires; she appears to fuse her body with her brother's, and this makes her blush, even though she lies asleep.

Thus we see that the dream is a visual experience (*saepe videt ... visa est*, 470), in which the dreamer can escape into a fantasy realm where she is not seen by anyone external to the dream, as we learn at 9.481 (*testis abest somno, nec abest imitata voluptas*, "in sleep there is no witness to one's imagined pleasure"). This feature is first seen as beneficial and is then deemed unsatisfactory because it implies that as a result no one (not even the person who is imagined to be present) can share it. Eventually, for this reason Byblis resorts to writing a letter, a traditional form of communication, in order to convey her desires. Thus the freedom provided by the visual experience becomes undesirable because it is only virtual (*imitata*); textual communication is chosen as the means to achieve the *actual* visual and physical encounter. As in the case of Ismene's dream, an attempt at communication between siblings bridges the virtual encounter between male and female characters in the dream and their actual encounter in reality.

This dichotomy between fantasy and reality demonstrates a problem peculiar to the visual experience of dreaming, namely that it is something

<sup>32</sup> See Raval 2001: 292–95 for detailed discussion of the "pivotal role of names in the story [of Byblis]" (292) and Byblis's difficulty articulating them.

witnessed by the viewer alone and cannot be shared unless translated. Hence the dreamer must establish an alternative mode of communication to convey the dream's relevance. In Byblis's case, the dream is translated into textual terms rather than verbal discourse, which is the mode Ismene chooses. In her letter, Byblis hesitates to write the hateful word *soror*, crosses it out, and replaces it with her own name (*scripta soror fuerat, visum est delere sororem*, 528). When she does inscribe her proper name in the letter, it is in a negative clause, in which she claims that she would rather not be known as Byblis, thereby identifying herself to her brother, before securing his mutual affection (532–34):

et si, quid cupiam, quaeris, sine nomine vellem  
posset agi mea causa meo nec cognita Byblis  
ante forem, quam spes votorum certa fuisset.

But if you seek to know what I wish, I would wish to be able to plead my case without my name, and that I would not be known as Byblis before hope for my wishes had been established.

Thus the difficulties of translating the dream experience are manifested in the difficulties of communication; the freedom from boundaries in the dream is dashed by the translator's inability to recast the experience accurately without resorting to words that, by their nature, contradict the pleasures of the visual experience. Later in the narrative Byblis hesitates to utter the word "brother" when instructing a messenger to deliver the letter to Caunus: *et pavidum blandita "fer has, fidissime, nostro" / dixit et adiecit longo post tempore "fratri!"* ("And upon soothing the frightened [messenger], she said, 'bring this letter, most faithful messenger, to my ...' and added after a long delay, 'brother!,'" 569–70). Byblis's hesitation recalls the explicit contrast made earlier between the realm of sleep and that of waking in terms of freedom of communication: in dreams names lose their meaning and cease to demarcate certain behavioral boundaries, while in waking life, the verbal reminders of these boundaries are shunned.

Byblis's dream is similar to those of Medea, Ilia, and Ismene in the sense that it is a vehicle for the transgression of familial bonds and social mores; the difference is that Byblis enjoys what she experiences in her dreamscape, while the other women are terrified by the visions they see there. In contrast to Medea, Ilia, and Ismene, Byblis does not attempt to relay the content of her dream to her brother; rather she is inspired by the freedom of her dream to communicate in writing her desire for him, to which the dream has seemingly given license. In this way, the dream motivates Byblis to act, to translate into written words something otherwise too transgressive to vocalize. As we

learn, the attempt to translate the personal experience of her dream fails when it collides with the waking reality of her brother's disdain. Caunus is unable even to finish reading her letter before letting it fall in disgust: *attonitus subita iuvenis Maeandrius ira / proicit acceptas lecta sibi parte tabellas* ("Stunned by sudden anger, the young Caunus threw the tablets down, having read only part of the letter," 574–75).

The rest of Byblis's story reveals the breakdown of verbal communication, a common Ovidian theme. After treating the reader to a lengthy monologue in which Byblis justifies her decision to approach her brother (585–629), Ovid simply states that her attempts to speak with Caunus are met with repeated rejection (630–32):

dixit, et (incertae tanta est discordia mentis)  
cum pigeat temptasse, libet temptare, modumque  
exit et infelix committit saepe repelli.

She spoke, and (how great is the struggle in a wavering mind) although it shames her to have attempted this, she gets pleasure from doing it, and she goes over the limit thus ensuring that she, unfortunate, is frequently rebuffed.

Repulsed by Byblis's excessive and persistent intrusions, Caunus is forced to flee. Byblis, driven mad by this failure, roves like a Bacchant across the lands of Lycia in search of her elusive brother. Conquered by exhaustion, she slides to the ground. When a band of nymphs tries to revive her, she is unable to respond. Caunus's definitive rejection of his sister, which negates the possibility of translating the love affair sanctioned by her dreams into a union acceptable in reality, has rendered Byblis mute: *muta iacet viridesque suis tenet unguibus herbas / Byblis, et umectat lacrimarum gramina rivo* ("Byblis lay silent, gripping blades of green grass with her fingernails and moistening the grass with a river of tears," 655–56). Byblis is consumed by weeping and eventually transformed into a fountain of her own tears (*sic lacrimis consumpta suis Phoebeia Byblis / vertitur in fontem*, 663–64). Byblis's transformation charts a path from the visual experience of desire in a dream, through written and verbal communication of this desire, to her ultimate submission to mourning, which arises from the devastating incompatibility between (seen) dream and (lived) reality.

The course of Byblis's trajectory has noteworthy parallels in the experience of Ismene. As I have shown in the context of Statius's narrative, while the reader gains insight into the female perspective on the war through Ismene's retelling of her dream, the dreamer herself cannot see the larger implications of her dream, for she is stymied by the dream's incongruities and hindered by the shocking violation of chastity that it reveals. By contrast, Byblis welcomes

her dreams as a retreat, while unable to comprehend the inappropriateness of their content for her waking life. Both girls, however differently motivated, are compelled to share the revelations of their dreams with their siblings. Ismene's communication to her sister is only semi-productive, as Antigone is not allowed a response, and Ismene's own invocations of safety are proven false when the reality of the war intrudes upon their female space. This seems to recall Ilia's story, where there is no dialogue between the sisters after the revelation of the dream (at least in the fragment as we have it), and they must wait (in Ilia's case, for nine months) to realize the dream's consequences. By contrast, Byblis's communication to her brother does elicit a response, which is then ignored by Byblis.

Ultimately, in a manner reminiscent of Medea's initial reaction to her disturbing dream in Apollonius, both Byblis and Ismene succumb to voiceless lamentation. This expression of grief is their natural response to the loss of a beloved, whose death was either not foreseen, as in the case of Ismene, or whose rejection was deliberately ignored, as in the case of Byblis. Ismene's reduction to lamentation finds a parallel in the *Thebaid's* end, where the women of the epic express with tears a grief for which words are inadequate.

#### VIII. LAMENTATION: THE FINAL WORDLESS RESPONSE TO WAR

In *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic*, Alison Keith makes it clear that although epic is a genre in which male poets teach lessons about male virtue by centering their narratives upon the exploits of male characters, female presence and the female voice are integral to the epic program. There is often a tension between the poet's concern with male exploits and the intrusion of female expression, frequently manifested in an extreme form of madness or lamentation. Thus an author "engenders conflict" by ascribing a particularly female madness or grief to the undercurrent of the war.<sup>33</sup> Ismene's dream episode in the *Thebaid* is a midpoint on the map from female madness, personified by the Fury Tisiphone (invoked and commanded by Oedipus in 1.58–87), which incites war, to lamentation, which follows war. In our brief contact with her, Ismene provides critical perspective on the events of the war from which she is visually excluded. Thus she becomes a portal for the fury-inspired events on the battlefield, conducting these into the private realm, as they are reflected and anticipated in her dream. Ismene does not

<sup>33</sup> Keith 2000: passim, esp. Ch. 4. Far from being mere observers of battle, female characters such as wrathful goddesses and Furies, embodiments of madness, are often the main inciters of war even as they are not participants in the battle.

go mad, however. Although tormented by her dream's images, she sanely dismisses their relevance by stating her conditions for remaining unperturbed (8.633–35). In a manner similar to one performing a teichoscopy, she hovers at the threshold of observation and experience without transgressing it. When Ismene's failure to interpret her dream becomes apparent, as the violence it has revealed is thrust before her eyes, her steadfastness yields to lamentation and thus sets the precedent for the swelling of female grief that will be released at the epic's end. This significant transition highlights the failure of language to communicate tragedy.<sup>34</sup>

Laura Micozzi (2001/2: 269) has noted the verbal echoes of Statius's comparison between the Pandioniae and the daughters of Oedipus (8.618–20) in his description of the Argive women lamenting at the Altar of Clemency in book 12, where this group is also compared to the Pandioniae. The two passages follow:

stantque super nidos veterisque exordia fati  
adnarrant tectis et truncum et flebile murmur  
verba putant, voxque illa tamen non dissona verbis. (8.618–20)

And they stand above their nests and tell stories to the house about the origins of their ancient curse and they think their cut-off and mournful warblings are words, and yet that sound is not so different from words.

Geticae non plura queruntur  
hospitibus tectis trunco sermone volucres,  
cum duplices thalamos et iniquum Terea clamant. (12.478–80)

The Getic birds do not lament at greater length to their friendly homes with shorn speech, when they lament the double wedding and unjust Tereus.

This twice-used reference to the Pandioniae strengthens the link between the lament of Ismene and that of the throngs of women in book 12. In fact, the reference in both cases to the lamentation of the women as speech that is mutilated, or hobbled (*truncum/trunco*), is further indication that their lament masks the failure of regular modes of communication. Ultimately, bird-like warbling is the only form of expression that persists. This comparison does more than equate the mournful expressions of the sisters and the Argive women, however. Rather, Statius draws an implicit connection

<sup>34</sup> Female lamentation at an epic's end has precedent in the response to the return of Hector's body and his funeral in *Iliad* 24. The outpouring of grief begins with the mournful speeches of Andromache (725–45), Hecuba (748–59), and Helen (762–75) and culminates in the wordless lament of the anonymous Trojans who prepare Hector's burial.

between lamentation and weaving, both non-verbal modes of expression, by using the analogy of the Pandioniae to describe both the sisters in Ismene's dream episode and the women of book 12.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that the voices of the Pandioniae are used metaphorically for broken communication recalls the central feature of Ovid's account of the story of the Pandioniae, where the severing of Philomela's tongue renders verbal communication impossible, and this loss inspires the creation of a graphic tapestry. This tapestry becomes a mode of communication in which visual communication trumps verbal (*Met.* 6.574–80). But there is an important difference between these two tales: Philomela uses visual communication successfully to represent lived experience and thus inform her sister Procne of a grim reality, while Ismene is unsuccessful at translating her visual experience into a verbal narrative that conveys a grim reality that she herself has not actually experienced but has witnessed through symbols.

This dichotomy illuminates an important feature of Statius's narrative. In the bleak world of fratricidal civil war, even the poet's language is ultimately insufficient for relating the grieving aftermath of the horrible conflict. The failure of Ismene's words to recognize and convey the horrors of the war has a parallel in the poet's own statement about ending his tale of conflict. The *Thebaid* is brought to a close by the lamentation of the Theban and Argive women, who reclaim the battlefield and thus the narrative with their tears. As Donka Markus (2004) has demonstrated, the female voice finds expression through lamentation in the *Thebaid* to a greater degree than in other epics. The female lamentation which ends the poem (12.789–96) is at once subversive, for it brings out into the open the grief that would otherwise be reserved for private expression, and integral to the release from horror which closes the epic.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, it is similar to weaving, in that it is an alternative to male epic narration that expresses a female, subjective viewpoint. Statius claims that he would be unable to proceed in telling specifically about the lamentation that followed the conclusion of the battle, even if endowed with supernatural speech powers (12.797–99):

non ego, centena si quis mea pectora laxet  
voce deus, tot busta simul vulgique ducumque,  
tot pariter gemitus dignis conatibus aequem.

<sup>35</sup> This connection has been articulated by Lev Kenaan 2008: 161–70, who links weaving and lamentation as subjective modes of female communication, with particular attention to Philomela and Helen.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the multiple endings of the *Thebaid* see Dietrich 1999, who identifies lament (by contrast with weaving) as the predominant outlet for the female voice in the *Thebaid*, Braund 1996, and Pagán 2000.

Not even if a god opened my throat with a hundred voices, would I be able to do justice with worthy song to so many tombs of common men and leaders alike, so many unified groans.

His own voice is inhibited not by his own grief, but by the enormity of the lamentation he attempts to describe. As is the case with Ismene, lamentation overpowers even the poet's own words. As with a nightingale, comprehensible speech eludes the poet when faced with overwhelming grief. The simile of Philomela's condemnation to an eternity of inarticulate warbling (*truncum et flebile murmur*, 8.619) after the success of her tapestry is a harbinger of the poet's failed voice at the epic's end.

In an epic where restful sleep is scarce and the boundary between the underworld and that of the living is uncharacteristically permeable, it is fitting that Ismene's nightmare conveys the horror of the war between brothers from the battlefield into the bedchamber as the violence of the conflict infects even the minds of those most removed from it. As Charles McNelis has argued recently, Statius himself seems eager to put off the war's horrific inevitable climax by delaying the culmination of the narrative on numerous occasions.<sup>37</sup> Just as Ismene's description of her dream to her sister and their interlocked chatter delay (albeit briefly) the arrival of the dying Atys, whose injury and death have been foretold by the dream, so Statius must confront the climax towards which his narrative drives: the mutual fratricide of the sons of Oedipus. Ismene's reaction to her fiancé's death is to dissolve into weeping; analogously, when they are finally allowed to grieve for their dead, the Argive and Theban women react at the epic's close with groans that overpower words. Statius's own reaction to his proximity to the subject matter mirrors Ismene's reaction to her dream: just as Ismene is speechless and reduced to tears when confronted by the horrors of the war, so too Statius finds himself unable to continue writing when challenged to put into words the grief that overwhelms the end of his poem. In all three cases, the failure of language to communicate tragedy forces grieving to replace words as a way to commemorate unspeakable horror. Out of deference to the potency of this response, Statius, like a dreamer having awoken from a nightmare, admits the inadequacy of words as a mode for expressing the horrors of war in the face of communal grief.

<sup>37</sup> McNelis 2007: 111 points out with reference to the interlude of the Argive troops at Nemea that tales of origins in particular "serve as alternatives to narratives of civil war." In similar fashion we could say that Ismene's and Antigone's preoccupation with and narration of their family's origins in seclusion (called by Statius a *cunctatio*, 613) is an alternative to the narrative of civil war raging outside.



I have argued that, like weaving and lamentation, the symbolic dream forms a third type of female non-verbal commentary on violence. Like the daughters of Pandion, who communicated their grief non-verbally first in tapestry and then in bird-song, Ismene is forced to visualize the awful reality of war in a dream of violation of chastity, which represents analogically the violation of Atys's chastity on the battlefield. The dreamer's failure to comprehend the dream's message and the listener's inability to interpret it show that the dream is only partially successful as a method of communication. When dreamer and dreamed subject are actually reunited across the threshold of external battle and internal battle-commentary, the collision of misinterpreted dream message and reality produces lamentation, which is ultimately the most persistent form of nonverbal female communication in the epic. Through lamentation, Ismene and the women at the epic's close are able to comment wordlessly upon the horrors of a war that they have been forced to watch from the margins. Thus, as Ismene's lament over Atys's death foreshadows the tearful mourning of the women of Thebes and Argos at the epic's end as they react to the epic's destruction in a particularly feminine mode, so too is Statius's own reaction to the conclusion of his narrative a markedly feminine one. Martha Malamud (1995: 193) and S. Georgia Nugent (1996) have argued that Statius characterizes his epic as female by enjoining it to follow in the footsteps of Vergil's *Aeneid* (epilogue, 12.810–19). If indeed Statius marks the text itself as a woman, his reaction of speechlessness is appropriate, as it is analogous to that of his female characters who have no way to react to the horrors of fratricidal civil war other than with tears.

This response reveals marked sympathy with the viewpoint of the marginalized, those who are powerless to intervene in the war and must engage with the action in devious ways. Ismene's dream, which is a complex amalgam of the dreams of her predecessors, teichoscopy, and—by analogy with the Pandioniae—non-verbal modes of communication between sisters such as weaving, forms an intricate commentary on the war that culminates in lamentation. By creating such a complex experience for a character of little significance in his plot, Statius underscores the persistent exclusion of non-fighters from his civil war narrative as well as the poignant futility of their attempts at intervention in the face of inevitable, mutual, fraternal destruction.

## IX. WOMEN'S DREAMS IN EPIC: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE SYMBOLIC DREAM

Generally speaking, dreams in epic poetry convey to dreamers information that has bearing upon the future and influences their subsequent action. In this article I have distinguished type-2 dreams (symbolic dreams, which

tend to be experienced by female characters) from type-1 dreams (visitation dreams, which tend to be experienced by male characters) by showing that the former allow dreamers (and readers) a specific type of perspective on the action of the plot, while the latter are themselves direct interventions (usually by a god or a specter) into the action of the narrative. In epic poetry, recipients of visitation dreams are usually motivated to act by the dream's warning or instructions, while recipients of symbolic dreams are more likely to ponder the significance of the dream and relay its contents, often to a sibling, thus using the retelling as a mode of discourse and a means for understanding or disavowing the dream's relevance.

Ismene's dream in book 8 of Statius's *Thebaid* is a complex example of the type-2 dream both because of its relationship with the symbolic dreams of female characters from earlier epics and because it incorporates elements of teichoscopy, weaving, and lamentation, all of which are traditional female activities in epic poetry. These parallels are not immediately apparent, however. By contrast with the dreams of characters such as Medea, Ilia, and Byblis, whose dreams have direct relevance for their subsequent actions within the plots of their epics, identifying the function of Ismene's dream is complicated by her status as a minor character in the narrative of the *Thebaid*. Furthermore, the content of her dream portends not only her own ruined marriage, but also the injury and death of her fiancé Atys, an equally minor character. But the relative brevity of the reader's encounter with these characters should not detract from his or her appreciation of the intricacy of Ismene's dream episode, nor should it hinder an analysis that seeks to establish the dream's importance either for the dreamer or for the larger plot.

This article has attempted to show that the study of dreams in epic is made richer by including the dreamer's reaction to and communication of the dream, rather than limiting discussion to analysis of the information conveyed by the dream itself. The dreams of epic women, characters often on the fringe of the central narrative of an epic poem, gain additional significance through their retelling as a mode for discourse with other women. Ismene's dream narrative is an important outlet for both observation and narration of the *Thebaid's* martial action; in this way it functions like teichoscopy. Like lamentation or Philomela's weaving, the narration of a dream enables the expression of something otherwise incommunicable. By exploring these comparisons in detail, I hope to have underscored the dream's broader function as an important and often underappreciated mode for the expression of female subjectivity in epic poetry.

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