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OID AND STATIVS, *THEBAID* 6.54–78.
NECESSARY ALLVSIONS OR A METAPOETIC DIALOGVE?*

ABSTRACT. Pierzak, Damian. Ovid and Statius, *Thebaid* 6.54–78. Necessary Allusions or a Metapoetic Dialogue? (*Owidiusz i Stacjusz, Tebaida 6.54–78. Aluzje konieczne czy metapoetycki dialog?*)

Statius' description of the funeral games held in honor of the baby Opheltes contains several utterances reminiscent of Ovid. The paper aims to show that these should not be read as the so-called necessary allusions, but rather as the poet's complex dialogue with his predecessor.

Keywords: Statius; Ovid; intertextuality; allusion; Opheltes; aetiological poetry.

Just as in recent years the theory of oral composition has been an invaluable research tool for Hellenists, so the notion of intertextuality constantly inspires the students of Roman poetry. The advantages of intertextual approach to ancient texts, however, have been disputed by many classicists. There are those for whom the modern theory is but another way of giving new names to subjects firmly established and studied for a long time within the field of classical scholarship.¹ The crucial question is, to put it very briefly, whether a reference in a given text to an earlier work of literature should be viewed as a (conscious) allusion on the part of the author or as a product of a creative process independent of authorial intent. In the latter case an assumption needs to be made that a text can only exist (i.e. be legible and possess a meaning) in relation to other – previously composed texts. A work of art is always produced at a certain point in time and space and cannot disentangle itself from the influence

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¹On the controversy in general see Fowler 1997; van Tress 2004: 21; Marincola 2010: 261–262. The intertextual reading of Roman poetry is the subject of Edmunds 2001.

of the pre-existing artistic patterns.² The description of the first ship in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.94–96), for example, cannot be fully appreciated in isolation from the prologue of Euripides' *Medea* and its later Ennian adaptation. For both Ovid and his audience, the picture of Argo had already been inseparable from that of the fallen pine tree. In that sense, the allusion to his predecessors was "necessary." Statius will later call the pine 'audacious' (*Theb.* 6.104) simply because its wood was used in shipbuilding. In this passage of the sixth book (90–107) of his epic poem it is mentioned as one of the trees laid low to be used as kindling for the funeral pyre. Thanks to Homer, the cutting down of trees became a commonplace in later poetry – a similar scene is found in Ennius, Vergil and, apart from Statius himself, Silius Italicus.³ Given that a correspondence between a source- and target-text, in order to be considered allusive, requires an interpretation reaching beyond the formal resemblance,⁴ there is little to be said about the just mentioned tree-felling scene. As Gordon Williams put it, "The late poets of the Silver Age have little to contribute of their own; what they do, essentially, is to take themes and ideas from earlier poets and elaborate them, mainly by simple multiplication."⁵ Taken as a general rule, this judgment is of course unjust. As far as tree-felling is concerned, however, Statius was indeed incapable of showing a great deal of ingenuity. Modern critics, on the other hand, put a lot of effort to prove that the poet's intent went beyond achieving "a decorative richness of effect."⁶ This does not apply, in my opinion, to the description of the funeral pyre – an equally common epic theme – for which all that wood was needed (lines 54–78). I argue that in this part of the poem Statius does not simply expand the ideas of his predecessors but, on a metapoetic level, he enters into a dialogue with one of them, namely Ovid. The correspondence between the two is manifold in that the author of the target-text seems to have alluded not only to his source but also to a self-reference within his oeuvre.

²The complex problem of a 'necessary allusion' is discussed in detail by Bonanno (1990: 11–40).

³See Fortgens 1934: 70; Williams 1968: 263–267; von Moisy 1971: 40–45; Vessey 1973: 193.

⁴Cf. Fowler 1997: 19–20.

⁵Williams 1968: 267. Vessey (1973: 193–194) replied to this criticism by asserting that Statius' extreme mannerism results from his intention to create "an unreal, dreamlike atmosphere" in the Nemean episode (Books 5 and 6). Cf. von Moisy 1971: 43: "Doch wird der wesentliche Faktor für diese breite Ausgestaltung im Wunsch des Dichters, ein rhetorisch prunkvolles, kunstreiches Gebilde zu schaffen, zu suchen sein."

⁶Williams 1968: 267. Mottram (2012: 276), for instance, suggests that "Statius may have drawn inspiration from the groupings of trees painted on the walls of villas from the Augustan age onwards" and further (p. 277) that "Arguably the deaths of the trees are allusive of political or historical events though they do not directly refer to such ideas." The second of the quoted statements seems, to my mind, to be an example of reading too much into a text. Newlands (2004b: 144–146) links the scene to the Erysichthon narrative (*Ov. Met.* 8.738–884) and to Caesar's cutting down of the sacred grove in Lucan's *Bellum civile* (3.399–452).

Furthermore, by weaving a complex web of literary references, Statius manages to speak on current political matters in an obfuscated way.

The Nemean episode forms the largest digression in the *Thebaid* (4.646–7.226) which temporarily interrupts the main narrative and at the same time foreshadows the outcome of the war. This is best seen during the funeral games, as the competitors neglect the omens portending the upcoming disaster, but the ultimate failure of the expedition is first anticipated by the death of Opheltes, the infant son of King Lycurgus of Nemea, which “is ordained to be the first in the Theban war, a presage of the doom of the Argives,” as David Vessey points out.⁷ At the end of the fifth book Amphiaraus interprets the preceding events – the drought and the appearance of the deadly serpent – as part of the divine purpose. He is aware that the name alone, Archemorus, which the boy will assume after his apotheosis, reveals the truth about their destiny (5.738–739): “et puer, heu nostri signatus nomine fati, / Archemorus.”⁸ The next book is devoted entirely to the funeral and the games held in honor of the deceased. This conventional epic theme allowed Statius to reshape some traditional motifs on his own fashion. He begins by explaining the origins of the Nemean games which at this point lends him an opportunity to incorporate a short *aition* into the poem. Aetiological poetry, associated above all with Callimachus, has been in vogue among the Roman poets of the Augustan period.⁹ The description of the funeral pyre has been therefore considered to be reminiscent of the traditional aetiological poetry, both Greek and Roman. Let me quote the relevant passage *in extenso* (*Theb.* 6.54–78):

tristibus interea ramis teneraque cupresso damnatus flammae torus et puerile feretrum textitur; ima virent agresti stramina cultu; proxima gramineis operosior area sertis, et picturatus morituris floribus agger; tertius adsurgens Arabum strue tollitur ordo Eoas complexus opes incanaque glebis tura et ab antiquo durantia cinnama Belo. summa crepant auro, Tyrioque attollitur ostro molle supercilium, teretes hoc undique gemmae	55 60
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⁷ Vessey 1973: 189. Cf. Burck 1979: 318; Fantham 1996: 171.

⁸ Cf. Schol. Stat. *Theb.* 4.717–719 (p. 320 Sweeney): “nomen enim lacrimabile sign<ific>at Archemorus ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς τῆς μοίρας, eo quod primus occisus est;” 5.738–739 (p. 384 Sweeney): “Lycurgi filius, qui primo Opheltes dicebatur, sed, quoniam initia Thebani belli eius initiata sunt morte, iure fatali postea Archemorus nominatus est Graeca pronuntiatione sermonis. ἀρχή enim Graece ‘principium’ dicitur, μῦθος ‘mors’ sermone eodem nuncupatur.”

⁹ Cf. n. 19 below. Aetiological poetry had already been composed by the neoterics (see Styka 1994: 109 on Catul. 36.11–17). Some scholars, for example, consider P. Valerius Cato’s *Diana* (Suet. *gramm.* 11 Brugnoli = Cinna *poet.* 14 Büchner) to have been aetiological (Bardon 1952: 339–340).

inradiant, medio Linus intertextus acantho letiferique canes: opus admirabile semper oderat atque oculos flectebat ab omine mater. arma etiam et veterum exuvies circumdat avorum gloria mixta malis adflictaeque ambitus aulae, ceu grande exequiis onus atque immensa ferantur membra rogo, sed cassa tamen sterilisque dolentes	65
fama iuvat, parvique augescunt funere manes. inde ingens lacrimis honor et miseranda voluptas, muneraque in cineres annis graviora feruntur – namque illi et pharetras brevioraque tela dicarat festinus voti pater insontesque sagittas;	70
iam tunc et nota stabuli de gente probatos in nomen pascebat equos – cinctusque sonantes armaque maiores expectatura lacertos.	75

The pyre consists of four layers: straw is spread over the surface (line 56); the next tier, covered with garlands made of grass and a pile of flowers, is slightly more elaborate (57–58); the third abounds with eastern ornaments, spices, and incense (59–61); on the top of the last one, which shines with gold (62), there are plenty of gemstones and a covering depicting the death of Linus (63–66). The combat gear of the royal ancestors is heaped up around the mound, as though it was erected in honor of a mighty warrior (69–70): “*ceu grande exequiis onus atque immensa ferantur / membra rogo*” [...]. The poet leaves no doubt that the burial offerings are far too excessive for the occasion (73): “*muneraque in cineres annis graviora feruntur*”. Literally, they are greater than the number of years (i.e. lived by Opheltes) – *annis graviora*. Finally, in the last lines of the passage in question (74–78), Statius enumerates the pieces of equipment that the father too eagerly promised his son. The gap between the grandeur with which the *rogus* was erected and the unripe age of the deceased is highlighted throughout. Perhaps the solemnity of the following tree-felling scene (90–107), as Willy Schetter¹⁰ suggested, serves to reinforce the contrast: the people of Nemea cut down a sacred grove in order to collect wood for the funeral pyre.

In the central part of the passage, Statius depicts the funerary adornments of Opheltes. Embroidered on the shroud is a picture of Linus torn to pieces by savage dogs (64–65): [...] “*medio Linus intertextus acantho / letiferique canes*” [...]. By employing ekphrasis, the poet merely sketches this picture, because it is the subject of Adrastus’ story about the reasons why the Argives celebrate the festival of Apollo (*Theb.* 1.557–673, cf. below). Eurydice was right in despising this work of art (65–66: [...] “*opus admirabile semper / oderat atque oculos flectebat ab omine mater*”) for, as it turned out, it foretold the fate of her own son. His death was analogical to that of Linus – both died in infancy, were exposed

¹⁰Schetter 1960: 60.

by those whose charge they were and killed by wild beasts.¹¹ On the structural level, therefore, these lines refer the recipient to the *aition* forming part of Book 1. On the metapoetic plane, on the other hand, Linus, who in Vergil's *Eclogues* 6.69–73 “transmits the literary heritage – in which Callimachus’ poetry figures prominently – to Gallus,”¹² serves to indicate the poet’s debt to his predecessors. The poetic inheritance which Linus is supposed to signify is, according to Charles McNelis, mainly Callimachean, i.e. aetiological.¹³ The story told by the king of the Argives is reminiscent of Callimachus’ *Aetia* not only in terms of poetical landscape and particular means of expression (e.g. 1.28.1–2 Massimilla = fr. 27 Pf. ~ *Theb.* 1.581–582). Statius translates literally the participle that Callimachus had used to express metaphorically his relationship with the literary (epic) past. In fr. 30.5 Massimilla = 26.5 Pf. a story / plot (‘myth’) is woven on the staff (καὶ τὸν ἐπὶ ῥάβδῳ μῦθον ὑφανόμενον) just like Linus is woven (*Theb.* 6.64: *intertextus*) on the veil. “In both Callimachus and Statius,” as Philip Mottram observes, “the story of Linus is woven into a larger poem.”¹⁴ “[T]he word *intertextus*.” moreover, “works on a literary level, virtually glossing Callimachus’ word (ὑφανόμενον) for his reception of literary predecessors.”¹⁵ By a reworking of the Hellenistic poet’s material in this way, concludes McNelis, “Statius generates this tension between the creation of expectations through allusions to predecessors and the subsequent failure to realize these expectations.”¹⁶ Statius, however, by evoking “Callimachus” both through the narrative correspondence in Book 1 and the weaving metaphor of Book 6, may have meant the genre with which the latter was commonly associated, that is aetiological poetry.

For Vergil, as was noted, Linus is the conveyor of literary tradition. The poet chose him to deliver the message that the Muses shall give Gallus the pipes, which they once gave to Hesiod (*Ecl.* 6.69–70) so that he can celebrate the Grynean Grove of Apollo. This, obviously, could not have been the same Linus whose story is narrated in Book 1 of the *Thebaid* and referred to in Book 6. In none of Vergil’s works is there any mention of the death of Linus, the son of

¹¹ See Vessey 1970: 325; Massimilla 1996: 301; Mottram 2012: 208. Cf. Schol. Stat. *Theb.* 6.64–66 (p. 391–392 Sweeney): “hanc historiam in primo libro Adrasto narrante cognovimus: Linum, filium Apollinis et Psamathes, Crotopi filiae, expositum a matre a canibus fuisse discerptum. haec ergo fabula, cum arte esset intertexta, odiosa erat matri quia miserationem parvuli commovebat. pari enim modo etiam Archemori mors videbatur illata.”

¹² McNelis 2006: 38.

¹³ McNelis 2006: 37–40. Cf. Vessey 1970: 316; 1973: 101 with n. 6 (secondary literature on the subject); Massimilla 1996: loc. cit.: “Tuttavia il racconto della *Tebaide* è certamente influenzato da quello degli *Aitia*.”

¹⁴ Mottram 2012: 209. See Harder 2012: 268 for more references to the metaphor of the weaving of poetry, cf. the valuable discussion of ‘Pattern-Weaving’ in Nagy 2015: 95–133.

¹⁵ Thus McNelis 2006: 39.

¹⁶ McNelis 2006: 39–40.

Psamathe and the grandson of Crotopus (cf. n. 11). His story is, however, briefly alluded to in Ovid's *Ibis* (478: *quique Crotopiaden diripuerit Linum*) followed by a reference to those whose death was caused by snakes (479–481): “neve venenato levius feriaris ab angue, / quam senis Oeagri Calliopesque nurus, / quam puer Hypsipyles [...]”¹⁷ Not only does Ovid juxtapose Linus and Opheltes, but he uses the same patronymic as Callimachus (fr. 29 Massimilla = 28 Pf.) to identify the former. In the *Amores*, on the other hand, he brings up the story of Apollo mourning the death of his infant son (3.9.23–24): “et Linon in silvis idem pater ‘aelinon’ altis / dicitur invita concinuisse lyra.” Is it possible, then, that what Statius wished to signal by saying *Linus intertextus* was in fact his debt to Ovid? In the following part of this article I argue that this precisely was the case.

Two points merit emphasis at the outset. First, there are many reminiscences of Ovid in the *Thebaid* overall, to which the scholars have paid attention.¹⁸ Second, from among the Roman poets who predate Statius, it is Ovid who as the author of the *Fasti* and of the *Metamorphoses*, a poem meant to explain the origins, *inter alia*, of various species and natural phenomena, should be considered *the* exponent of aetiological poetry. “The Augustan poets’ engagement with Callimachus which has occupied scholarship in the past few decades finds its fullest expression in Ovid’s *Fasti*, a quintessentially Callimachean work. In announcing his aetiological theme in the first verse (*Tempora cum causis*) Ovid hints at an affinity with the *Aetia*” – wrote John. F. Miller¹⁹. Let me, therefore, make a working assumption that by hinting at Callimachus, Statius in fact intended to indicate his debt to the Roman poet, whose works contain a good deal of aetiological material.

When explaining the origin of the myrrh-tree, Ovid tells the story of Myrrha’s incestuous love towards her father Cinyras, the king of Assyria and Cyprus (*Met.* 10.298–502). Due to machinations of the old nurse-maid, Myrrha manages to have sexual intercourse with her father in complete darkness for several subsequent nights. After the plot and the incest have been revealed, she runs away and pleads with the gods for deserved punishment whereby she would neither die nor stay alive (lines 483–487). Her wish is fulfilled, and she turns into a myrrh-tree. Her tears, dripping from the tree bark, become a precious resin (499–502):

¹⁷ Cf. Vessey 1970: 316 with n. 10.

¹⁸ See e.g. Mozley 1933; Aricò 1963, who at 121, n. 5 lists the literature on the subject up to 1950s; Cancik 1965: 48–52. Stroh (1969: 9–10) quotes two passages from the *Silvae* (2.7.78 and 1.2.254–255) where Ovid is named more or less explicitly. For more recent studies see Newlands (2004b, 135–136, with a brief review of previous scholarship) and Keith 2004/2005 with ample bibliography (205–207).

¹⁹ Miller 2002: 174. On the first line of the proem to the *Fasti* see also Prescendi 2000: 4; cf. for instance Heinze 1960 [1919]: 327–335; Barchiesi 1997: 214–237; Monella 2004, who examines one particular *aition* of Ovid, i.e. the origins of the cult of *Dea Tacita*.

quae quamquam amisit veteres cum corpore sensus,
 flet tamen, et tepidae manant ex arbore guttae.
 est honor et lacrimis, stillataque robore murra
 nomen erile tenet nulloque tacebitur aevo.

Although devoid of sense, she can still cry. Warm drops flowing from the tree shall receive her name. By saying that it will not be forgotten in the next generations, the poet appears to be referring to the commercial fashions of his own times.²⁰ It is not herself who is honored by mankind, but her tears, i.e. *murra* (*est honor et lacrimis*).²¹ Statius clearly borrows Ovid's words to describe parental grief (*Theb.* 72: "inde ingens lacrimis honor et miseranda voluptas"). In the new context the tears deserve a great *honor* because they bring consolation to the bereaved.²² Combined with the oxymoron *miseranda voluptas*, this expression also helps to emphasize the disproportion between the sumptuousness of the obsequies and the lack of any achievements (lines 71 and 73) on the part of the deceased.²³ For Opheltes' parents this excessively splendid display is the only thing capable of suppressing their grief. Statius could have used the adverb *inde* ('thence') at the beginning of the line not only to specify, on the textual level, the source of the honor, but also as a metapoetic response to Ovid: "That is why tears are so greatly honored." In both poems *lacrimae* and *honor* fill the same metrical (dactylic) units: *est honor et lacrimis* (– ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | –) ~ *lacrimis honor et* (∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | –), whereas Statius' *inde ingens* takes the form of a spondee + *elementum longum* of the following dactyl (– – | –). Such emphasis on "the point of disagreement" between the source- and target-text seems to additionally support the present interpretation.

A hemistich (*hemiepes*^{masc}) with which Ovid begins his discussion of the *Feralia* in the *Fasti* (2.533), moreover, bears a striking resemblance to the one depicting Myrrha's tears (*Est honor et tumulis* ~ *Met.* 10.501: *est honor et lacrimis*).²⁴ The poet might have had this episode of the *Metamorphoses* in mind when putting together the opening lines of his *Feralia*. It is tempting to think

²⁰Anderson 1972: 517 ad loc. Cf. Ov. *Ars* 1.285–288: "Myrrha patrem, sed non qua filia debet, amavit, / et nunc obducto cortice pressa latet; / illius lacrimis, quas arbore fundit odora, / unguimur, et dominae nomina gutta tenet." At *Met.* 10.307–310 Ovid enumerates eastern riches and spices associated with Myrrha's birthplace. It is worth noting that the third layer of the funeral pyre in *Thebaid* 6 consists of precious things of eastern origin (lines 60–61): "Eoas complexus opes incanaque glebis / tura et ab antiquo durantia cinnama Belo." Ov. *Met.* 10.501–502, as was shown by Bruère 1958: 482, is echoed in the final sentence of the Pyrene episode of the *Punica* (Sil. 3.440–441): "[...] nec honos intercidet aevo, / defletumque tenant montes per saecula nomen."

²¹Bömer 1980: 165: "Der *honor* gilt aber nicht der Myrrha, sondern den *lacrimae*, d.h. der *murra*."

²²See Fortgens 1934: 67 ad loc. Cf. Schol. Stat. *Theb.* 6.72 (p. 392 Sweeney): "fletus scilicet, quod planctus quasi voluptatem afferat orbatis parentibus."

²³Thus Mottram 2012: 221–222.

²⁴See Bömer 1958: 120.

that Statius meant to allude to both passages at once, although the similarities of phraseology alone are not sufficient to prove that this was the case. A closer look at the initial words of Ovid's description of the last day of the *Parentalia* (Feb. 21) will allow us to draw firm conclusions (*Fast.* 2.533–536):

Est honor et tumulis. Animas placate paternas
parvaeque in exstructas munera ferte pyras.
parva petunt manes, pietas pro divite grata est
munere: non avidos Styx habet ima deos.

The former of the two elegiac couplets poses some textual difficulties. Most MSS read *placare* and *ferre* instead of the imperatives favored among others by Nicolaas Heinsius and Thaddeus Zieliński.²⁵ The text quoted above is based on J.G. Frazer's Loeb edition (revised by G.P. Goold) not only because this version agrees better with the text of *Met.* 10.501, but it is more coherent with what Ovid apparently wanted to convey. He assumes the role of master of ceremonies (*dissignator*) to encourage "dutiful Romans to bring offerings to the tombs of their family dead."²⁶ The gifts ought to be modest, because "ghosts ask but little" (*parva petunt manes*, tr. Frazer). Some votive garlands, a few grains of salt, wine, and scattered purple flowers should suffice to appease them. The amount and value of the offerings must have been debated for a long time, since the issue had already been raised in the Law of the Twelve Tables.²⁷ This being considered, the discrepancy between Ovid's instructions and the lavishness of display accompanying Opheltes' obsequies becomes more conspicuous. In the *Fasti*, the adjective *parva* (lines 534 and 545) designates the traditional simplicity required during the *Feralia*. Statius, on the other hand, modifies the deceased with the adjective *parvus* a number of times²⁸, and, having enumerated the expensive gifts brought for the boy's funeral, he says that thereby the little ghost increases in size (6.71: "parvique augescunt funere manes"). His words "inde ingens honor lacrimis", therefore, echo both those of the Myrrha episode and those of the preamble to the *Feralia*. This brings up the question: what other

²⁵ Bömer 1958: "Der Versuch einer wörtlichen Wiedergabe zeigt, daß der Text der besten Hss. (*placare...ferre*) nicht haltbar ist [...]." The infinitives, however, are retained in the latest Teubner edition (1978) by Alton, Wormell and Courtney.

²⁶ Littlewood 2001: 921. Cf. Toynbee 1971: 64; Bömer 1958: 120–121 who prefers to read *extinctas* instead of *exstructas* at 2.534, because the latter participle would entail the meaning 'funeral pyres', and not 'tombs', whereas during the festival in honor of the dead no funeral pyres were erected.

²⁷ Cf. Cic. *Leg.* 2.59: "Iam cetera in XII minuendi sumptus sunt lamentationisque funebris, translata de Solonis fere legibus: 'hoc plus' inquit 'ne facito: rogum ascea ne polito'" (= 10.2 [²*FIRA* 1.66]). For more references see e.g. Bömer 1943: 31, n. 1; 1958: 121 on Ov. *Fast.* 2.535. Dodds 1951: 158, n. 9 lists the Greek sources.

²⁸ Esp. *Theb.* 5.534, 7.93.

than simply artistic reasons might have prompted him to take issue with Ovid's views and precepts? As was noted above, the obsequies of Opheltes take place at a critical moment for the expedition in that they precede and prefigure the upcoming war. Another explanation lies in extratextual conditions of Statius' literary production. By praising parental grief itself and by solemnizing the funeral of the boy, the poet might have wished to pay honor to Domitian's son who died very young, probably in the year 74, shortly after his birth.²⁹ David Vessey, commenting on *Theb.* 5.534–537 (“quis tibi, parve, deus tam magni pondera fati / sorte dedit? [...] / [...] an ut inde sacer per saecula Grais / gentibus et tanto dignus morerere sepulchro?”), observes that “[i]t is not improbable that Statius was thinking of the infant son of Domitian who was deified after his premature and unexpected death.”³⁰ Though *parvus*, then, the king's son, soon to become deified, and at the same time the emperor's, deserves more than just *parva munera*, normally demanded by ghosts (*manes*).

Statius appears to have followed Ovid's footsteps in one more respect. He calls the coverlet depicting the death of Linus *opus admirabile semper* (line 65) which clearly mirrors *Met.* 6.14–15: “huius ut adspicerent opus admirabile, saepe / deseruere sui nymphae dumeta Timoli”.³¹ The story with which the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses* begins focuses on the weaving contest between Arachne and goddess Minerva / Pallas. This motif belongs to a tradition of poetical descriptions of a work of art going back as far as Homer (the shield of Achilles) and Hesiod (the shield of Heracles). Ovid portrays some threads woven into the tapestries more carefully, others only superficially. The conciseness of these latter is usually compensated by a detailed account of a given scene earlier in the poem. Thus, for example, lines 6.103–107 (“Maeonis elusam designat imagine tauri / Europam: verum taurum, freta vera putares [...],” etc.) refer the recipient to the story of the abduction of Europa by Zeus, the final myth of Book 2 (*Met.* 2.833–875); lines 6.119–120 (“[...] sensit volucrem crinita colubris / mater equi volucris [...]”), on the other hand, bring to mind a part of the Perseus sequence in Book 4 (*Met.* 4.772–803, esp. lines 798–801).³² This narrative technique allows Ovid to save space on his tapestry for elaborating new themes. In doing so he relies on his audience's recollection of the mythical material already dealt with in previous books. The recipient is able to create in his mind a larger picture of the scene woven by Arachne, while the poet's description of the work of art (ekphrasis) remains suitably economical. Statius

²⁹ See Suet. *Dom.* 3.1 and Southern 1997: 28; Newlands 2004a: 68.

³⁰ Vessey 1973: 188 quoting Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.97; Mart. 4.3 and Sil. 3.629 in footnote 1.

³¹ Cf. Fortgens 1934: 65 (*Met.* 6.44 misprinted for 6.14); Mottram 2012: 210.

³² Rosati 2002: 296 points out that Neptune's assault on Medusa (6.119–120) must have been an episode hateful to Minerva, because it took place in her temple (4.798–801) which is why Arachne weaves it into her tapestry. See also Anderson 1972: 165 on Ov. *Met.* 6.103 and 167 on 6.119–120.

had apparently adopted the same approach for, as has been already observed, his words *Linus intertextus*, etc. at *Theb.* 6.64–65 turn the attention to the Linus and Coroebus episode in Book 1 (lines 557–673).³³ By weaving Linus into the canopy crowning the funeral pyre, and by calling this canopy *opus admirabile*, the poet suggests that his “Callimachean model” for this particular passage is indeed Ovid. The weaving metaphor borrowed from Callimachus (*intertextus* ~ μῦθον ὑφανόμενον), on the other hand, may be indicative of his aiming to create “a tapestry of words woven together in a controlled design”,³⁴ in the present case a tapestry reminiscent above all of Ovid’s aetiological pieces.

The correspondence between Statius’ description of the funeral pyre and its source-texts, the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*, has been shown to reach beyond a formal resemblance which could be interpreted simply as a ‘necessary allusion’. In the *Thebaid*, unlike in the case of the Myrrha episode, tears receive honor because they bring consolation to the bereaved. The deceased, who is *parvus*, furthermore, deserves more than Ovid’s *parva munera* in that he is the son of the king, awaiting apotheosis. This metapoetic dialogue with his predecessor allows Statius to pay tribute to Domitian’s son who, like both Opheltes and Linus, died prematurely in infancy and, like Archemorus, became deified thereafter. The ekphrastic motif, modeled on the opening sequence of *Met.* 6, is a bit more complicated. By weaving Linus into the shroud covering the body of the deceased, Statius follows Callimachus, but by weaving him into the text, as it were, he applies the narrative technique of Ovid whereby a concise ekphrasis refers the recipient to a story recounted in a more detailed fashion in the previous books. On closer inspection, however, the meaning of this visual representation of the work of art in Book 6 of the *Thebaid* can be ambiguous. The artefact is called *opus admirabile*, an expression used by Ovid to describe the works of Arachne. Like Arachne’s tapestry (*Ov. Met.* 6.127–128 quoted in n. 33), it is framed with a design of leaves / flowers (*medio... acantho*). Finally, the story which it alludes to has a lot in common with these woven by Arachne. After all, Linus’ mother, Psamathe, was seduced by Apollo (*Theb.* 1.573–575).³⁵ It looks as if Statius had consciously chosen Arachne over Minerva, a goddess adopted by Domitian as his special patron.³⁶ Is it possible that in the

³³ Cf. above, n. 11 and *Ov. Met.* 6.127–128: “ultima pars telae tenui circumdata limbo | nexilibus flores hederis habet intertextos.”

³⁴ Snyder 1981: 196 on the weaving imagery in archaic Greek lyric poetry.

³⁵ Cf. *Ov. Met.* 6.122–124 on Apollo’s erotic escapades woven into Arachne’s tapestry. On the seduction of Crotopus’ daughter in the *Thebaid* see Vessey 1973: 102–103; Newlands 2004b: 135, n. 14.

³⁶ See e.g. Mattingly, Sydenham 1926: 151: “The characteristic types [i.e. of coinage] of Domitian himself are devoted to a large degree to his favourite goddess, Minerva”; Newlands 2004a: 52, 55, 176 with n. 60 and Leberl 2004: 49–51, 77–78, 157–158, esp. 49 with n. 108 for literary sources.

guise of praise of his deified son was a hidden insult directed at the emperor? The rejection of Minerva, a deity meant to symbolize the balance of war and peace – a vital part of the Flavian ideology – could be a hint at “the dynastic instability of Domitian’s reign.”³⁷ This is merely a conjecture, but the number of references Statius makes to his predecessors and the way in which his text agrees with or departs from the source-texts allows us to consider the passage in question (*Theb.* 6.54–78) carefully designed. The initial lines of the snippet under discussion, moreover, may have been intended as an announcement of this accumulation of allusions. The bier which is about to be cremated (*damnatus flammae*) is embroidered (*textitur*) with sorrowful twigs and delicate cypress-wood (lines 54–55); forming the bottom-layers of the pyre is a mound covered with garlands and flowers (56–57). The weaving metaphor combined with the image of greenery can be read, on a metapoetic level, as suggesting a density of text. For Hellenistic poets foliage tangle, especially in ekphrastic contexts, tended to symbolize sophisticated literature.³⁸ This correlation gains additional support when we look at the poetical *ekphraseis* themselves. Both Theocritus (the marvelous cup) and Statius (the shroud of Opheltes) frame their works of art with the leaves of the acanthus (*Id.* 1.55: παντῶ δ’ ἀμφὶ δέπας περιπέπταται ὑγρὸς ἄκανθος; *Theb.* 6.64: [...] *medio Linus intertextus acantho*).

In what sense, then, does the notion of intertextuality apply to the present discussion? In the most literal one: by reworking Ovidian utterances, themes, and narrative techniques Statius weaves his own textual tapestry. By unweaving it, the recipient is able to detect and appreciate the poet’s deviations from the source-texts which are accounted for by the special role this episode plays within the structure of the whole poem. On the extratextual level, the excessive abundance of the obsequies of the baby Opheltes reflects the poet’s intent to pay honor to the prematurely deceased and later deified son of Domitian. If my assumptions about a hidden message less favorable for the Flavian emperor are correct, it would take a connoisseur of aetiological poetry among Statius’ contemporaries to unravel it out of this intricate fabric pattern (*textus*).

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³⁷Newlands 2004b: 134 on *Silv.* 1.1; cf. Newlands 2004a: 55.

³⁸Cf. Kwapisz 2018 and 2019: 17–18 on Theoc. 1.29–31, 52–55. I am grateful to Dr. Jan Kwapisz for suggesting to me these associations and for making available to me his forthcoming paper on “The Forms of Theocritean Poetry.”

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OVID UND STATIUS, *THEBAIS* 6.54–78. NOTWENDIGE ANSPIELUNGEN
ODER EIN METAPOETISCHER DIALOG?

Zusammenfassung

Im 6. Buch der *Thebais* (54–78) stellt Statius die Leichenspiele des Opheltes dar. Einige Redewendungen, die von ihm bei dieser Gelegenheit gebraucht werden, können an Ovids Werke (*Met.* 6.14–15, 10.499–502; *Fast.* 2.533–536) erinnern. Im vorliegenden Aufsatz wird es versucht zu beweisen, dass Statius' Formulierungen nicht nur als die sog. „notwendige Anspielungen“ zu betrachten sind. Der Dichter führt eigenartigen Dialog mit seinem Vorgänger, indem er ein vielschichtiges Netzwerk von Verbindungen aufbaut. Seine Motivation, gerade an dieser Stelle den Empfänger zu derartigem Spiel einzuladen, lässt sich auf zwei verschiedenen Ebenen erklären: auf der strukturellen Ebene sind die Leichenspiele ein wichtiger Wendepunkt im ganzen Epos; auf der außertextuellen dagegen dienen sie dem Dichter dazu, den Sohn des Domitian, der ebenso wie Opheltes zu früh gestorben ist und nach dem Tod vergöttlicht wurde, zu verehren.