

## Women and War in Roman Epic

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# Women and War in Roman Epic

*By*

Elina Pyy



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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

*To my mother*





# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	IX
<b>1 Introduction</b>	1
1 Subjects, Objects and Others: The Narrative Construction of Subject Positions in War Epic	5
<b>2 Origins of War</b>	22
1 <i>Casus belli</i> : War-Bringing Marriages and Ill-Omened Brides	27
2 Warmongering Furies and Active Agitators	41
3 Divine Interventions and Semiotic <i>furor</i> : Virgil's Amata and Turnus	58
<b>3 Victims of War: Gendered Dynamics of Suffering</b>	71
1 The Victimised Female Body and the Construction of Roman Identity	72
2 The Victim's Viewpoint: Female Gaze and Epic Subjectivity	81
3 Marginal Mothers? The Threatening Overtones of Maternal Fear	89
4 Grief, Lament and the Dissolution of Differences	106
<b>4 'Playing Supermen': The Manly Matrons of Roman Epic</b>	130
1 <i>Mentem aequare viros et laudis poscere partem</i> : Female Groups in Defense of Their Cities	131
2 <i>Fida coniunx: comes ultima fati?</i>	137
3 <i>Da mihi castra sequi</i> : The Female Intrusion in the World of War	148
<b>5 Means of Production or Weapons of Destruction? Gender and Violence in Roman War Epic</b>	163
1 Manly Men versus Effeminate Others: Armed Violence in the Construction of <i>Romanitas</i>	167
2 Women in Arms: The Absolute Other?	177
3 <i>Bellatrix virgo</i> : An Outsider or an Insider?	202
4 Fragile Warriors and the Questioning of the Male Subject Position	220

<b>6 Sabine Successors? The Failure of Female Mediation</b>	232
1 The Futility of <i>mora</i> , the Failure of Mediation: Mixing and Juxtaposing Epic with Historiography	235
2 Functional Failures: Epic Women Tangled Up with War	260
<b>7 Dynamics of Death</b>	267
1 Death, Power and Narrative Control: Creusa, Dido, and Cleopatra	269
2 Getting Rid of the Queen: The Archetype of <i>regina moritura</i>	289
<b>8 Conclusion</b>	300
<b>Bibliography</b>	309
<b>Index</b>	327

## Acknowledgements

This book is a result of a long process that started when I began my doctoral studies in the University of Helsinki. After receiving my PhD in 2014, my plan was to turn my dissertation into an academic monograph as quickly as possible. However, things did not go according to plan: other projects and opportunities presented themselves, and I put my doctoral thesis on the shelf, nevertheless repeatedly returning to its themes in the articles and the conference papers that I wrote. During these years, I matured as a scholar, and my research interests and emphases shifted. As a result, I began to see how my own earlier work could be improved upon by applying the new theoretical frameworks that I had acquired to the study of Roman epic. Hence began the rewriting of my doctoral thesis, the result of which this monograph is. While many parts of the book are based on my dissertation, it is however a completely new and independent study—and in my opinion, a better one.

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## Introduction

Ancient epic about war is a genre often viewed as hypermasculine. Many modern scholars regard it as exemplifying the kind of poetry that was not only written by men, for men and about men, but that also actively constructed models and standards of masculinity for its audience.<sup>1</sup> These ideals included both military courage and civic leadership. The Homeric hero was “a speaker of words and doer of deeds”—he was one among his peers but at the same time outstanding in his virtue; “the first of the Achaeans”.<sup>2</sup> *Roman* war epic, then, while it drew heavily on the Homeric and the Hellenistic models of masculinity, was not only a continuation of this tradition, but also a reformulation and an update of the ideals of manliness, designed particularly for the needs of an empire.<sup>3</sup> From Virgil to the Flavians, Roman epic poets strove to establish a new, imperial identity based on the ideals of masculinity—to construct a model of *Romanitas*<sup>4</sup> based on manly *virtus*.<sup>5</sup> War as a subject matter provided prolific material for the discussion of these themes, since it was a milieu where the concepts of manliness and patriotism interrelated. War was a business of men and a business of Rome, a device through which ‘male’ and ‘Roman’ were established as the dominating ideals in the world and as central to epic discourse.<sup>6</sup>

In a genre where men and masculinity are such crucial themes, a closer look at women and femininity, in comparison, can reveal something crucial about the ideological frameworks of the poems. The Roman war epics are, as it has

1 See Arthur 1981, 24–26; Nugent 1994, 179; Keith 1999, 214; Keith 2000, 2–3, 8–35; Foley 2005, 105; Syed 2005, 13–19; Skempis & Ziogas 2009, 238–240.

2 Klooster 2018, 67; Martin 1989, 22–25, 92; Nagy 2013, 26–28.

3 For further discussion of the variations of the above-mentioned Homeric models in Flavian war epic, see Pyy 2018a, 200–212.

4 The concept of *Romanitas* does not exist in the sources of the early Principate; the first surviving mention can be found in Tertullian's *De pallio* 4.1. In the study of Roman imperial literature, the concept is often used to discuss literary construction of identities; Antony Augoustakis, for example, uses it as an all-encompassing concept for the Roman ideals *virtus*, *pietas* and *fides*, and William Dominik uses it to refer to the idea of Roman-ness that is related to the “customs and institutions of the Romans”. Augoustakis 2010, 8, n. 18; Dominik 2003, 474, n. 8. For further discussion, see Kramer 1998, 81–82. *Romanitas* is applied to the study of epic, e.g., in Burck 1981, 633–645; Galinsky 1981; Dewar 2003; Syed 2005, 194–223 and Spentzou 2008.

5 Keith 2000, 5–35; Syed 2005, 194–223; van Nortwick 2013, 146–149.

6 For further discussion, see Syed 2005, e.g., 116–135.

been widely acknowledged, full of complex and intriguing female characters whose role is not limited to observing the male action, but who also participate in the action in various ways. Despite the visible role of women in epic, in the long tradition of research on Roman epic, female characters have almost invariably been labeled as ‘marginal’ to the teleological, heroic and patriotic drive of the poem, or as opposed to it. This book was born out my curiosity in the face of this marginality—it is an attempt to clarify and scrutinise what it actually means to be marginal in the epic narrative, and how this narrative position is constructed. In the chapters that follow, I aim to look beyond the binary oppositions and juxtapositions that are characteristic of gender-focused readings of war epic. Instead, my purpose is to dig deeper into the grey area between the supposedly male and female roles and functions in war epic. In this way, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics of these poems—and to scrutinise to what extent gendered subjectivity is actually a factor in the ideological frameworks and the narrative techniques of imperial epic. The question is: is the alleged male vantage point of war epic trite but true—or just trite? How do gender and ethnicity as components of identity complement each other in the Roman epics’ construction of Roman-ness and otherness? Is there a noticeable change or continuity in the way the imperial war epics utilise gender in their narrative strategies?

Chronologically, this study covers roughly the first century of the Principate, from the beginning of Augustus’ reign to the death of Domitian in 96 CE. This period of time is characterised, on the one hand, by the aftermath of civil struggles and on the other, by the strengthening of the Roman imperial dominion on three continents. This means that these decades can be considered crucial to the development of ideas concerning *Romanitas*, and to the formation of imperial ideology. Notably, the first century of the Principate was also a particularly productive time in the field of epic poetry, since all of the six surviving Roman war epics date to this period of time: Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Statius’ *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*,<sup>7</sup> Silius Italicus’ *Punica* and Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*.<sup>8</sup> These works are the main sources for this study,

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7 This fragmentary poem includes only two books, the second of which is incomplete. The prevailing opinion among scholars is that the work was left unfinished by the poet. See, e.g., Aricò 1986; Heslin 2005; 57–58.

8 The fragmentary state of surviving poetry earlier than the Augustan period means that our knowledge of pre-Virgilian war epics is relatively incomplete. Marks lists seventy-eight Roman epics, dating from the mid-to-late third century BCE to the late second century CE: twenty-four of these date to the Republican period, and nothing at all survives of the majority of them. Marks 2010, 200–205.

and together, they form a subspecies of Roman epic that is often referred to as ‘war-centred epic’ or simply ‘war epic’.<sup>9</sup>

It is irrefutable that the borders of this group are somewhat unstable and open for discussion. Ovid’s membership in this category, for instance, is a matter that could be, and has been, much disputed. In one sense, I will include Ovid’s poetry throughout the book, since many comparisons to his epic are unavoidable and genuinely useful to my understanding of the genre in general. I have, however, decided to leave the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* out of the primary source material, mainly for reasons related to the narrative structure of these works. Although he was one of the most influential epic poets of the Principate, Ovid deliberately distanced himself from the tradition of Roman war-centred epic—that is, from the structural pattern where the narrative follows a coherent plotline book by book in a chronological order. As a highly self-conscious poet, he avoided competition with Virgil’s canonical work,<sup>10</sup> and generated a new kind of epic that was both complementary to and, at times, subtly ironic towards post-Homeric war epic.<sup>11</sup> Arguably, Ovid can with good reason be considered the greatest postmodernist of antiquity, and in this, he differs from the continuum of Roman war-centred epic (Virgil-Lucan-Statius-Valerius Flaccus-Silius Italicus)—a tradition that could be described as forming one (more or less coherent) master narrative, ‘a great story’ within which individual works complete each other in an ongoing intertextual play.<sup>12</sup>

This intra- and intertextual discourse can be considered as one of the most defining characteristics of the genre. What marks the Roman imperial war epics is the poets’ self-aware pursuit of aligning themselves with the historical predecessors of the genre—the lofty names of Homer, Naevius and Ennius represen-

9 ‘National’, ‘heroic’, or ‘narrative’ or ‘historical’ are also sometimes used as epithets for this particular type of epic poetry, depending on whether the reader chooses to lay the emphasis on the form or on the (ideological) content of the poem. Hardie 2007, 91–94; Kennedy 1997; Toll 1997, 34 n. 1. ‘Heroic epic’ derives from *carmen heroum*, used, e.g., in Prop. 3.3.15–16; Ov. *Tr.* 4.10.47–48; Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.5. Boyle 1993, 2–3, 16 n. 2; von Albrecht 1999, 81; Syed 2005, 18, 166.

10 Classen 2002, 22–24.

11 For further discussion, see Hardie 1990, *passim*; Hardie 1993, 105–108; Baldo 1995, *passim*; Smith 1997, 16; Hinds 1998, 104–107; Keith 2002, 236–245; Papaioannou 2005, 1–3; Jenkyns 2005, 570–571; O’Hara 2007, 104–130.

12 This is not to claim that Ovid’s poetry (not only his epic, but his elegy too) did not belong to the intertextual tradition of Roman epic: in particular, the strong influence of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Amores* on Statius’ epic style has been pointed out several times. However, the structural differences in the narrative tradition clearly set these works apart from the linear and teleological tradition of war-centred epic. For further analysis, see Davis 2006; Spentzou 2003; Heslin 2005.

ted a literary tradition that the epic poets of the Principate longed to become part of.<sup>13</sup> Although the works composed under the Principate naturally responded to different cultural needs than their Homeric, Hellenistic or Republican models, the tradition weighs heavily on them and is reflected in various stylistic details.<sup>14</sup> This allusive interplay that marks the genre is one of the things I will be focusing on throughout this study. I believe that by paying attention to the poetic interaction between the Roman war epics and to the development of the genre from Virgil to the Flavian poets, crucial insights can be gleaned about the role of epic in the construction of Roman-ness, and about the ways in which gender functioned in this process.

Another feature that marks all Roman war epics from the Principate is their strong investment in the theme of civil war. The *Aeneid* was composed in the 20s BCE, after the turbulent decades of the civil wars, and the collective memory of the destruction was still fresh when Lucan wrote the *Pharsalia* in the early 60s CE. As for the Flavian poets, the confusion of the years 68 and 69 following the death of Nero created an atmosphere of civil discord, insecurity and chaos that is comparable to a civil war. All in all, it is not in the least surprising that all the epics of the early Principate are deeply involved in the process of restoration and healing—of reconstructing cultural identity and fashioning a common value system for a people torn apart by war or civil struggle.<sup>15</sup> In civil war, the dissolving of unity—of ‘the collective sense of the self’—is far more complete than when the threat to community comes from the outside. It is a situation that, on the one hand, forces the community to apply exceptional operational modes; on the other hand, it creates an urge to treasure the values viewed as traditional and most essential. The search for a balance between these two is one of the distinguishing characteristics in Roman war-centred epic.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Boyle 1993, 2–8. See also von Albrecht, who studies the intertextual tradition in Roman epic and demonstrates how the epic poets generated a new kind of poetry by recycling ideas of their predecessors. von Albrecht 1999, 13–21.

14 For further discussion of the development of archaic elements in Roman epic, see Boyle 1993, 1–13; von Albrecht 1999, 1–32; Leigh 1997, 6–40; Classen 2002, 20. De Jong speaks of the “feigned orality” of the genre. De Jong 2004, 549.

15 The post-war theme in Roman epic has been discussed in various studies; see, e.g., Gurval 1995, 209–247; Henderson 1998, 165–256; Finiello 2005; McNelis 2007, 2–8.

16 See Farrell and Nelis, who perceptively point out that in order to understand poetry of the early Principate, one must be sensitive to the tension between the attempt to idealise the legendary past, on the one hand, and the need to depict the past as an endless civil strife leading to the need for a radical renewal of the political system, on the other. Farrell & Nelis 2013, 3.

Besides the aftermath of the civil wars, another historical factor that is crucial for the mental ambience of the Roman war epics is, of course, the imperial ideology—the multicultural atmosphere of the Empire. While the civil wars inevitably destroyed the illusion of unity of the Roman people, constant encounters with alien cultures, on the other hand, forced the Romans to reconsider their values, customs and ideals, as well as to justify them in comparison with non-Romans.<sup>17</sup> This development raised questions about what it meant to be Roman in the immense Empire.<sup>18</sup> The two sides of the identity issue—the question of whom the Romans were willing to accept amongst them, and the question of whether the non-Romans wanted to become Romans or not—are ever-present in the tradition of imperial war epic.<sup>19</sup> As I will explain in the following chapters, these questions were of indispensable significance to the literary construction of subjectivity in the imperial war epics, and they are closely related to the construction of gendered otherness (and sameness) in the genre.

## 1 Subjects, Objects and Others: The Narrative Construction of Subject Positions in War Epic

‘Subjectivity’ is a concept that I will be using throughout this work, as a term that defines presence and consciousness in the epic narrative. The notion of ‘subject’ has different connotations and meanings within the humanities, depending strongly on the field of research—the subject of linguistics, for instance, is not the same as the subject of narratology, and both differ from the subject of semiotics. In this work, I draw on the subjectivity theory developed by the philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, to examine the connections among gender, presence and consciousness in Roman war epic.

Often, when applying contemporary theory to the study of ancient sources, classicists and ancient historians feel the need to justify our choices somehow, as if we were not quite entitled to steal from the battle arsenal of neighbouring fields. While this feeling can be traced back to the centuries of a distinctively non-theoretical past of Classics, and to the development of our professional identities as a result,<sup>20</sup> this obviously does not mean that there would not be

17 Forsén & Salmeri 2008, 7; Gruen 2011, 1–5.

18 See Huskinson 2000, 7–14, 20–25.

19 Ando 2002, 127–128; Bessone 2013, 89–92, 101–105; Penwill 2013, 29–54.

20 See my more thorough analysis in Pyy 2018b, 3–7. For further discussion, see also Peradotto 1989, 180–187, DuBois 1991, Sullivan 1994, 9–15.

actual concerns and challenges to consider when trying to marry contemporary theory to ancient sources. There is a real and ever-present danger that writing by classicists may turn into a hollow verbiage that does justice neither to the sources nor to the theory. No theory is universal, and the ideas concerning language and psyche always speak volumes about the particular historical and cultural circumstances in which they first came into being. These issues notwithstanding, I do not believe that the positivist distancing of oneself from contemporary critical theory is beneficial for our understanding of the ancient texts. Nor am I in any way alone in this belief, or a pioneer in this field. The suitability of the Kristevan theory to the study of ancient literature has been demonstrated in the past two decades by Antony Augoustakis, Mairéad McAuley and Efrossini Spentzou, and the Freudian and the Lacanian traditions—on which Kristeva’s thinking is strongly based—have been convincingly applied to Classics by scholars such as Ellen Oliensis, Miriam Leonard, and Peter Heslin.<sup>21</sup> This is a research tradition with which I align myself. I strongly believe that, when accompanied with a constant awareness of the differences between the cultural contexts of the sources and the theory, the Kristevan framework can considerably widen our understanding of the aspects of Roman war epic that have so far been little examined.

In its core, Kristeva’s theory on subjectivity is a post-Lacanian theory about the formation of the self through language use and acquisition. In her work, Kristeva has generally preferred the term ‘subject’ over the notion of the ‘self’, in order to emphasise the unconscious nature of the process by which subjects come to be.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the Kristevan subject is anything but a self-aware and stable entity: it is *le-sujet-en-procès*, or ‘the subject on trial’.<sup>23</sup> “The subject never is,” Kristeva writes, “[he] is only the signifying process and he appears only as a signifying practice”.<sup>24</sup>

This signifying practice can be defined as a dynamic interaction between the two modalities of communication: the symbolic and the semiotic, which Kristeva develops from Lacan’s symbolic and imaginary orders.<sup>25</sup> The symbolic is the sphere of language, defined and dominated by meaning, logic, grammar, and syntax. Not only is it necessary for any human communication; it is also

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21 Augoustakis 2010, McAuley 2015, Spentzou 2003; Oliensis 2001; Oliensis 2009; Oliensis 2010; Heslin 2005; Leonard 2006. For my use of critical theory on ancient sources, other influential models have also been Pollock 2006 and Rimell 2015.

22 McAfee 2004, 1–2.

23 See e.g., Smith 1998, 24.

24 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 215.

25 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 23–24.

indispensable for the speaking subject to insert logic into her psyche. Without the transition and entry into the symbolic order—which happens gradually, as the child acquires understanding of the language and of herself—all speech would be reduced to meaningless babble, and the mind would crumble into a psychotic state.

The semiotic, for its part, is, “a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process”,<sup>26</sup> It precedes the acquisition of language and draws upon the “corporeal memory”. While the symbolic is verbal and logical, the semiotic is preverbal, asymbolic and material. It is powerfully present in all kinds of non-symbolic communication, such as music, rhythm and baby babble; it can also be observed *within* the symbolic language as meaninglessness, disruptions, silences and absences.<sup>27</sup> In *New Maladies of the Soul*, Kristeva speaks of “bodily drives” that are discharged through the semiotic sphere of communication. These drives, she explains, are “instinctual energies that operate between biology and culture”, “a pivot between soma and psyche, between biology and representation”,<sup>28</sup> and they are the underlying incentive for all human communication. This means that, while the symbolic is necessary in order for the communication to ‘make sense’, the semiotic is necessary because it provides the motivation for engaging in the signifying process. As Kelly Oliver has aptly put it, in her analysis on Kristeva’s thinking, “we have a bodily need to communicate”,<sup>29</sup>

By arguing that the symbolic and the semiotic are interdependent and inseparable, Kristeva challenges the structuralist divide between the mind and the body (or culture and nature) that marks the Western philosophical discourses from Plato onwards. For this reason, she has been given credit for “bringing the body back to theory” and “language back into the body”, and for seeking a middle ground where the humanities and the sciences could meet, in their shared attempt to understand human communication.<sup>30</sup> For Kristeva, the semiotic and the symbolic cannot exist without each other: the signifying process is a result of both, and hence, the subject is also always both—as she puts it, “language is not divorced from the body; ‘word’ and ‘flesh’ can meet at any moment for better or worse”.<sup>31</sup> This notion is of crucial importance for this study, because this is indeed what often appears to happen in Roman war

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26 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 23–30.

27 See, e.g., Moi 1986, 13.

28 Kristeva 1993 (in Oliver 2002, 203–224; see also xvii).

29 Oliver 2002, xv.

30 Oliver 2002, xvii, xxii.

31 Ruthrof 2015, 15–16.

epic. The genre is marked by recurrent moments where the strict formal rules of epic fall apart: the flow of the hexameter is interrupted by breaks that do not seem to ‘make sense’, or the structure of the teleological narrative is placed under pressure by meaningless endings, disruptions and unfinished storylines. For several decades, researchers in classical philology have tried to explain away these uncomfortable aspects of Roman epic, or have striven to make sense of them in one way or another. The application of the Kristevan theory, instead, enables the reader to accept these uncomfortable elements as the living genotext of Roman epic—as a continuous pulsation of the semiotic *chôra*—and allows him or her to appreciate them as an indispensable part of the poetic communication.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, while the semiotic genotext is evidently present in the Roman imperial epics, it should be acknowledged that war epic as a genre does not seamlessly fall into Kristeva’s textual categories in terms of the semiotic-symbolic divide. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva classifies different texts depending on the dynamics between the semiotic and the symbolic in them. She argues that the dialectic between the two modalities determines the type of discourse in question: while the discourse of scientists, for example, exemplifies the symbolic mode, the creative expressions of musicians, dancers, and poets represent the semiotic.<sup>33</sup> In *Powers of Horror*, she further discusses poetry as a prime example of a discourse that is heavy on the genotext and driven by the semiotic, and emphasises poetry’s willingness to play with grammar, metaphor and meaning, thus laying bare the fact that language is, indeed, arbitrary.<sup>34</sup>

There is no denying that Kristeva’s approach is somewhat unhistorical: she romanticises poetry’s ‘original’ ritualistic function as “the bringing into play of the vehemence of drives”, and argues for its decline into “linguistic formalisation” from the Renaissance onwards.<sup>35</sup> This approach, however, fails to acknowledge the strictly formal nature of most Greek and Roman poetic genres. The

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32 ‘Phenotext’ and ‘genotext’ are among the central concepts of Kristeva’s thinking. The pair corresponds roughly (and is closely related) to the symbolic and semiotic modalities. ‘Phenotext’ can be understood to be the perceivable signifying system, language that serves to communicate. ‘Genotext’, then, exists *within* the phenotext, and is the process by which the self is in fact generated: it draws heavily on the bodily drives and their disposition, and operates ‘underneath the surface’, continuously generating the subject of enunciation which the phenotext presupposes.

33 See Beardsworth 2004, 12–16.

34 J. Kristeva, “Powers of Horror” (orig. *Pouvoirs de l’horreur. Essai sur l’abjection*, 1980: in Oliver 2002, 229–263).

35 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 83.

rhythmic elements in ancient Graeco-Roman poetry were certainly rooted in the oral tradition and can be observed as traces of the genre's original ritualistic function; it is, however, arguable that by the time of the Principate, these elements had lost all of their ritual bearing and had, for the most part, become an expression of the same bourgeois "decorative uselessness" that Kristeva sees as a blemish in the European tradition.<sup>36</sup> This concerns Roman epic more than other genres, since it is highly dependent on clearly articulated rules and 'weighed down' by the high moral bearing of the hexameter.

While Kristeva's understanding of the functions of ancient poetry in general therefore perhaps does not say all that could be said, the special position of epic among the poetic genres becomes evident in her work. It seems reasonable that Kristeva does not in fact map epic together with poetry, but places it into the signifying practice of 'narrative', a discourse dominated by correlations between the opposites (good/bad, inside/outside etc.), where the "social organism is dominated, ruled by, and finally reduced to or viewed through the structure of the family/clan".<sup>37</sup> According to this definition, 'narratives' are texts largely shaped by the symbolic modality and in which the semiotic drive flow is subordinated, giving only a "faint indication" of the signifying process.<sup>38</sup> For Kristeva, therefore, epic is in reality no poetry at all, but a story, comparable to myths and legends. This definition seems to make sense with regard to the inner structural logic of Roman war epic—a genre that is, in its very core, about storytelling, and not far estranged from the traditions of ancient historiography.

Here, however, one comes face to face with the Kristevan concept of 'intertextuality'. Instead of the conventional meaning of the word (an allusive interaction between literary works), Kristeva uses intertextuality/transposition to refer to the ability of a signifying practice to pass from one sign-system to another, or to switch between different sign systems within one text.<sup>39</sup> This is something that Roman war epic arguably does superbly, repeatedly breaking free from the signifying practice of narrative and amalgamating into itself elements of poetry. This practice very often appears to be inspired by the civil war theme of the poems: above all, the structural breaks, the meaningless endings and the contradictions are often related to depictions of *nefas* and *furor* that tear the community apart. Thus, the disturbance of the logic of the social order was what gave Roman war epic its creative power to give birth to meaninglessness and ruptures—elements that go against the formal tradition of 'narrative',

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36 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 83.

37 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 90–92.

38 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 92.

39 Moi 1986, 111–112.

and that can be read as the pulsational pressure of the semiotic on the symbolic logic of epic.<sup>40</sup> The result is the rich genotext of Roman war epic, unapologetic in its contradictions and illogicalities.

For this study, the questions of how this genotext of epic is related to gender, and what is the relationship between gender and epic subjectivity, are of primary importance. The role of gender in Kristeva's thinking, and the relationship between her semiotic and symbolic modalities and the issue of sexual difference, are much-disputed topics.<sup>41</sup> The question is rooted in Kristeva's development of the concept of semiotic *chôra*—a term she borrows from Plato's *Timaeus*, and that she describes as “a sensory cavern”, and as “a non-expressive totality formed by the [semiotic] drives and their stases”.<sup>42</sup> *Chôra* is the location and the origin of bodily drives—as Lynne Huffer has said, it is “the space of mediation” that regulates the semiotic drives that precede the forming of the speaking subject.<sup>43</sup> Because Kristeva describes the *chôra* as a maternal space, the semiotic modality has understandably often been associated with the female—and the symbolic, building on Freud and Lacan, has been examined as a paternal sphere, dominated by the Law of the Father. Consequently, the entire Kristevan theory has sometimes been criticised for ostensibly challenging, but actually reproducing the binary oppositions and the hierarchic relations between male-female/culture-nature/mind-body—the ontological differentiation that inevitably reinforces the political structures of oppression.<sup>44</sup> Judith Butler, for example, has argued that for Kristeva, language is a system in which the symbolic (male) remains hegemonic, while the bodily drives (female) can only temporarily and in vain disturb the hegemony of the Law of the Father.<sup>45</sup> According to Butler, Kristeva's strategic task is “neither to replace the symbolic with the semiotic nor to establish the semiotic as a rival cultural possibility”, but mainly to manifest the borders which divide the two

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40 According to Kristeva, in order to ‘penetrate the era’, poetry needs to disturb the logic that dominates the social order, and to do so through that logic itself. In her analysis of some of the ‘truly revolutionary’ poets of the nineteenth century (Lautréamont and Mallarmé), she pays attention to the social, political and historical contexts which allowed these writers to allow the charge of the *chôra* to mark their language. Kristeva 1974 (1984), 82–83; Moi 1986, 89.

41 Kristeva's complicated relationship with feminism and feminist philosophy is discussed in Moi 1985, 163–172. For a more in-depth analysis, see Schippers 2011.

42 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 25. For further analysis, see Huffer 1998, 77–87; Smith 1998, 21–22; Moi 1985, 161–162.

43 Huffer 1998, 82–83.

44 Butler 1990, 111–112.

45 Butler 1990, 102–103, 111–113.

modalities.<sup>46</sup> This is why, in her view, Kristeva’s “political strategy” lacks subversive power and fails on a very fundamental level.

It is, however, worth asking whether Kristeva has a political strategy in the first place. Butler’s critique appears to be based at least partly on her way of reading Kristeva’s work as a theory of gender rather than as a theory of language—this can be observed in her attempt to politicise Kristeva’s aims, as well as in her reluctance to understand her definition of language as a dynamic process, and not as a system. This way of reading can be considered at least partially a result of aligning Kristeva with the other French ‘feminist’ philosophers, especially H el ene Cixous and Luce Irigaray.<sup>47</sup> However, while for Cixous and Irigaray, sexual difference is the grounding principle that drives their thinking about language, for Kristeva, the relationship between the two appears to be reversed—language takes precedence over gender. She has openly argued against a universal notion of ‘women’ and against the understanding of the semiotic as a representative of the female, stating that if ‘women’ have something in common with each other *and* something to do with the semiotic, it is in fact their marginality.<sup>48</sup> In other words, the semiotic is marginal to the symbolic in the same way that the female is marginal to the male within the patriarchy—but the modalities themselves have no gender, and the speaking subject is dependent on both.<sup>49</sup>

The idea that marginality could be viewed as the lowest common denominator for ‘women’ is of crucial importance for this study, since this idea particularly well reflects the hierarchic gender dynamics in Roman war epic. In the narrative universe of epic, the definition of ‘male’ and ‘female’, or the differentiation between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, is anything but clear-cut and unproblematic—in addition to modest matrons and heroic super-warriors, there are Amazonic warrior maidens, fetishised hermaphrodites and castrated priests (to mention only the most extreme examples). Instead of a binary system, gender appears as a spectrum of different experiences and performances. Therefore, instead of assigning one categorisation to men and another to women, a more useful way

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46 Butler 1990, 108–109.

47 See Moi 1985, 151–156, 163–167.

48 Moi 1985, 166; see also Gambaudo 2007, 16–17.

49 As Smith points out, Kristeva’s semiotic *ch ora* “is a maternal space from which the figure of the father is not absent, but rather prefigured”. Smith 1998, 60. In the same way, the entry into the symbolic is a function of the maternal as well as of the paternal; it does not happen solely in the “violent break” of the Oedipal stage, but begins earlier, in the semiotic sphere—in this, Kristeva differs from both Lacan and Freud. Gambaudo 2007, 23–29, 51–57.

of looking at the issue—and one that takes into consideration the gendered power structures in the genre—could be a distinction drawn between *virī* and non-*virī*: that is, ‘real’ men as the unquestionable subjects of epic, versus those falling short of the requirements of epic masculinity. Apart from women, the large and ambiguous group of non-*virī* could include those with non-binary experiences, but also characters who are represented as ‘biologically’ male but who ‘fail’ or choose not to perform masculinity the way it is expected to be performed (this could mean, for instance, slaves, young boys, or cowardly warriors—technically, anyone literally or metaphorically penetrated). On the one hand, therefore, Roman war epic leaves a lot of room for gender performances and experiences to travel between and beyond ‘male’ and ‘female’—but on the other hand, it makes stricter the criteria of ‘manliness’, requiring both a credible biological background *and* a plausible social performance in order for a character to ‘pass’. If characters are lacking in one or both of these, they are likely to fall into the large and ambiguous group of non-*virī*—those marginalised by the patriarchal power structures and by the omnipotent male gaze of the projected reader.

As many earlier studies of Roman epic have pointed out, this marginalisation happens on the level of the narrative: it is due to the character’s inability to ‘convince’ the projected (male, elite, citizen Roman) reader of his or her manliness and to invite the reader to identify and relate.<sup>50</sup> Alison Keith, in particular, has stressed the strongly gendered focalisation of epic as a reason for the androcentric perspective of the genre: Keith speaks of the “male, mobile hero of epic”, whose subjectivity is constructed through contrast with the female.<sup>51</sup> Similar

50 While the Roman audience in the imperial period was actually rather heterogeneous, it is, however, justifiable to imagine the primary projected reader—the addressee—of imperial war epic as “male, élite, Italian, middle-aged and citizen Roman”. As Dixon somewhat provocatively argues, these are the denominators that define the epic voice and gaze, and everything that falls outside these categories is inevitably marginalised. Dixon 2001, 21. Keith has likewise argued that war epic as a genre was addressed to a male audience: she stresses the position of epic in the Roman curriculum, and argues that it was one of the main devices that indoctrinated Roman pupils with the ideals of masculinity. Keith 2000, 2–3.

51 Keith 1999, 216–218, 228–230. In particular, Keith observes a correlation between masculine subject position and the male gaze, “which come together in the visual objectification of women”. Keith 1999, 222. Keith’s reading is influenced by Teresa de Lauretis, who has famously argued that “the hero, the mythical subject” of Western narratives is “constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture—”. De Lauretis 1984, 119–121; on the connection between gaze and objectification, see also Fredrick 2002, 1–2, 10–24.

arguments have been made by Georgia Nugent, who states that “the self and the subject of classical epic is always male”,<sup>52</sup> and by Yasmin Syed, who stresses the male vantage point of the *Aeneid*, arguing that Virgil deliberately strives to alienate the reader from the female characters.<sup>53</sup>

According to these views, the most crucial narrative technique that works to alienate the reader from the non-*viri* is related to the representation of their emotional lives. It is intriguing that, while the delivering of the literary character’s emotion to the reader can be one of the most powerful ways to invite the reader to identify with that specific character, in the universe of Roman epic—marked by the Stoic ideals of manhood and self-control—the effect of emotions often appears to be the opposite. The uncontrollable expressions of grief, anger, or affection often appear to the male subjects and heroes of Roman epic as ‘threatening’ and ‘alien’: and because the reactions of the internal audience tend to guide those of the external audience, the epic hero’s aversion in the face of strong emotions is likely to discourage the reader from identifying with characters who express these feelings.<sup>54</sup> This marginalisation is both enforced and underlined by the non-verbal elements present in the extreme expressions of emotion: the weeping, the screaming and the physical self-harm. From the Kristevan viewpoint, these are all natural expressions of the semiotic pressure on the logic of the symbolic order: in moments of emotional turmoil, words tend to fail the speaking subject, and this is when the bodily need to express what is ‘beyond words’ can come to the rescue. But in the universe of epic, dominated on both narrative and ideological levels by the Law of the Father, this recourse to the semiotic might easily end up alienating the reader and constructing textual otherness and objectification.

It is important to stress, however, that ‘marginality’, as defined here, does not necessarily mean an unimportant role in the narrative; on the contrary,

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52 Nugent 1994, 179. See also Bakhtin, who regards classical epic as consisting of male-oriented foundation legends that legitimate and explain the patriarchal social order. Bakhtin 1981, 13–15.

53 Syed 2005, 53–54, 57–58, 63–74, 103.

54 Naturally, it should be acknowledged that gendering of emotions in any genre of ancient literature is a risky and difficult pursuit, considering the long philosophical tradition concerning the subject. Emotions and the need/ability to control them constitute such an important part of Graeco-Roman philosophical discourse that it is inevitably an oversimplification to establish one comprehensive view of the matter in any given source group. As O’Hara points out, the purpose of epic is not to establish a coherent moral or philosophical model and, in the end, none of the Roman epic poets can be considered as devoted to any single philosophical framework. O’Hara 2007, 2–7. For further discussion, see Venini 1964, Gill 1997, Wright 1997; Hershkovitz 1998; LaCourse Munteanu 2011.

'the Other' can be a very visible character and temporarily even become the protagonist of the story—it is the author's construction of a standpoint and the reader's identification that define otherness and subjectivity in epic.<sup>55</sup> This dual position of 'the Other' as simultaneously both central and marginalised is the core idea in Antony Augoustakis' brilliant study of motherhood in Flavian epic. Augoustakis points out that "the paradoxical status of women as both central but, at the same time marginalised—is key to our understanding of the role of women in Flavian epic".<sup>56</sup> In his view, 'central' and 'marginal' are not mutually exclusive positions—neither in narratological terms, nor from the perspective of psychological subjectivity. A similar idea can be observed in Mairéad McAuley's excellent study of motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and Statius, where she speaks of mothers as occupying a double position, as "figures marginal to epic's narrative structures yet central to its ideology, responsible for the production of warriors for the state".<sup>57</sup>

This phenomenon can be observed in many epic women whose turbulent emotional lives dominate the narrative, and who often end up being the most memorable characters of the poems: Virgil's Dido and Amata, and Statius' Jocasta are perhaps the best examples. These women have often been labeled as 'transgressive', or as 'opposers' of the hyper-masculine universe of war epic. Many scholars—Keith, Nugent and Perkell, in particular—have examined epic women as having two options: they can either become absorbed into the male, patriotic ideology of the poem, or they can stand against this heroic drive and consequently become erased from the narrative. This kind of a clear-cut distinction between the 'absorbed' and 'erased' women is especially in line with Kristeva's view of the role and position of women as marginalised within the patriarchy. In *On Chinese Women*, Kristeva writes that

[W]e cannot gain access to the temporal scene, i.e. to political affairs, except by identifying with the values considered to be masculine—some women "play supermen"—others, more bound to the mother, and more tuned in to their unconscious drives, refuse this role and sullenly hold back, neither speaking nor writing, in a permanent state of expectation, occasionally punctuated by some kind of outburst: a cry, a refusal, "hysterical symptoms". These two extremes condemn us either to being

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55 See, e.g., Ganiban's, Spentzou's and Tipping's discussions of Hannibal as the hero of the *Punica*, Ganiban 2009; Spentzou 2008; Tipping 2009.

56 Augoustakis 2010, 16.

57 McAuley 2015, 23.

the most passionate servants of the temporal order and its apparatus of consolidation—or of subversion—.<sup>58</sup>

Kristeva's argument bears a clear resemblance to the above-mentioned readings of Roman war epic: both views observe women as having a choice between two options, neither of which is satisfying or leads to full subjectivity. As Oliver puts it, "[e]ither women can enter the symbolic—language, politics, time, culture—only by identifying as men, or they can withdraw into their silent bodies as hysterics".<sup>59</sup> In Roman war-centred epic, examples of both tactics are numerous. On the one hand, we have women like Lucan's Marcia and Cornelia: model matrons who perform masculinity by manifesting almost superhuman Stoic self-control and devotion to the *patria*, and who do so without questioning or transgressing the female role assigned to them.<sup>60</sup> On the other, we have out-of-control women like Virgil's Dido and Amata, who violently oppose the preordained course of events and—in Kristevan terms—"take their jouissance in an anti-Apollonian, Dionysian orgy".<sup>61</sup> In both of these roles, however, epic women have usually been considered as doomed to a lack of textual subjectivity: they are the unrelatable others to the internal male audience of the poems as well as to the projected male reader. It is the classic 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' double-bind that makes it impossible for the woman to win: her only options are to become an inferior version of the Man, or to become the villain of the story, who needs to be silenced.

In this study, however, I am more interested in using the Kristevan framework to complicate the strict juxtaposition between the categories of male and female, self and other. Arguably, there *are* women in Roman war epic who manage to avoid the above-mentioned double bind, to break free from the roles prescribed to them by the patriarchy and, consequently, to achieve tex-

58 J. Kristeva, "About Chinese Women" (orig. *Des Chinoises* 1974), in *Moi* 1985, 138–159 (transl. Seán Hand): 155–156.

59 Oliver 1993, 108.

60 These kinds of exemplary female characters are frequent in Roman historiographic tradition, where they mark the Roman legendary history, in particular. The most articulate example of a woman 'rising above her gender' is Cloelia, a legendary virgin who demonstrated 'manly courage' by escaping from an enemy camp. See Liv. 2.13.11 (*novam in femina virtutem*); Cic. *Off.* 1.61 (*vos enim iuvenes animum geritis muliebrem, illa virgo viri*); Val. Max. 3.2.2.15 (*viris puella lumen virtutis praeferendo*); Sen. *Marc.* 6.16.2; Marcus Manilius, 1.780 (*maiorque viris et Cloelia virgo*) and Florus 1.4.3 (*ecce et virginum virtus*). In Cloelia's story, *Romanitas* is constructed in terms of manliness; however, the authors assert that a woman, too, can become representative of this quality, and without compromising her *pudicitia*. See also Roller 2004, 35–36; McDonnell 2006, 154–158.

61 Kristeva 1974 (in *Moi* 1986, 154).

tual subjectivity. Likewise, there are men who at first sight might seem to be heroes and subjects of the poems, but who under closer scrutiny turn out to be non-*viri*: the marginalised others. These kinds of characters are extremely interesting, because they reveal the underlying sameness between the subject and the other: they reveal that the other is, in fact, always a construction, designed to protect the fragile self.

A crucial concept to this part of my reading and thinking is the Kristevan notion of *abject*. According to Kristeva, the ‘marginality’ of women within the patriarchy is due in its very core to the fact that the woman is not really the other, but an *abject*: something that was formerly part of the self but that has been alienated and rejected. Following Lacan, she suggests that the very first abjection happens when the child abjects the mother’s body and constructs herself as an “I”. This rejection, Kristeva claims, is subsequently repeated on the macrolevel of society: as Oliver has put it, “an individual identity is constructed against the exclusion of the abject maternal body to the way in which a cultural or national identity is constructed against the exclusion of maternity and the feminine”.<sup>62</sup> However, this alienation is never successful: because the mother was first abject, and not object, this relationship is tense and conflicted. The woman is always part of “I”.

The same applies to the ethnic other. As Butler points out, the rejection of certain people because of their racial ‘difference’ is a way of alienation, on which culturally hegemonic identities are based.<sup>63</sup> In Roman epic, race and gender can often be observed working as background for one another: the understanding of Roman world dominion as something natural is in direct interplay with the ideology that establishes male control over the female in Roman society.<sup>64</sup> In Roman war epic, the most extreme example of this phenomenon is the literary archetype of the Absolute Other. This is a character who appears to embody all the characteristics that the subject wants to exclude and

62 Oliver 2002, 226.

63 Butler 1990, 169–171.

64 Keith 2000, 40–64; Keith 1999, 221–222. Keith defines these power dynamics following de Lauretis’ argument about the gendered dichotomy in Western narratives; “male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; and female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other”. Keith 1999, 216–217. As Keith points out, the association between femininity and *locus* does not require a mythological framework, but can be implemented in historical epic, too. Keith 2000, 55. This idea can be observed also in Syed 2005, 137–149, 171–176; Augoustakis 2003, 237–252; Augoustakis 2010, 125–128, and especially in Van Nortwick (2013), who argues that the key element in the *Aeneid*’s ideal of masculine heroism is “the control of women and *all things feminine*” [my emphasis]. Van Nortwick 2013, 145, 149. For further discussion of the colonial discourses of sexuality, see Mattingly 2011, 99–105.

distinguish from himself—that is, in Kristeva’s words, “the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder”.<sup>65</sup> In the Absolute Other, the categories of otherness merge and create an antithesis against which the projected Roman reader can reflect himself and construct his identity.<sup>66</sup> Lucan’s Cleopatra as an oriental seductress queen, and Silius’ Asbythe as a fetishised Amazonic warrior, are prime examples of this kind of character. Nevertheless, over and over again in Roman war epic, these Absolute Others turn out to be in reality *abject* others—forcibly created antitheses of the self/subject of epic. The deceptive nature of abjection is revealed when the line that separates the abject other from the Roman citizen male is blurred and the underlying sameness of the other and the self is revealed.

When reading the works of Virgil, Lucan, Statius, Silius and Valerius Flaccus, what I have found most intriguing are the narrative moments where the semiotic pressure on the symbolic language cannot be easily gendered or defined as ‘feminine rebellion’ against the male Roman mission, but where the semiotic *chôra* makes itself heard in unexpected characters and storylines. When Lucan’s Caesar, trapped in a corner and out of his mind through panic, is compared to murderous Medea, the reader can observe the semiotic ‘leaking into’ the character of a Roman citizen male. And when Statius’ Tydeus’ celebrated martial *virtus* turns into savagery and *crudelitas*, he becomes the embodiment of the Kristevan abject: something that “evokes horror as it makes the subject feel her mortality and her limits”.<sup>67</sup> The difference between the self and the other is dissolved when one of the most crucial building blocks of Roman identity—martial *virtus*—is represented as the quickest and easiest way to the all-consuming darkness of the *chôra*.<sup>68</sup> These ‘failures’ of the epic heroes to live up to the role expected from them manifest the underlying similarity between the ‘transgressive women’ of epic and its male subjects. In the chapters that follow, I focus on the narrative moments where this happens, with the aim of complicating the juxtaposition between the male, epic, Roman mission and the feminine, threatening, subversive otherness that has marked most of the previous studies of gender in Roman war epic.

In the war-centred epic of the early Principate, the communication of values and ideals that are crucial to the construction of both textual subjectivity

65 Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 229–263).

66 Syed 2005, 136. Sannicandro, too, when discussing women in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, considers these characters as instrumental to the establishment of the model of the male, Roman ‘Self’. Sannicandro 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2011.

67 Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 232).

68 Ripoll 1998, 327–332; Masterson 2005, 298–307; Alston & Spentzou 2011, 44–64.

and cultural identity seems to be emphasised in certain structural points of the narrative. The episodes that mark the beginning of the action or a significant turning point in the plot are most likely to discuss the conflict between tradition and reformation, or between continuity and change. They are also the narrative points in which, arguably, the reader can most clearly observe the semiotic pressure on the logic of symbolic order. In war epic, of course, the development of the military crisis is what determines these decisive moments. The beginning and the end of the conflict (as well as its decisive battles) can be considered turning points where the limits of heroism, virtue and humanity are blurred and redefined. And these are the most crucial moments when we examine the representation and assessment of ideas concerning gender and Roman-ness.

This study is structured around these decisive moments; I begin by examining the gender dynamics in the beginning of war, paying particular attention to the theme of the just war and the guilt caused by an unjust conflict. In chapter two, I examine the two roles most typical of women in the Roman epic tradition: the passive and instrumental *casus belli*, and the active inciter of war and violence. These archetypal female roles, I will argue, demonstrate the two different ways of marginalising women in an epic narrative, while simultaneously granting them considerable narrative power in driving the story forward. In neither of these roles, I will argue, can epic women be considered as easy scapegoats for war on the grounds of their sex: even at their most frenzied and uncontrolled—out of touch with the symbolic logic—female characters of Roman war epic are political agents responsible for their actions in the temporal scene. This is something that is further reflected in the following chapters, where the women responsible for the beginning of war face the consequences and pay the price of their actions.

Chapter three examines the emotional responses of women when the war is already on its way or just about to begin. Overwhelming and uncontrollable emotions, as noted above, have usually been considered as the female domain in war epic. In particular, it has often been argued that negative emotions such as fear, grief and desperation constitute ‘the female voice’ in the genre—that is, a counterforce to the dynamic, teleological drive of the epic and something that questions the meaning of it all.<sup>69</sup> This kind of reading obviously grants little textual subjectivity to women in epic, and usually marks them as figures of pathos whose suffering is quietly pushed to the margins or written out of the narrative. In this chapter, however, I will argue that the matter of female emotions

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69 Thus, e.g., Nugent 1992; Mack 1999; Dietrich 1999; Syed 2005.

in war epic is more complex than this and that, at times, fear, grief and suffering actually appear as phenomena that clearly construct subjectivity for the character who expresses them. By making the anxious women powerful focalisers, the narrators utilise their distress to construct a subject position for the reader, and to invite him to identify with these 'figures of pathos'. The female fear and suffering do not necessarily or self-evidently mean an opposition to the heroic drive of the epic: they can exist and be acknowledged without considering them a revolutionary force or a hindrance to the teleological patriotic narrative. As I will show, on many occasions, the suffering of victimised women comes in effect to embody the crumbling Roman virtues and the very essence of *Romanitas*, which is under threat from an unjust war. Moreover, it is also crucial to notice that the male and female roles in war epic are not as drastically different in this respect as often has been believed: by taking a closer look at the figures of anxious and fearful fathers in Roman war epic, I will demonstrate that the categories of rational/political/epic and emotional/private/tragic cannot be easily gendered as male versus female—a character's dedication to the temporal scene and their ability to subscribe to its symbolic logic are not self-evidently male phenomena, nor are semiotic frenzy and the confinement in one's personal suffering female phenomena.

Chapter four will elaborate on this point, by examining more closely a few examples of epic women who, in Kristevan terms, "play supermen". By identifying with the values of the epic universe that are traditionally considered as 'masculine' and by dedicating themselves entirely to the service of the temporal scene, the 'manly matrons' of epic manifest the alternative to the semiotic frenzy and uncontrollable *furor*. However, as I will attempt to show, these women *are* in fact inevitably marginalised by the patriarchal society and value system: at their very best, they manage to become reflections of their husbands' virtue (or weaknesses), and sounding boards to their grandeur. The couples such as Pompey and Cornelia or Cato and Marcia in Lucan's *Pharsalia* manifest the gender complementary nature of virtues and weaknesses in the Roman value system: in this equation, however, there seems to be no room for femininity as an independent phenomenon. The best of women, in fact, appear to be those who can perform masculine high-mindedness to its fullest, and turn their marital love into political dedication—without actually transgressing the female roles assigned to them by the patriarchal society. As I will argue, the marginalisation of the manly matrons is, in the end, more complete than that of many other epic women, since they do not even temporarily reveal the hierarchy and the imbalance that underlie the patriarchal value system and the epic narrative. Content with their fate to be lauded as almost as good as men, they disappear from the pages of the epics.

Chapter five focuses on a different kind of female activity in the times of war, discussing the connection between gender and violence—in particular, the complicated topic of women in arms. I will look at the phenomenon through a theoretical lens that is popular in feminist classical studies: a theory that views the polarisation of genders as rooted in the alleged functions of male and female bodies. According to a culturally deep-rooted belief that marks most premodern patriarchal societies, the female body is a means of production, whereas the male body is a weapon of destruction—in other words, there are two genders, one that gives birth and the other one that kills. In Roman epic, this ideology is most evident in the episodes where its transgressions are discussed, or where it is questioned, challenged, or defended. One expression of this discourse is violent women, such as epic warrior maidens, or murderous matrons who take up arms; another is men who ‘fail’ to perform masculine bellicosity in a manner expected of them. In chapter five, I will discuss both phenomena and examine how the expectations targeted at gendered conduct are related to the ethnic and cultural stereotypes and presumptions in the process of constructing *Romanitas*.

Chapter six brings this study to another theme that is structurally just as important as the beginning of war—its end. I examine the epic endings and closures (or the lack thereof) from the viewpoint of gender, focusing on epic women’s roles as arbiters and mediators for peace. In this chapter, my focus will be on the ways in which the Roman epic poets both exploit and challenge earlier Graeco-Roman literary traditions, drawing influence especially from Athenian tragedy and Roman historiography. I will demonstrate how precisely those episodes where the previous literary models are challenged and questioned are essential for the Roman epics’ ideological content: the fact that there are no Sabine successors who could stand in the way of war and bring the conflict to its end, tells us a great deal about the mental ambience of the epics of the early Principate. While the surviving Roman war epics greatly differ from one another in the level of optimism and cynicism, what they have in common is the fact that the female role in them is more strongly connected to war than to peace—neither at the beginning of war nor at its end can epic women appear as non-political creatures who could make use of their impartiality to maintain peace in the society. By examining the women’s various failed efforts to delay war or to end it—Amata in the *Aeneid*, Julia in the *Pharsalia*, Venus, Jocasta and Antigone in the *Thebaid*—I will demonstrate that epic women, burdened with the guilt of war, are generally unable to fulfill the exemplary roles offered by Athenian drama and by the Roman historiographic tradition. However, because of this failure, they turn out to be more complex and multifaceted characters than their literary models in other genres.

The last chapter examines the marginalisation of women and the female subjectivity in epic through a theme that is central to each Roman war epic: death. Deaths of women, as has often been demonstrated, tend to wield great narrative significance in Roman narrative literature, including epic. In this chapter, I will pay attention to how very different the Roman historiographic and epic traditions are when it comes to this matter. Whereas historiography tends to represent dead female bodies as *loci* and as a ground for male (imperial) action, epic remarkably often appears to empower the dying female object, instead. I use the cases of Creusa, Dido and Amata in the *Aeneid*, as well as Jocasta in the *Thebaid*, to discuss the different ways of dealing with a woman's death in the epic tradition: while some of these deaths marginalise and erase the woman in the favour of the heroic drive of the epic, others grant the dying woman an agency and subjectivity that reveal the underlying sameness between the subject and the putative other. Furthermore, it is notable that all of these episodes wield considerable narrative power: they denote how the deaths of women in Roman war epic tend to become structural turning points that drive the narrative forward, marking the end of one storyline and the beginning of something new.

The concluding remarks will sum up some of my thoughts on gender, emotions and subjectivity that have in one way or another played a crucial role in all the previous chapters. I will discuss in more detail the alleged marginality of women in epic, and analyse the difference between the so-called 'narrative marginality' and the 'psychological marginality' (that is, a lack of epic subjectivity). Moreover, I will pay attention to how these two, in fact, often appear to conflict in Roman war-centred epic: arguably, epic *furor*, while it is likely to distance and alienate the reader, is the most important dynamic force in the genre, since it drives the narrative towards its ultimate telos. By examining in a little more depth the connection between this epic *force majeure* and the Kristevan *chôra*, I will demonstrate how the semiotic pressure is, in fact, an essential element in the narrative tradition of Roman war epic—and, moreover, a phenomenon that cannot be easily or unambiguously gendered as 'feminine'.

## Origins of War

In the genre of war epic, the outbreak of war is a climactic moment: it brings to the surface tensions, conflicts and issues that are crucial to the dynamics of the poem and to the reader's self-positioning with regard to its characters. Furthermore, while the beginning of war is always an event marked by impending destruction and a diplomatic failure, it is also the most important dynamic moment that drives the narrative forward, as well as a turning point where the epic's values and ideals appear most fragile and volatile. Because of the narrative significance of the outbreak of war, it is worth examining more closely the function of gender in these crucial moments—especially, how gender plays out in the discussion concerning the justification of war, the control over its outbreak and the finding of the culpable party.

It is characteristic of the Roman epic tradition that readers do not usually find themselves *in medias res* in the beginning of the poem: instead, the Roman epics tend to explain the background to the action in detail, and stress the gradual culmination of the crisis. The beginning of war is an episode that unleashes action and becomes a climax to the tension that has been building since the first lines. This narrative impetus is at its strongest in the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid*, where the reader must wait for the outbreak of war until the second half of the epics.<sup>1</sup> In the *Pharsalia* and the *Punica*, the culmination of the crisis comes more swiftly, but it is still grounded in an elaborate discussion of reasons and motifs, and is represented in a dramatic manner.<sup>2</sup>

Arguably, one of the reasons why the outbreak of war has such an impetus in Roman epic is its inherent connection to the political and ideological dis-

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1 In the *Aeneid*, the war between the Trojans and the Latins marks the middle of the epic; Virgil dedicates the whole of book seven to scrutinising the background of the conflict, before the battle finally breaks out in 7.572–640. In the *Thebaid*, Statius spends the first six and a half books depicting the Argives' and the Thebans' preparations for war. We do not witness the beginning of the battle before the end of book seven, Stat. *Theb.* 7.564–627.

2 In both of these poems, the beginning of the war is embodied in the anti-hero of the epic—in the *Pharsalia*, Caesar, and in the *Punica*, Hannibal—whose characters and motives are discussed in detail before the breakout of the conflict. In Lucan's epic, it is Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, in 1.213–227, that dramatically marks the beginning of armed hostilities. In the *Punica*, Silius depicts Hannibal as single-handedly breaking the peace treaty with Rome, Sil. *Pun.* 1.296–309.

cussions of the post-civil war era. The crucial themes that appear in all the Roman imperial epics are, on the one hand, the justification of war and, on the other, the guilt caused by an unjust conflict. The fact that these issues are of importance can be considered a reflection of the Roman political traditions. The definition of *bellum iustum* and its proper execution were matters of continuous concern in the Roman political system, and they involved both the secular and the religious spheres of life.<sup>3</sup> The aggressive and unapologetic expansion of the Empire makes it obvious that the Romans did not justify their wars in a modern way, by characterising them as 'defensive wars'.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the idea that a war must have the blessing of the gods and a cause that was morally right was strongly present in Roman ideology concerning military matters.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the strict procedure of declaring a war was needed to maintain the central administrative control over the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>6</sup> During the intense imperial expansion, when large sections of the army were mobilised at the same time, this became all the more important.

From the beginning of the Principate, the *princeps* was the ultimate decision maker in the process of declaring a war. Technically, the emperor had a duty to consult his *consilium*, but he was not bound to follow its advice.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, individual generals in the provinces and on the frontiers were carefully supervised, and waging war without the emperor's permission carried a death penalty.<sup>8</sup> Endeavours to further centralise power over war and peace reflect the desire to avoid the mistakes of the recent past. The disastrous results of the lack of control over the outbreak of war were bitterly demonstrated during the

3 For some later imperial depictions of the archaic procedure of declaring a war, see, e.g., Liv. 1.32.6–14, 1.24; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.72.4–9. See also Polybius' account of the procedure in 150 BCE, Polyb. 36.4.

4 Rosenstein 2007, 228.

5 In the formal declaration of war, the gods were asked to be judges in the disagreement between Romans and their enemies. Watson argues that the idea of a just cause was not shaken even by a Roman defeat: if the gods had confirmed that the Roman cause was just, and Rome still lost the war, it meant only that the Romans had been unable to execute the gods' judgement appropriately. Watson 1993, 10–30 (see On. *Strat.* 4.1–6, 10.25–28; this idea is reflected in Luc. *Phar.* 1.352–356). Mattingly considers this an important part of the Roman imperial rhetoric as a whole. Mattingly 2011, 18.

6 The idea that the questions of war and peace should be decided upon in a democratic fashion was an essential part of the Roman political system. Watson 1993, 29; Smith 2006, 281–298. In his overview of the Roman Republican system, Polybius emphasises that matters of war and peace had to be approved by the people. Pol. 6.14.8–12.

7 Sidebottom 2007, 6–7.

8 Sidebottom 2007, 6–7, 11, 15.

last century of the Republic. When the Senate lost its authority in questions of war and peace, and the Roman legions turned against each other, a complete travesty of the process of war was witnessed. Civil war was the most unjust war of all; it perverted the natural order and ridiculed the detailed procedure of beginning and executing a military conflict.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, as Romans turned against each other, the task of identifying the guilty party and labeling the opponents as treacherous 'others' required new rhetorical devices. The fact that the theme of unjust war is constantly raised in the epics of the early Principate should therefore be examined against this background, as a reaction to the chaos of the previous decades.

This discussion is preeminently present in the epics with a historical topic. In the *Pharsalia*, Lucan paints a vivid picture of Caesar as a ruthless tyrant attacking his *patria* and abusing the democratic customs of waging war.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, the Pompeian side is not represented as a faultless embodiment of Roman righteousness<sup>11</sup>—a matter which severely complicates the dealing of guilt and affects Lucan's definition of Roman-ness. A different approach to the theme can be found in the *Punica*, where the guilt of war reflects the classic antithesis between Romans and their enemies. Silius constantly emphasises Hannibal's breach of *fides* and Carthaginian treacherousness as the reasons for the war.<sup>12</sup> While stressing that the Second Punic War made Rome the *caput mundi*,<sup>13</sup> the poet simultaneously succeeds in implying that this imperial position was a direct consequence of the Romans' responsibility for defending their values and their allies against the Carthaginians' bombastic behaviour. There is, therefore, a distinct difference between Lucan's civil war narrative, which emphasises ambiguity and uncertainty in ascription of guilt, and Silius' tale of the imperial establishment, which draws a distinct line between Romans and their enemies in the respect of the guilt of war. These examples clearly show

9 This is particularly evident in Roman war-centred epic, where civil conflicts are repetitively referred to as *nefas*, *crimen*, or *scelus*. The latter terms refer to the breaking of human laws and orders, while *nefas*, as the most severe crime of all, denotes a violation of the divine law as well as the secular. For further definition of the concept in Roman literature, in epic in particular, see Ganiban 2007, 11–17, O'Hara 2010, 105–106; McNelis 2007.

10 For further discussion, see Henderson 1998, 165–211; Leigh 1997, 292–306; Armisen-Marchetti 2003, 251–258; Utard 2010, 180.

11 See Utard 2010; Martin 2010.

12 In the very first book of the *Punica*, the matter comes up seven times; the most descriptive are lines 1.56–59, where the poet states that *Ingenio motus avidus fideique sinister/is fuit, exsuperans astu, sed devius aequi./armato nullus divum pudor; improba virtus/et pacis despectus honos*. See also 1.10, 1.62, 1.296–297, 1.329–330, 1.539, 1.692–693.

13 Sil. *Pun.* 1.1–8.

how the beginning of war in Roman war epics is a theme loaded with moral overtones that have a crucial role in the construction of Roman identity.

When studying the breakout of war in Roman epic, many scholars have underlined gender difference and the antithesis between the male and female as crucial themes. It is indeed true that the interaction between men and women—whether peaceful or contentious—often has a crucial role in the culmination of a crisis. This might seem somewhat surprising, when we consider the Roman patriarchal gender hierarchy, which in real life left little room for women in the matters of war and peace. In war epic, however, female characters are strikingly active and visible in the outbreak of war. The prominent role of women has sometimes been explained by the poets' efforts to justify the chain of events that leads to the conflict. John Zarker and Paul Burke, for instance, point toward Amata's role in the *Aeneid* as a scapegoat: a character who takes on the *culpa belli* and eventually, by her death, absolves the narrative of it, paving the way for peace.<sup>14</sup> This reading is built on the conception of women as fundamentally non-political characters—from their nature as private beings, it is deduced that women, like divine powers, are not 'real' agents in the public sphere of politics and war. Accordingly, the guilt assigned to them is, as a matter of fact, nobody's guilt. Their actions could be equated with fate or chance, and when the crisis is over, no party is obliged to take responsibility for it.

The problem with this reading appears to be that from the period of civil wars onwards, Roman elite women simply cannot be characterised as domestic beings without political responsibility. Instead, they were active participants in the politics of their husbands, brothers, and children, and—more importantly—they were publicly considered as such. Their actions had a profound influence on the reputation of the men associated with them, and their vices and errors did not go unnoticed by the political adversaries of their family.<sup>15</sup> Against this background, it is highly improbable that the poets of the early Principate, or their contemporary audience, would have considered women

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14 Zarker 1969, 10, 16–17; Burke 1976, *passim*.

15 During the late Republic, elite women's political activity and influence on their family members emerged as a literary topos (see, e.g., Cic. *Att.* 2.12.2, *Cael.* 20.50, 32.78). During the early Principate, this topos was further strengthened, with the exception that now there was one ultimately influential family in the political field of Rome (see, e.g., Suet. *Claud.* 29.1, 44, *Ner.* 7.2, Tac. *Ann.* 12.25.1, 13.5.2–3, 13.6.2). For further discussion, see, e.g., Dixon 1983; Skinner 1983; Hallett 2004. From the end of the second century BCE, elite women also appear to have acted as witnesses in criminal and civil trials (see, e.g., Val. Max. 3.8.6; Val. Max. 8.3; Suet. *Iul.* 74.2; Ulp. *Dig.* 28.1.20.6; 3.1.1.5). Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy & Shapiro 1994, 273.

as easy scapegoats. Certainly, this theory cannot be evoked to bypass their prominent role in the beginning of war.

Another popular explanation for the strong presence of epic women in the outbreak of war is exactly the opposite, and stresses the responsibility and guilt of the female characters. According to Keith, Perkell and Panoussi, in the epic universe the female and the male represent the binary oppositions of nature and civilisation, chthonic and Olympic, destruction and order (and, although these studies do not adopt this terminology, I would add: semiotic and symbolic). This means that the epic female is a destructive force, opposed to the Roman (male) mission of establishing an *imperium sine fine*.<sup>16</sup> While this theory is all-encompassing, it is most often applied precisely to the outbreak of war, which is considered its strongest proof.<sup>17</sup>

In one sense, one can argue more convincingly for this reading than for the scapegoat theory discussed above, since it acknowledges the conflation of the public and the private spheres that is an integral part of any epic narrative. However, its weakness is that it reduces epic women to nothing but women, and reads them exclusively through the lens of gender.<sup>18</sup> While the male characters are examined as having varying motivations for stirring up war, the sole motivation for the women's conduct seems to derive from their innate feminine nature, which is destined to complicate the teleological drive of the epic and to wreak havoc. The women are depicted as womb-driven hysterics, motivated solely by their bodily drives and by the pulsation of the semiotic *chôra*—while, at the same time, this interpretation fails to notice that it is in fact their war-mongering that drives the teleological narrative forward and makes possible the fulfillment of the epic hero's quest.

Arguably, it is highly problematic to examine epic women as a unified group: in the surviving imperial epics, women agitate for war and make an impact on its outbreak for multiple reasons, and sometimes oppose each other while doing so. The varied and conflicting female roles in war epic therefore demand a more refined and a less all-encompassing reading than these two discussed above. In this chapter, I will scrutinise the role of females in the beginning of war, focusing on the concepts of guilt and fury. These concepts, I suggest, are

16 See, e.g., Keith 2000, 89–90; Keith 2007, 62–63; Panoussi 2009, 84, 112, 117–118; Perkell 1981, *passim*.

17 Thus, e.g., Panoussi 2009, 83–91, 124–132; Mack 1999, *passim*; Nugent 1999, 251–252; Monti 1981, 95–96.

18 Thus, for instance, in the *Aeneid*, where Amata's inability to restrain her passions has often been interpreted as deriving directly from her feminine nature. See, in particular, Zarker 1969; Burke 1976; Brazouski 1991; Mack 1999, 142–146.

closely connected to the interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic in the narrative language of epic, and to the construction of Roman identity in the genre. The examination of their gendered aspects, therefore, will be particularly enlightening when we consider the functions of gender in the construction of 'the Roman self', on the basis of the ideology of just and unjust war.

## 1 *Casus belli: War-Bringing Marriages and Ill-Omened Brides*

One of the most prominent and archetypal female roles in war-centred epic is that of a victimised cause of a crisis. In this narrative pattern, the woman herself is usually extremely passive, and her fate becomes a matter that triggers violent action in the male protagonist(s) of the story. The topos itself is evidently present in the Graeco-Roman literary tradition, where it is possible to observe two main variants of the theme. In one of these, war is a result of a marriage, or of the dissolving of a marriage; in the other, it follows the death of a woman. I will first discuss the former, demonstrating that it is a narrative structure repeatedly utilised and modified by the Roman epic poets of the early Principate.

In the Greco-Roman literary tradition, the theme of marriages that lead to war can be most clearly observed in the so-called bride rape stories. Paris' abduction of Helen, followed by an epic war on a massive scale in the *Iliad*, is one of the most ancient representatives of this tradition, and predictably a model for most of the later variants of the theme. It is an archetypal tale of male vigilantes taking revenge in order to restore the honour of the family or the clan—the narrative is strongly focused on the male agents' experience, and the voice of the female victim is almost entirely lacking.<sup>19</sup> Frequent allusions to this archetypal bride rape tale in Greek literature speak of the continuous need or desire to rewrite the story about an unlawful form of wedlock, reflecting contemporary cultural values and ideas. In addition to Helen's story (several times retold),<sup>20</sup> the bride rape is a prominent theme, for example, in the story about

19 In Homeric epic, Helen's agency, feelings or thoughts have a very small role; for some passages where these are speculated on, see Hom. *Il.* 13.625–629 (where Paris is blamed for taking her away by force) and Hom. *Od.* 23.218–224 (where Helen is suspected to have been under a divine 'spell' or 'trick').

20 Euripides' *Helen* is the most prolific source for the study of Helen's textual subjectivity; see also Eur. *Tro.* 991–1009, where Hecuba accuses Helen for lying about being raped by Paris. For further references, see Aeschyl. *Ag.* 403–408, 737–749; Eur. *Andr.* 627–631; Eur. *Or.* 1625–1642; Aristoph. *Lys.* 155 f.; Sapph. fr. 16; Hyg. *Fab.* 92. For references to the story in

Jason and the Argonauts, where the hero runs away with Medea after stealing the golden fleece from her father Aeëtes.<sup>21</sup>

In the Roman context, the story about a bride rape followed by a military conflict holds an important place in the city's legendary history—the rape of the Sabine women was one of the most crucial founding myths of Rome and the Roman people. The cultural importance of the tale was strengthened especially by the works of the Augustan historians Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who made it an important episode for understanding the common past and the ethnic origin of the Roman people.<sup>22</sup> As Hemker and Joshel have convincingly demonstrated, the idea of the female body as a space and place for imperial conquest is particularly evident in this story. Not only do the abducted women embody the continuity of the family line and the merge of the Romans and the Sabines; their violent abduction and docile submission also represent the power balance of this union. The Romans' dominion over the Sabines is naturalised, since it is aligned with the male dominion over the female.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, Keith's equation of sexual conquest of a female body and political conquest of a foreign territory—which she regards as something that marks Roman literature throughout its course—is particularly evident in this Romanised variant of the Helen myth.<sup>24</sup>

The lasting fascination of the bride rape theme in ancient literature was doubtless due to the fact that the narrative structure offered an effective way of discussing many fundamental issues and illuminating values of importance to Greek and Roman cultures. The most obvious points of concern in the storyline are the rightful procedure of making and dissolving a marriage pact, the violation of *patria potestas*, and the role of marital unions in the forming of political alliances. Questions concerning rightful revenge and the justification of war are likewise raised in these tales. Because of this underlying discourse on values, the different versions of this archetypal story can reveal essential differences in Greek and Roman authors' ideas concerning marriage, gender and war: it is against this background that I will scrutinise the variants of this narrative pattern in Roman war-centred epic.

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Roman literature, see Sen. *Tro.* 861–1008; Verg. *Aen.* 2.267–587, 6.494–530; Hor. *Epod.* 17,42; *sat.* 1.3,107; Ov. *Epist.* 16.17.

21 Eur. *Med.* 1–13; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1–103; Val. Flac. *Argon.* 8.1–173. On Virgil's association of Lavinia and Medea, see Mack 1999, 133–134.

22 Liv. 1.9–13; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.30–33, 2.45–46. See also Plut. *Rom.* 14.

23 Hemker 1985, 41–46; Joshel 1992, 112–113.

24 Keith 2000, 40. See also Hemker 1985 (*passim*) and O'Gorman (1993), who notes that in the Graeco-Roman literary tradition, the founding (and naming) of a city is “an uncompromising act of possession and power”. O'Gorman 1993, 145–146.

In Roman epic, one of the best examples where the bride rape storyline figures can be found in book seven of the *Aeneid*, where the outbreak of war between the Trojans and the Latins is depicted. The book opens with Aeneas' arrival in Italy, where he is welcomed by Latinus, king of Laurentum. Encouraged by a divine omen, the king is convinced that he should give his daughter Lavinia, the sole heir to the kingdom, to Aeneas in marriage. Unfortunately, there is another suitor in sight: a young Rutulian noble, Turnus, to whom the princess appears to have been informally promised. As a result of these conflicting interests, a war breaks out, involving nearly all the neighbouring peoples.

Book seven in its entirety is devoted to discussing and explaining the background and the beginning of the war. Since the nature of the earlier agreement between Latinus and Turnus is not indisputable, it remains uncertain to whom the princess belongs, who has been betrayed, and who is the actual villain claiming another man's bride for himself.<sup>25</sup> What is clear, however, is the futility of the war and the unlawful execution of its outbreak. The war in the *Aeneid* is unjust, unnecessary and unholy—a *sacrilegium*, in fact. The narrator stresses this by calling the conflict *arma impia*, *infandum bellum* and *lacrimabile bellum*, and claims that by giving his blessing to the war, the king broke all the bounds *religionis et foederis*.<sup>26</sup>

The Homeric model is made explicit in the speech of the fury Allecto, when she represents the story as a sequel to the Trojan scandal:

*hac gener atque socer coeant mercede suorum:/sanguine Troiano et Rutulo  
dotabere, uirgo,/et Bellona manet te pronuba. nec face tantum/Cisseis prae-*

25 In 7.54–57, Turnus is referred to simply as a suitor, although clearly strongly favoured by the bride's father. The mother, for her part, obviously considers the engagement as decided upon: in 7.365–366, she accuses her husband of breaking *fides* with Turnus, to whom the daughter had been formally promised (*data dextera Turno*). Later on, this view seems to be supported by Latinus himself: in 12.25–31, he confesses that *vincla omnia rupi/promissam eripui genero, arma impia sumpsi*. Nor is the nature of the king's pact with Aeneas unambiguous. In 7.249–273, Latinus invites Aeneas to come and meet him, explicitly promising his daughter as a wife to him in marriage. However, Aeneas never appears, since the outbreak of the war prevents him from doing so. Hence, the validity of the pact could be questioned. For further discussion, see Mack 1999, 132–133, 138–139; Horsfall 2000, 82–83.

26 Verg. *Aen.* 7.583–584, 7.601–622. 7.583–584, 7.604. DeBrohun 2007, 266–269; Mack 1999, 145. The unjustness of the war is made clear also in the episode where Juno opens the gates of war (7.616–622): the ritual procedure of opening the gates and declaring a war is clearly depicted as gone awry here (Virgil describes the traditional manner in *Aen.* 7.601–622; for comparison, see Liv. 1.19.1–2; Hor. *Carm.* 4.15; Aug. *RG* 13).

*gnas ignis enixa iugalis;/quin idem Veneri partus suus et Paris alter,/funestaque iterum recidiua in Pergama taedae.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.317–318

May the father- and son-in-law be united at the cost of their people's lives: Trojan and Rutulian blood will be your dowry, virgin, and Bellona attends you as your matron of honour. Nor was it only Cisseus' daughter who was pregnant with a firebrand and gave birth to bridal flames. Indeed, Venus is alike in her child—another Paris and, again, funeral torches for reborn Troy.<sup>27</sup>

With the help of this internal narrating voice, the poet rewrites the legend of Troy, representing Aeneas in the role of Paris, and Lavinia as the war-bringing bride.<sup>28</sup> Notably, some of the responsibility is ascribed to the bride-rapist's *mother* too: Cisseus' daughter who conceived a firebrand is a reference to Hecuba, whom the fury appears to consider partly guilty for the war, for no other reason than that she gave birth to its cause.<sup>29</sup> This is by no means an unusual rhetorical device in epic: in Statius' *Thebaid*, for instance, Jocasta refers to herself as *mater belli*, since it is her twin sons who are engaged in the destructive conflict.<sup>30</sup> Some epic women, therefore, seem to be condemned to bear the guilt of war merely on the grounds of their biology (and perhaps through their failed performance in the motherly, educational role). Intriguingly, in Virgil's version of the story, it is Venus herself, the great ancestress of the Roman people, who is mother to the rapist of the bride and therefore the *genetrix* of the war. This detail further underlines the moral complexity of Virgil's epic, and the blurring of the line between just and unjust war.

The explicit reference to the Homeric model underlines the gravity of the incipient conflict: the reader of the *Aeneid*, familiar with the tale of Troy, is

27 All translations are my own, unless otherwise mentioned. I am grateful to Brian McNeil for his many helpful comments and suggestions.

28 As noted in Mack 1999, 132.

29 Although there are different versions of Hecuba's ancestry in the canon of classical mythology, she is sometimes identified in this way. See e.g. Eur. *Tro.* 921–922; Cic. *Div.* 1.42; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.12.5. For further discussion, see McAuley 2015, 263–264. Virgil's reference, however, has a double meaning, since “Cisseus's daughter” could be read as a reference to another Cisseus, king of Thrace. This Cisseus allegedly promised his daughter to Archelaus of Argos, in return for military support, but afterwards went back on his word and tried to kill the suitor. In the end, Cisseus ended up being murdered by Archelaus. This version of the myth was depicted in Euripides' fragmentary tragedy *Archelaus*.

30 Stat. *Theb.* 7.483–484.

supposed to expect a similar ruin. Furthermore, that ruin is clearly embodied in the figure of a passive, war-bringing bride. In the beginning of book seven, Lavinia is depicted as performing a sacrifice, when suddenly something goes awry and a foreboding omen is witnessed:

*praeterea, castis adolet dum altaria taedis, / et iuxta genitorem astat Lauinia  
uirgo, / uisa (nefas) longis comprehendere crinibus ignem / atque omnem  
ornatum flamma crepitante cremari / regalisque accensa comas, accensa  
coronam / insignem gemmis; tum fumida lumine fuluo / inuolui ac totis Vol-  
canum spargere tectis. / id vero horrendum ac uisu mirabile ferri: / namque  
fore inlustrem fama fatisque canebant / ipsam, sed populo magnum por-  
tendere bellum.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.71–80

Moreover, when he [the king] kindled the altars with pure torches, and the virgin Lavinia was standing by her father, she seemed (oh horror!) to catch the fire in her long hair. All her ornaments were burning in the crackling flame, her royal locks were lit, and lit was her crown, remarkable for its jewels. Then, enveloped in smoke and yellow light, she scattered the fire throughout the whole palace. This truly was said to be something terrible and marvelous to behold: they sang that she herself would be illustrious in fame and fate, but would bring great war to her people.

As Keith points out, uncontrollable fire as the element of destruction is a widely used symbol in ancient literature; moreover, in Roman epic, it is often connected to destruction-bringing women.<sup>31</sup> This seems like a natural association, given the nature of fire as something powerful and dangerous if it is not controlled. It is telling that very often in Roman epic, overwhelming emotions are referred to by means of metaphors of fire—this means that it is an element strongly associated with threatening bodily drives and the semiotic *chôra*, and with epic women who are observed as embodying these. In *Aeneid* 6, Helen waves blazing torches, inviting the Greeks to Troy to destroy the city.<sup>32</sup> In book four, a flaming pyre is a central feature in Dido's suicide and in her curse that

31 Keith 2000, 73. As Mack has noted, this association indicates Virgil's great debt to Athenian tragedy: in Euripides' *Medea*, for instance, fire is a central element in Medea's destructive rage, and is explicitly present in her gift to Jason's new bride. Eur. *Med.* 1186 ff.; Mack 1999, 132.

32 Verg. *Aen.* 6.518–519.

would bring eternal war between her own and Aeneas' people.<sup>33</sup> Keith argues that like Helen and Dido, Lavinia, too, must therefore immediately be understood as bringing doom to her own people.<sup>34</sup> And while the fire is simultaneously interpreted as signifying a glorious future for the victim herself—here, one can observe a reference to *Aeneid* 2, where Ascanius catches fire<sup>35</sup>—it is nonetheless a future brought about by war and destruction.

It is crucial to notice that Lavinia's passive role in the conflict does not undermine her central position in the development of the crisis. She does not incite or wage war, just as she does not light the fire that consumes her, but passively *catches* fire. In the same way, by her mere existence, without herself lifting a finger, she dooms her people to destruction. Perhaps because of her extreme passivity—notably, she does not speak once in the entire epic—Virgil's Lavinia has often been examined as a prime example of the likening of the woman to the geographical landscape. Syed has argued that the poet deliberately confuses Aeneas' promised land with the flesh-and-blood-woman to such a degree that it is evident that the two are a unity that can be attained only in combination.<sup>36</sup> The territory that Aeneas conquers for his descendants and his marriage that ensures the generational continuum of those descendants are conceptually inseparable. In a similar manner, Keith understands Lavinia as “constitutive of the topography of Italy”: it is her dynastic marriage to Aeneas that ensures the future fertility of the land and the people.<sup>37</sup>

While it is undeniable that the vague and blurry figure of Lavinia appears as little else than a symbol of her homeland, it seems to me that these readings over-emphasise the imperial nature of the conflict in the *Aeneid*. It is tempting to read the narrative of the Latin war as yet another version of the rape of the Sabine women, where the sexual conquest of the male over the female is seamlessly in line with the conquest of the (proto-)Romans over their future allies. To my mind, however, these dynamics do not best describe the war in the *Aeneid*: a war that is more strongly characterised by the rhetoric of civil war than by that of an imperial conflict. Arguably, rather than being a story about Romans' cultural or political conquest of a new area, the Latin war is a founding myth about their origins—it is a war that merges into one various

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33 Verg. *Aen.* 5.3–5.

34 Keith 2000, 73.

35 This incident takes place in book two, when Aeneas is still planning on staying to fight in the collapsing Troy; the divine, cool fire in Ascanius' hair is interpreted as a good omen that encourages Aeneas to escape from Troy in search of a new, glorious future. Verg. *Aen.* 2.679–706.

36 Syed 2005, 137–139.

37 Keith 2000, 49–50.

peoples who are ‘others’ to each other. As Hahn states, none of the peoples in the *Aeneid* is sufficient on its own to offer a model for the ideal Roman-ness.<sup>38</sup> To achieve *Romanitas*, the Trojan identity must be dissolved and merged with the Latin—and the other Italian peoples too will in time let go of their distinct identities and join this union. This is made clear in the final moments of the epic, when Juno finally gives in to Jupiter’s higher plan, and demands:

*cum iam conubiis pacem felicibus (esto)/component, cum iam leges et foedera iungent,/ne vetus indigenas nomen mutare Latinos/ne Troas fieri iubeas Teucrosque vocari/aut vocem mutare viros aut vertere vestem./sit Latium, sint Albani per saecula reges,/sit Romana potens Itala virtute propago:/occidit, occideritque sinas cum nomine Troia.*

VERG. *Aen.* 12.821–828

When they soon make peace with happy wedding ceremonies (so may it be), when they soon come together in laws and treaties, do not order the native Latins to change their old name, nor to become Trojans and be called Teucrians, nor to change their language or alter their clothing. Let Latium be, let there be Alban kings through the ages, and let there be Roman offspring mighty in Italian valour: Troy has fallen, and fallen may it be, along with the name.

She gets her way, as Jupiter promises that

*Sermonem Ausonii patrium moresque tenebunt,/utque est nomen erit; commixti corpore tantum/subsident Teucri. morem ritusque sacrorum/adiciam faciamque omnis uno ore Latinos.*

VERG. *Aen.* 12.834–837

Ausonia’s sons will keep their fathers’ speech and customs, and their name will be as it is now. The Teucrians will sink down, only merged in the mass. I will add sacred customs and rites, and make them all Latins of one tongue.

It is therefore clear that while Aeneas wins the war and ‘gets the girl’, it is not his Trojans who conquer Italy in an imperial fashion. The Latin war as an emergence of a new identity has been discussed for instance by Toll, Ando and

38 Hahn 1984, *passim*.

Bettini, who understand it as a final phase in a process where Aeneas gradually lets go of his Trojan identity and his past.<sup>39</sup> I believe that the character of a war-bringing bride is crucial to this process, because it is the one thing that ultimately enables Aeneas to let go of his Trojan past and become oriented towards the Roman future. While Aeneas' loss of his first wife, Creusa, marks the end of his Trojan-ness and the beginning of his limbo as an exile, the new Italian wife, then, marks the end of his wanderings and signifies his acceptance of a new cultural identity for himself and for his future offspring. This is the reason why the ascription of guilt over the outbreak of war in the *Aeneid* is not a simple matter. It is an ambiguous and delicate matter because, in its core, this is a story about a war between those who should be united as one—it is, in fact, a backwards civil war narrative. Arguably, this is why Virgil avoids being too specific in his distribution of the blame and instead stresses the final unity of the peoples who together will constitute *Romanitas*. This ideology is fittingly expressed in the character of a war-bringing bride—for although she brings destruction, she is also the starting point for the new era of *concordia* and peace. Her flaming hair is simultaneously a good and a bad omen, just as the war that she causes is both destructive and beneficial. The war-bringing woman, as a link that connects peoples, is what ultimately enables the dissolving of ethnic and cultural barriers in the *Aeneid*.

The epic archetype of a war-bringing bride can be found Statius' *Thebaid* too. The Flavian poet, however, modifies the tradition further: in his epic, there are no wrongly claimed brides, nor is the war between Argos and Thebes a direct result of a marriage. Instead, the marriage is represented as a prerequisite for the war. At the beginning of the poem, the Theban prince Polynices wanders in exile lusting for revenge against his brother, until Adrastus, king of Argos, welcomes the exile to his city. Polynices seals his alliance with the king by marrying his daughter, Argia. In the same ceremony, Deipyle, the king's other daughter, is given as wife to Polynices' friend and brother-in-arms, Tydeus. All this is, in a sense, preparation for Polynices' military alliance with Argos, and for his upcoming war against Thebes. Along with the bride, the Theban prince receives the backup necessary for his revenge on his brother.

Although the marriage is not a direct cause for the war in the *Thebaid*, Statius deliberately connects his epic to the literary tradition about war-bringing brides. When depicting the double wedding at Argos, the poet plays with an imagery that makes clear that what is at hand is an inauspicious union and a

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39 Ando 2002; 139–141, Toll 1997, 43; Bettini 1997, 30–31.

foreboding of doom. This threatening atmosphere is explicitly associated with the brides themselves. Every feature of Argia's and Deipyle's wedding appearances is a harbinger of war: even their virginal beauty is described as that of Pallas and Diana, "both fierce in weapons, both fierce in face" (*utraque telis, / utraque torva genis*).<sup>40</sup> When describing young brides, language that so obviously recalls war and violence is striking.

*Omina dira* of war are omnipresent in many other aspects of the wedding ceremony, as well. During the bridal procession to Pallas' temple, the decorative shield falls off the roof, overwhelming the bridal torches.<sup>41</sup> Once again, uncontrollable fire becomes an element associated with ill-omened brides; it implies tumult and revolt against the social order and forebodes the destruction brought by war. Next, from the depths of the temple, a terrifying sound of a war trumpet is heard, as if to foreshadow the future events.<sup>42</sup> To complete the ill-omened imagery of the wedding ceremony, Argia is depicted as wearing Harmonia's necklace, one of the most infamous objects in Greek mythology.<sup>43</sup> In the Graeco-Roman tradition, not only was this legendary item closely associated with the tragic fates of Thebes, but its fatality was also strongly personified in the person wearing it.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, by having Argia dress up in Harmonia's necklace, Statius simultaneously marks her as a member of the cursed Theban family line *and* stigmatises her as the harbinger of doom to her father's house and to her own people.<sup>45</sup> In the *Thebaid*, Harmonia's necklace is not a direct reason for anything; rather, it is a symbol of Argia's fatal position between her husband and father. *She* is the reason; or rather, the enabler.

40 Stat. *Theb.* 2.237–238. The entire passage 2.230–243.

41 *praemissasque faces, festum nubentibus ignem, / obruit*. Stat. *Theb.* 2.256–260.

42 Stat. *Theb.* 2.260–261.

43 Stat. *Theb.* 2.265–267.

44 According to the legend, Vulcanus, in order to avenge Venus' affair with Mars, forged a cursed necklace and gave it to her daughter Harmonia, the bride of the Theban king Cadmus, as a wedding gift. After having led both Harmonia and her husband to ruin, the necklace passed on to their daughter Semele. She, too, was destroyed after getting involved in the conflict between Jupiter and Juno. Another famous owner was Oedipus' mother Jocasta, whose love affair with her son was considered to be due to the power of the necklace. For the several variants of the story of the necklace, see Rocchi 1989, 130–134 in particular.

45 What is special about the necklace in the *Thebaid* is its direct association with the omens of war. In Statius' representation of the necklace, the item is associated, not with private suffering, but with a political conflict. As McNelis points out, the object is "not only a harbinger of evil, but also an impetus for war". McNelis 2007, 53, 55. See also Keith 2000, 96–97.

With the help of subtle allusions both to the epic tradition and to the mythological canon, Statius therefore depicts Argia as an epic bride of destruction *par excellence*: she is the link that unites the father and the son-in-law and makes possible the advent of war. This message is underlined in book three, where the princess, now married to Polynices, outgrows the role of a passive trophy bride and adopts a more active role, suitable to a matron. At the end of the book, Argia approaches her father and, relating her husband's longing for revenge, explicitly begs the king for a war:

—*tu solus opem, tu summa medendi/iura tenes; da bella, pater, generique  
iacentis/aspice res humiles, atque hanc, pater, aspice prolem/exsulis—  
nescis, pater optime, nescis/quantus amor castae misero nupsisse marito./et  
nunc maesta quidem grave et illaetabile munus,/ut timeam doleamque,  
rogo—*

STAT. *Theb.* 3.695–698, 3.704–707

Only you can help, you hold the high power to heal. Give war, father: look at the lowly affairs of your fallen son-in-law and look at this child of an exile.—You do not know, O best of fathers, you do not know the extent of the love of a chaste wife who is wedded to an unhappy husband. And now, heartbroken, I ask indeed for a heavy and joyless favour—to be allowed to fear and grieve.

It is noteworthy that Argia asks not only for permission for Polynices to begin the war, but also for the necessary backup. Her husband is dependent on Argos' support, and cannot wage his war without Adrastus' troops. Hence, Argia, as a matter of fact, is begging her father to drive his own people into the midst of warfare—an enormous economic and emotional burden.

When Argia pleads to her father, she faithfully observes all the structures of norms prescribing the behaviour of an obedient daughter. Her speech is respectful and timid, her comportment submissive. Most importantly, Argia's humble appeal does not compromise the power balance within the patriarchal family—she makes clear that she recognises her father's superiority, both in regard to herself and in regard to her husband. Accordingly, although the content of Argia's request might be audacious, its manner could hardly be considered provocative in the eyes of Statius' contemporary audience. In effect, Argia could be considered a prime example of a woman 'absorbed' into the logic of the symbolic order—her 'warmongering', while it has an emotional motivation, is structured by the rules of reason and rhetoric. She does not question the hierarchic power structures of the patriarchal family and society, any

more than she questions the logic of language in getting her plea across to her father. There is no sign of maenadic fury or violence about her: Argia is a woman who completely submits to the Law of the Father—in all possible senses of that expression.

Statius therefore appears to recall the Virgilian model when he depicts an epic marriage as a matter that, on the one hand, brings about a destructive war and, on the other, enables an exile to pursue a new identity. Just as in the *Aeneid*, the passive and instrumental role of women in political alliances is strongly emphasised, since the *casus belli* tradition understands marriage primarily as a link between families and peoples. This is hardly surprising, since marriages as fortifiers of political unions were an all-important phenomenon in Roman political life—the epic tradition concerning ill-omened brides exploits and enforces society's established gender dynamics, and stresses the female role as a link between the men and as a catalyst for male agency.<sup>46</sup> In this narrative structure, women do not pose a threat to the logic according to which the community operates, and they do not give in to the overwhelming and uncontrollable turmoil of their emotions, which might endanger that order. They are channels and mediums, not active agents.

What is, nevertheless, noteworthy are the violence and the destruction that seem to be inscribed into this instrumental role of women: in the universe of Roman epic, all the marriages intended to fortify a political alliance lead to the battlefield. The female role is associated with war, not with peace—instead of fortifiers of beneficial friendships, the brides become ill-omened war-bearers. To some extent, epic women's 'failure' to become peaceful links between the men of their families certainly reflects the anxieties of the Roman civil war period. In the last century BCE, the ideal of a mediating matron wavered, since even the most virtuous of women could not prevent the outbreak of violence. The familial union between Pompey and Caesar that was formed to maintain peace ended at Julia's death in 54 BCE. A generation later, the disappointment was repeated when Antony's marriage to Octavia ended in divorce in 32 BCE, thus enabling open hostility between the ex-triumvirs. In Roman literary tradition, these disappointments became iconic events that manifested the fragility of family-based political alliances. This tradition can be clearly observed in

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46 See, e.g. Plutarch and Cassius Dio on Mark Antony's marriage to Octavia, Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 31.2–3, 35, 52.2, 57.4–5; Cass. Dio 50.3.2. On Julia and Pompey, see App. *B Civ.* 2.19; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 23; Vell. Pat. 2.47.2; Liv. *Per.* 106; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 53. On Octavian's short-lived marriage to Fulvia's daughter Clodia Pulchra, see Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 20.1; Cass. Dio 46.56.3. The significance of a marriage pact in the forming of political alliances becomes evident also in Cicero's disappointment at Tullia's marriage to Dolabella, see Cic. *Fam.* 3.12.3.

Roman epic, where the passive role of women as links between the men of their families is marked by war, death and destruction. In the *Pharsalia*, Lucan depicts Julia's death as a direct cause of the civil war. The poet participates in the same discourse as Virgil and Statius when he states that

*Nam pignora iuncti/sanguinis et diro ferales omine taedas/abstulit ad manes Parcarum Iulia saeva/intercepta manu. Quod si tibi fata dedissent/maiores in luce moras, tu sola furentem/inde virum poteras atque hinc retinere parentem/armatasque manus excusso iungere ferro,/ut generos soceris mediae iunxere Sabinae./Morte tua discussa fides, bellumque movere/permisum ducibus.*

LUC. *Phar.* 1.111–120

For when Julia was cut off by the cruel hand of fate, she bore with her to the underworld the promise of offspring united by blood and the wedding torches which the terrible omen had turned into funeral torches. If only Fate had granted you a longer life, Julia, only you could then have restrained the fury of your husband on one side and your father on the other. You might have struck down their swords and made them clasp their armed hands, as the Sabine women, stepping between the sons- and the fathers-in-law, joined them together. But loyalty was quashed by your death, and it allowed the generals to pursue war.

Lucan's version of the story portrays Julia's death as the final straw that leads to the conflict between the father and the son-in-law.<sup>47</sup> The political background of the situation is understated, since the emphasis is put on the breaking of familial loyalty between *socer* and *gener*. Lucan's representation of Julia's death introduces to Roman epic another variant of a classical *casus belli* theme: The death of a woman as a cause of war. The topos is closely connected to bride rape stories, especially in its Roman context, where the tales of Lucretia and Verginia are the best representatives of the tradition.<sup>48</sup> In both of these legendary stories, the unjust death of a woman marks a milestone in Republican history, and results in a political upheaval that transforms the structures of society. During the early Principate, these stories were a crucial part of the patriotic imagery, that is, the selection of stories that shaped the Romans' understanding of their

47 In this, the poet follows the narrative tradition of Roman historiography: compare Liv. *Per.* 106, App. *B Civ.* 2.19, Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 23, *Vit. Pomp.* 53, Vell. Pat. 2.47.2.

48 On Lucretia, see Liv. 1.57.6–60.3, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.64.4–85.4. On Verginia, Liv. 3.44.1–54.15, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 11.28.1–44.6.

shared past. In the tales about Lucretia and Verginia, the victimised female body becomes a tool for the forming of Roman identity and, as Keith points out, the Roman political institutions and defining virtues are established “over her dead body”.<sup>49</sup>

This is the literary discourse that Lucan participates in when he relates the story of Julia’s death. However, the Neronian poet seasons the tradition with cynical overtones characteristic of his civil war epic. While the deaths of Lucretia and Verginia provoke righteous outrage and bring about the rise of Republicanism, Julia’s death leads, instead, to an unholy familial war and to a dissolving of democratic governance. It would appear that, in Lucan’s view, these elements are just as crucial parts of the shared history and the collective identity of the Romans as are the abovementioned virtues, and just as important to remember. Another step away from the earlier tradition is that in the *Pharsalia*, the woman’s death is not the ultimate cause of action; rather, it is the final condition for it. In this sense, the Julia passage is more closely linked to the *virgo moritura* archetype of the Greek tradition.<sup>50</sup> However, the differences are as obvious as the similarities. Whereas the sacrificial virgin must die so that the just war can begin, Julia, instead, should have stayed alive to prevent an unjust one. Lucan brilliantly blends the literary models of both Greek and Roman tradition, creating a mytho-historical hybrid that underlines the woman’s inability to fulfil her role as a beneficial link between the male protagonists, and turns her into a symbol for the less flattering characteristics of ‘the Roman spirit’ and the collective past.

The narrator utilises the concept of *fides* to stress the severity of the situation and the unholy nature of the war in question. Epic *fides* is a holy bond, the breaking of which stains the breaker with the guilt of war.<sup>51</sup> With *morte tua discussa fides*, Lucan therefore places the quintessential responsibility for the

49 Keith 2000, 103–104; See also Donaldson 1982, 103–118; Hemker 1985, Richlin 1992, Joshel 1992.

50 In this mythical structure, a ritual death of a sacrificial maiden assures the proper execution of a war. The best-known example is Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigeneia in order to assure the divine protection in the Trojan War. On Iphigeneia, see Eur. *IA* 1540–1580; Eur. *IT*; Apollod. 5.3.21 f.; Hyg. *fab.* 98.261. On Polyxena, e.g., Eur. *Hec.* 177–437, Eur. *Tro.* 260–270, 622–629. The story is also referred to in the fragmentary material of Sophocles’ plays. For versions of these stories in Roman literature, see Lucr. 1.80–103; Ov. *Met.* 12.24–38, 13.182–195, 13.441–480.

51 In the *Punica*, for instance, the narrator states about Hannibal: *Ingenio motus avidus fideique sinister/is fuit*, Sil. *Pun.* 1.56–57. See also 1.8–11, 1.169–170, 1.296–297. For further discussion, see e.g. Ripoll 1998, 124–125, 277–279, 411–415; Freyburger 1986; Hölkeskamp 2000.

civil war on the death of Julia. *Tu sola* emphasises Julia's unique position in the affairs of the family and the state, while the reference to the Sabine women further highlights the wasted opportunities. The *Pharsalia* implies that Julia could have become a modern Sabine woman—she *could* have stood between the warring parties and thrown herself between their weapons. However, in the grim reality of civil war, this potential is never actualised. The time of legendary heroines is long past, and the reader of the *Pharsalia* knows that this time, there will be no saviour-bride and no peace within the family and the state. Julia's death emphasises the difference between the good old legendary past and the desperate era that the poem depicts. In a characteristically cynical way, Lucan manifests the fragility of the heroic myths: Instead of lamenting the death of an avenged or sacrificed woman, he creates a new Roman myth discussing the lost opportunity for peace. The gender dynamics and expectations of legendary history and Roman historiography are turned upside down, to accentuate the desperation typical of the *Pharsalia*. Instead of enforcing the social order and promoting the characteristic Roman virtues in men, Julia's death reveals the shattering of the patriotic identity that is based on these virtues.

The *casus belli* character, therefore, appears to be crucial to all three poems discussed here. Virgil, Lucan and Statius all utilise the theme in their own ways, depicting either the formation or the deformation of identity through war. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia frees him from uncertainty and exile and provides him with a new cultural identity. In the *Thebaid*, the marriage to Argia does the same for Polynices; for both these epic heroes, getting the bride they want offers them the means to unite their past and their present into a comprehensive whole.<sup>52</sup> In this equation, the war-bringing bride is not only the *locus* of male agency, but also a factor that enables the collapse of the old idea of the self—and, potentially, the formation of a new identity. The main difference between the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid* in this respect can be observed in the amount of optimism. Whereas Virgil's reader is invited to believe that it is possible to achieve unity through war, Statius cherishes no such illusions. In this sense, Argia is a failed Lavinia. The union that she, as an ill-omened bride, symbolises turns out not to be successful but catastrophic, and the war that her marriage brings about engenders not unity but dissolution. Statius, thus, exploits the Virgilian rhetoric concerning the female role as a *casus belli*, but his way of dealing with the theme is gloomier. The Flavian poet highlights dis-

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52 Evans briefly discusses Aeneas' marriage with Lavinia as a matter that bridges the Trojan and the Latin identities. See Evans 2003, 45–59, 55–59.

solution rather than unity, and stresses the destructive impact that war has on the identity of the individual and the community.

Understandably, the Virgilian hopefulness is lacking in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, too, where the war is a civil war, fought between family members. The woman who could have been the uniting link between the factions is removed from the stage before the story even begins. Thus, the self-destructive drive of the civil war appears as an antithesis to a coherent Roman identity. Lucan reverses the Virgilian example of a *casus belli* theme, since Julia becomes the antonym of Lavinia, and the war, instead of being a glorious foundation myth, ends up as a swan song of the disintegrating *Romanitas*.

None of these women, however, can be easily categorised as being marginal to the narrative structures of the epic or to its ideological content. They occupy a central position in the story, and by their mere existence they drive the flow of the narrative forward, bringing about its most significant event: the war. It can even be argued that Argia temporarily achieves literary subjectivity, since her carefully constructed and logical plea to her father is likely to make the projected reader relate to her viewpoint and perhaps even identify with her. If there is marginality to be found, it is doubtless related to the instrumental role of the epic *casus belli*. These women are, in the end, so entirely absorbed into the male ideology of the poem, and reduced to links and tools in the relations between the protagonists, that they disappear into the tapestry of the patriarchy. In their relationship to the symbolic order, there is nothing rebellious or subversive—and this is why they are often overshadowed by other, more radical and transgressive, epic women, whom I will next discuss.

## 2 Warmongering Furies and Active Agitators

While the *casus belli* character is most typically utilised to discuss the underlying reasons and motives for war, the warmongering woman, in turn, becomes an embodiment of the emotional turmoil that precedes the conflict. Through her, the pressure and pulsation of the semiotic *chôra* are released into the narrative: she is precisely the reason why destructiveness and susceptibility to emotions are characteristics that have often been associated with women in epic.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the warmongering woman is also a prime example of a character who is simultaneously both central and marginal—while she succeeds

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53 For the association between epic women and destructive emotions, see Zarker 1969; Burke 1976; Brazouski 1991; Mack 1999, 142–146; Benario 1970; Monti 1981, 83–96. Syed 2005, *passim* (esp. 116–135).

in grabbing the reader's attention, she is however unlikely to become a point of identification to him. Usually, these kinds of female characters were deliberately represented in a way that was likely to generate feelings of perplexity and strangeness in the projected primary audience of the poems—namely, in the elite Roman citizen male. Not only do these characters' active agency in political matters blur the line between the public and the private spheres,<sup>54</sup> but—most importantly—as women who incite violence and destruction, they challenge the fundamental patriarchal idea that defines the woman's role as a *genetrix*: the creative, life-giving force.<sup>55</sup>

This female archetype is not typical of epic alone; in fact, the war-mongering woman is one of the best-known figures of Roman historiography. Little of Roman historiography dating to the Republican period survives, so it is impossible to know whether the topos was as prominent then as it is, for instance, in the works of Plutarch, Appian, and Dio—without a doubt, the fascination with Cleopatra during the early Principate increased the popularity of the theme. However, the origins of the literary archetype can be detected already in the late Republican sources. In the works of Cicero and Sallust, the few Roman women that crossed the line of appropriate female behaviour and meddled in matters of war are repeatedly turned into *exempla* of moral decline and of the decay of female *pudicitia*. Most notably, Fulvia, the wife of Mark Antony, is recurrently criticised for being a dangerous woman with an insatiable lust for power and war.<sup>56</sup> It is notable that in Fulvia's case, her political

54 Although the complete exclusion of women from public life was not a feature of Roman society and culture, the ways in which it was appropriate for women to behave in public were much more strictly defined than those of men. Roman women always had to take into consideration the requirements of *pudicitia*, a characteristically female virtue that could have been considered violated by too bold public speaking or, in some cases, by public speaking at all (see Val. Max. 8.3). Significant factors in assessing the women who appeared in the public sphere were, of course, age and social standing. Generally, matrons had more liberty in expressing their opinions and in appearing in public than young, unmarried, girls. For further discussion of this tradition in Roman historiography, see, e.g., Mustakallio 2012.

55 The idea of the reproductive and nourishing female body's immanent connection to nature is ancient; its literary expressions can be traced back to the earliest surviving Greek literature. See e.g. Hom. *Il.* 3.243; *Od.* 11.301; Hes. *Theog.* 126 ff., 571 ff. This idea is frequently found in Roman literature, e.g., in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, see 2.589–591, 2.594–599, 5.795–796, 5.805–817. For further discussion of this subject, Keith 2000, 36–64.

56 Cic. *Phil.* 2.113, 4.4, 3.4, 5.22, 13.18. As Manuwald states, in the *Philippics*, Cicero deliberately paints negative portraits of Antony's followers (Manuwald 2011, 208); it is telling that Fulvia's activity in the public sphere and her bloodthirsty nature appear as the most degrading things imaginable in a woman.

and military activity was clearly perceived as related to her loose morals and to her frustrated sexual desires.<sup>57</sup>

It is telling that in Roman historiographic sources, the woman's bloodlust is often described in highly sexualised terms. The warmongering women are represented as venting their sexual frustration in the matters of war and violence, hence distorting the traditional female role. This sort of rhetoric speaks of two fundamental ideas that underline patriarchy: first of all, the woman is observed as a bodily being, unable to 'break free' from the chains of the flesh and to fully enter the temporal scene. Secondly, the different animalistic bodily drives that threaten the logic of symbolic order—death and sex drives in particular—are considered interchangeable, and they often find their most powerful expression through one another.

The archetype of a warmongering woman in Roman historiography is an important literary model and a background for the many dangerous women of Roman epic. In addition to this tradition, Roman epic reflects the traditions of classical mythology, which is particularly apparent in the poets' fashioning of the *furiae*. Known as Ἐρῆνύες in Greek literature, these were chthonic deities who occasionally rose on Earth to spread discord among mortals.<sup>58</sup> In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the most prominent of the Furies is Allecto, "in whose heart lamentable wars, angers, deceits and destructive crimes dwell" (*cui tristia bella/iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia cordi*).<sup>59</sup> In Statius' *Thebaid*, it is Allecto's sister Tisiphone who is summoned by Oedipus to sow the seeds of war in Thebes.<sup>60</sup>

57 In addition to the insinuating and offensive depictions by later imperial authors, there is archeological evidence on the matter: sling bullets have been recovered from the site of the siege of Perugia, with inscriptions that represent the bullets as aimed at Fulvia's clitoris and at the oral and anal openings of Octavian's body. Vell. Pat. 2.74.3; see Hallett 2006 and 2015, Brennan 2012.

58 The Furies' role as agents and agitators of war obviously compromises their virginal *pudicitia*; hence, the gender ambiguity that apparently was already discussed in Roman Republican epic. Keith, who has studied the representation of women in the *Annals* of Ennius, notes that the poet uses the word *uirago* to describe a Fury. This word, an amalgamation of *vir* and *virgo* is little used in Latin literature; generally, it is to be understood as referring to a woman (or more accurately, a maiden), who has adopted the ultimate male role. Keith 2007, 64. Keith refers to Servius' definition: *uirago dicitur mulier quae uirile implet officium*. Serv. *Aen.* 12.468. See also Isid. *Diff.* 2.80 (*dicta—uirago, uel quod a uiro sumpta sit, uel quod sit masculini uigoris*) and Isid. *Orig.* 11.2.22 (*uirago—quae uirum agit, hoc est opera uirilia facit*). These examples are given in Keith 2007, 64.

59 Verg. *Aen.* 7.325–326. Tisiphone is mentioned twice, once as guarding the prison of the tortured souls, and once as raging in the middle of the battlefield in the Latin war. 6.548–572, 10.758–761 (*pallida Tisiphone media inter milia saeuit*). Megaera appears only once in the *Aeneid*, in 12.848–868, when she calls Iuturna back from the battlefield.

60 Stat. *Theb.* 1.56 ff. Another fury mentioned by name in the *Thebaid* is Megaera, Tisiphone's

Tisiphone is present in Silius Italicus' *Punica*, too, where she drives the people of Saguntum to a violent mass-suicide.<sup>61</sup> The Flavian poets' Tisiphone is clearly modelled on Virgil's Allecto; the similar appearance and nature of all three strengthen the epic archetype of a *furia*.<sup>62</sup>

Rather than being independent goddesses of the chthonic order, *furiae* in Roman epic appear as embodiments of discord and bloodlust, comparable to personified ideals such as Virtus, Pietas and Fides.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, incomprehensible dissonance as an essential part of their being is exactly what distinguishes the Furies from other warmongers of epic. They are ill-bringing and merciless by nature, not because of any—rational or emotional—reasons. For the Furies, any battle will do, because their whole existence is about spreading discord: they personify *furor*, the destructive and uncontrollable rage that leads to war and violence.<sup>64</sup> In the epic universe, *furor* is perhaps the most recurrent and powerful expression of the Kristevan bodily drives that are charged through the semiotic and that press on the logic of the symbolic order. It is a kind of rage and frenzy that originates outside the mind and reason—its motivation is illogical and bodily. Fittingly, *furor* often finds its best expression not in words but in the body: it is communicated with Bacchic revelry, with averbal wailing or screaming, or with uncontrollable violence (either against the self or against others). *Furor* is beyond words and escapes all reason. Simultaneously, however, it is an indispensable motivation and a driving force for epic action—not only does it wreak havoc on cities and peoples, but it also carries the narrative forward and steers the epic towards its *telos*. Because of its role as simultaneously constructive and destructive, *furor* can be considered the best expression of the semiotic in the narrative language of epic. Consequently, the Furies, who are personifications of this drive, are the best representatives of the threatening otherness of the *chôra*. They are the antithesis of the celestial sphere and the

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sister, who is repeatedly spoken of, but who does not appear in person. Stat. *Theb.* 1.477, 1.712, 3.641, 4.636, 11.60.

61 Sil. *Pun.* 2.526–707.

62 For comparisons, see, e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 7.323–329, 7.445–455, Stat. *Theb.* 1.88–113. Sil. *Pun.* 2.543–552. In Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the divine agitators of war are considerably fewer than in Virgil's, Statius', and Silius' poems. Still loyal to the Virgilian tradition, Lucan, too, mentions Tisiphone and Megaera (1.577, 6.730).

63 Panoussi 2009, 143. Mack (1999) has perceptively defined the epic fury not as an avenger but rather as “discord personified”. See also Huskinson, who discusses the paradox of representing male qualities of military strength and prowess in a female form. Huskinson 2000, 8.

64 Panoussi 2009, 84–85, 89–90.

Olympian gods; like the semiotic itself, they are necessary, but also feared and despised—in the *Aeneid*, it is stated that even the chthonic gods loathe them.<sup>65</sup>

While the epic Furies, therefore, appear as personifications of semiotic *furor*, it is important to notice that in effect they are but messengers and pawns through which this *furor* is channelled in the interaction between gods and mortals. It is characteristic of Roman epic that the bloodlust and the warmongering gradually spread from the divine level to the human; in this process, *furiae* function as the instruments of divine anger. The original plan never comes from them; nor are they capable of carrying out any havoc without the help of mortal men and women. This characteristic of the Furies makes them even more interesting when studied with the Kristevan framework in mind. It seems that these characters—the personifications of the threatening otherness—are actually not others at all but rather *abjects*: characters that serve the purpose of estranging and alienating (‘pushing out’) the *furor* that dwells in divine and human hearts. At the very beginning of the *Aeneid*, the narrator refers to Juno’s *ira* (a slightly more controlled form of anger), wondering how such a rage can dwell in the minds of gods (*tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*).<sup>66</sup> The question seems significant, all the more so since it remains unanswered: it expresses the narrator’s genuine confusion in the face of the merge between the symbolic and the semiotic, the celestial and the chthonic, the logic of the mind and the drives of the body. Later on in the epic, the Fury Allecto comes to solve this problem, since *she* becomes the pawn into whom Juno’s anger is located. Allecto works as Juno’s minion who embodies her rage, stirring up bloodlust in mortal hearts. The narrative function of the Fury is to get her hands dirty, so that the queen of gods can keep hers clean.

The same could be said about the mortal warmongers of Roman epic. While in war epic, bloodlust—like almost any impulse or action—usually originates in the divine sphere,<sup>67</sup> the rage and the destruction that divine powers initiate is, in the end, always implemented by humans. It is typical of the epic narrative

65 Verg. *Aen.* 7.327–328. For further discussion of the nature of the Furies in epic, see, e.g., Panoussi 2009, 89–92; Mack 1999, 143–147; Monti 1981, 89.

66 Verg. *Aen.* 1.11. On the concepts of *ira*, *furor*, *rabies*, see Fantham 1997, 198–199, 200–203; Gill 1997, 215–218, 236–241; Wright 1997, 179–184; Delarue 2000, 83–85, 159–160; Ripoll 1998, 328–332, 432–440, 468–520.

67 Feeney discusses the phenomenon in depth; see Feeney 1991; also Syed 2005, 153–154. It should be noted that despite the constant presence of gods in Roman war epic, the divine origin of human feelings, desires and fears is occasionally questioned by some poets. The best known example is Nisus’ speech in the *Aeneid* (Verg. *Aen.* 9.184–185). Lucan is a remarkable exception in the epic tradition, since he generally leaves very little room to gods in the *Pharsalia*. Von Albrecht 1999, 227–228. See also Baier 2010, *passim*.

to blur the line between humans and gods by making human characters take on attributes of deities when executing their plans. This is particularly common when the plans and motives in question are destructive in nature. In the Roman war-centred epics, one can find a string of mortal women who become embodiments of chthonic *furor* to such a point that they almost seem to turn into Furies themselves.<sup>68</sup> In this role, they are able to release the pulsation of the semiotic *chôra* into the society and into the narrative.

Intriguingly, the warmongering women of Roman epic bear striking resemblance to each other—so much so, in fact, that it is justifiable to talk about an epic archetype. They are usually matrons or widows, slightly older (but not necessarily past their child-bearing years), and belong to the ruling elite of society—and these factors mean that they wield a great deal of social power and authority. What makes their role as the instigators of bloodlust all the more complicated is that, as the above-mentioned social status clearly shows, these women have been deeply indoctrinated into the patriarchal society's values and mechanisms. In Kristeva's words, they have been "identifying with the values considered to be masculine", and have hence become "the most passionate servants of the temporal order".<sup>69</sup> This role, however, collapses violently and suddenly in the outburst of the semiotic pressure—the "hysterical symptoms"—that makes the woman forsake the behaviour dictated by social norms, and turns her into a most powerful and dangerous instigator of chaos and destruction.

Perhaps the most classic example of the archetype of a warmongering *regina* is Dido in the *Aeneid*.<sup>70</sup> While Dido's past as a refugee and her status as a self-proclaimed queen make her more 'rebellious' or 'subversive' than many other queens in the epic tradition, she is, at the same time, the best imaginable example of a woman 'playing a superman', in order to succeed in the temporal scene. And succeeded she has: until Dido meets Aeneas and falls in love with him, it seems she has been making all the right decisions. Instead of getting into a destructive circle of revenge with her treacherous brother, she has fled with the treasury, prioritising her own future and starting anew in a new land. When the Trojan refugees arrive, she is playing the benevolent ruler, supervising the building of her city and maintaining diplomatic relations with the neighbouring peoples. Dido's identification with the male role, therefore, seems to serve her rather well—until it does not.

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68 Keith 2000, 67–69; Syed 2005, 183.

69 Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 155–156).

70 Characterised as such, e.g., in Syed 2005, 142–145, 162–176.

Although Dido's infatuation with Aeneas is depicted as an extremely corporeal and emotion-driven experience that escapes reason and logic, it is noteworthy that at the very beginning of her story, there actually seem to be rational motives behind her feelings. When Dido's sister Anna tries to convince the queen to pursue a relationship with the Trojan refugee, she makes use of arguments both personal and political:

*o luce magis dilecta sorori,/solane perpetua maerens carpere iuventa,/nec  
dulcis natos Veneris nec praemia noris?—ne venit in mentem, quorum con-  
sederis arvis?/hinc Gaetulae urbes, genus insuperabile bello,/et Numidae  
infreni cingunt et inhospita Syrtis;/hinc deserta siti regio lateque furentes/  
Barcae. quid bella Tyro surgentia dicam/germanique minas ...?/dis equi-  
dem auspiciibus reor et Iunone secunda/hunc cursum Iliacas vento tenuisse  
carinas./quam tu urbem, soror, hanc cernes, quae surgere regna/coniugio  
tali! Teucrum comitantibus armis,/Punica se quantis attollet gloria rebus!*

VERG. *Aen.* 4.31–33, 4.39–49

You who are dearer to your sister than the light, are you going to whittle all your youth away, lonely and sad, and not know sweet children or the bounties of Venus?—And do you not recall in whose lands you have settled? On this side Gaetolian cities, a race invincible in war, and the unrestrained Numidians, and the inhospitable Syrtis surround you; on that side an area of dry desert and the Barcaeans, raging far and wide. And what am I to say of the wars rising from Tyre, or of your brother's threats ...? It was with the gods' favour and Juno's helping, I believe, that the Trojan ships took their course here with the wind. What a city you will see here, sister, what kingdoms you will see rise, through such a marriage! If we join forces with Teucric arms, how high will Punic glory, by so many great deeds, rise?

Dido's sexual and romantic attraction to Aeneas is inseparable from the political factors that underlie her infatuation. But as the story moves forward, all these rational arguments in favour of the marriage are pushed to the background, and Dido is depicted as a lovesick lunatic, completely driven on by her bodily drives, which she can scarcely herself understand, let alone control. Because she is a woman, she is depicted as behaving as women are considered to behave, slaves to the body and to the womb in particular. It is crucial to note that there is another way of telling this story, a way that would grant Dido more subjectivity and construct her as a character that the projected Roman reader could understand and even relate to—but the narrator deliberately avoids this

road, and instead of stressing the rational, political side of Dido, lets it fade away, thus representing her as failing in her male role as a monarch.

Close to the end of book four, the reader gets another glimpse of the rational side of Dido's motivation. When it has become clear that Aeneas is leaving and that there is no hope of changing his mind, Dido seems most bitter about not having conceived a child. She claims that

*saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset/ante fugam suboles, si quis mihi  
parvulus aula/luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret,/non equidem  
omnino capta ac deserta viderer.*

VERG. *Aen.* 4.327–330

At least, if I had conceived a child of yours before your flight—if here in my halls a little Aeneas was playing, whose face, despite everything, would remind me of yours, I would not consider myself completely defeated and abandoned.

Again, while it is clear that a male heir would primarily mean political stability for the state, the poet decides to stress the emotional side of these vain hopes. Through Dido's secondary, internal narrating voice, Virgil delivers the idea that is one of the building blocks of the patriarchal worldview: namely, that women are primarily defined by their reproductive capability, and have an all-consuming, inborn need to bear children. Instead of stressing Dido's failure as a monarch—her being unable to secure the dynastic continuity—the poet stresses her failure and inadequacy as a woman, unable to fulfill the purpose of her existence.

Dido, therefore, is put into the classic double-bind: as a woman who identifies with the values considered masculine, she fails to be taken seriously because of her sex, and because of the author's and the reader's preconception of her. As a political leader who is not male, and as a woman who is not a mother, she is not a real man, but not a real woman either—and as a result of this impossible position, Dido eventually gives in to her desperation and resorts to the semiotic drives of her body. However, even at the very end, these drives do not completely have a hold on her or surpass the logic of her actions. It is crucial to notice that, while Dido is repeatedly depicted as being in a hysterical state and 'out of her mind', her suicide is not, in fact, an act of impulse. Instead, it is a well-planned ritual sacrifice, the purpose of which is to ensure that the gods of the underworld, placated with her own blood, will make Aeneas suffer. Dido's motivation may therefore be grounded in uncontrollable emotional turmoil, but her actions follow a very clear logical track. What is more, her *furor*

does not render her speechless, or make her “withdraw into her silent body as a hysteric”.<sup>71</sup> Before taking her own life, the queen delivers an articulate speech that is the most venomous declaration of war in the whole of Roman epic:

*haec precor, hanc uocem extremam cum sanguine fundo./tum uos, o Tyrii,  
stirpem et genus omne futurum/exercete odiis, cinerique haec mittite nos-  
tro/munera. Nullus amor populis nec foedera sunt./exoriare aliquis nos-  
tris ex ossibus ultor/qui face Dardanio ferroque sequare colonos,/nunc,  
olim, quocumque dabunt se tempore uires./litora litoribus contraria, fluc-  
tibus undas/imprecor, arma armis: pugnent ipsique nepotesque.*

VERG. *Aen.* 4.621–629

This I pray, this last speech I pour out with my blood. Then you, oh Tyrians, persecute with hatred his future stock and the entire race to come, and grant my ashes this boon. Let there be no love or treaties between the peoples. Arise from my ashes, some avenger, to pursue the Trojan settlers with fire and sword—now and hereafter, whenever we are given the strength! May coasts with coasts collide, I pray, and waters with waves, arms with arms: let them fight, both themselves and their descendants.

Dido's speech is a powerful amalgam of a prayer and a curse.<sup>72</sup> What is especially dangerous about it is that, besides agitating for *instant* war, it dooms the entire Roman *future* to eternal warfare. In addition to the Punic Wars, the queen's curse foreshadows the Latin war that Aeneas is about to face in the latter part of the *Aeneid*:

*si tangere portus/infandum caput ac terris adnare necesse est,/et sic fata  
Iovis poscunt, hic terminus haeret:/at bello audacis populi vexatus et  
armis,/fnibus extorris, complexu avulsus Iuli,/auxilium imploret videatque  
indigna suorum/funera,*

VERG. *Aen.* 4.612–618

If that abominable scoundrel must be allowed to touch the harbour and sail to the shore—if Jove's destiny demands it, and that is where his goal lies—then at least, harassed in war by the arms of a bold race, exiled from

71 Oliver 1993, 108.

72 On magical, chthonic elements of Dido's curse, see Tupet 1970.

his borders, and torn from Iulus' embrace, let him beg for help, and witness the inglorious death of his people!

Dido, therefore, has clearly thought her plan through, and she intends its impact to be as far-reaching as possible. Frantic and furious as she is, she does not seem to be completely out of her mind or incapable of rational planning—arguably, her death scene manifests the perfect union of the symbolic and the semiotic. By letting the drives of the *chôra* flow through her, while still maintaining her reason, she is able to deliver the most impressive speech in the entire epic, a speech that lacks neither bodily motivation nor verbal expression. This does not lift the weight of marginality that the narrative forces upon her: she is unquestionably still the unidentifiable other to the projected Roman male reader. However, in her desperate reaction to this marginality, Dido finds her voice that—ironically—is perhaps the best example in the *Aeneid* of the formation of the speaking subject in the interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic modalities.

The episode paves the way for the most elaborate web of intertextual allusions in Roman war epic—and for the development of the literary character of a blood-lusting foreign queen, the Absolute Other. In order to understand the development of this archetype and its significance for Roman identity, it is crucial to grasp the historical references in Virgil's mythical narrative. Dido's suicide, in addition to providing the legendary past for the Punic Wars, immediately reminds the reader of more recent Roman history: another war, another queen, and another sacrifice made for the Roman mission towards the Empire. The association between Dido and Cleopatra is obvious, and unsurprisingly, it has been widely discussed by previous scholars.<sup>73</sup> In this context, the matter is of major importance, because it elucidates the significance of gender in the epic discourse concerning the justification of war.

Virgil's choice to utilise a legendary past to deal with recent history speaks of his reluctance to make many direct references to the civil wars. In the case of Cleopatra, there are astonishingly few mentions of her in the whole of the *Aeneid*: when the battle of Actium on Aeneas' shield is described, the queen is mentioned in ten lines, but her role in the development of the conflict is not discussed at all.<sup>74</sup> However, with regard to the position of the *Aeneid* as the great patriotic epic of the Augustan age, the reader expects Octavian's triumph over Egypt to be discussed on some level—and the character of Dido

73 See, e.g., Benario 1970; Williams 2001; Monti 1981; Horsfall 1990.

74 Verg. *Aen.* 8.688, 8.697–698, 8.706–713.

offers a solution to this issue.<sup>75</sup> It has been argued before that Virgil's characterisation of Dido as a warmongering Fury is, in effect, designed to assign this role to the Actian Cleopatra.<sup>76</sup> Syed, who considers the story of Actium as "a fundamental text for the Western orientalist discourse", argues that the two queens are amalgamated into a character against which Roman political discourse defines *Romanitas*.<sup>77</sup>

This point could be further illuminated by discussing how Lucan deals with the Virgilian model. In the *Pharsalia*, the poet builds his representation of Cleopatra steadily on the epic tradition, and the allusions to Virgil's Dido are particularly obvious. In book ten, the poet discusses Caesar's sojourn in Egypt, harshly scolding his foreign mistress:

*Dedecus Aegypti, Latii feralis Erinys,/Romano non casta malo. Quantum  
inpulit Argos/Iliacasque domos facie Spartana nocenti,/Hesperios auxit  
tantum Cleopatra furores./Terruit illa suo, si fas, Capitolia sistro/et Romana  
petit inbelli signa Canopo/Caesare captivo Pharios ductura triumphos;/Leu-  
cadioque fuit dubius sub gurgite casus,/an mundum ne nostra quidem mat-  
rona teneret./Hoc animi nox illa dedit, quae prima cubili/miscuit inces-  
tam ducibus Ptolemaida nostris./Quis tibi vaesani veniam non donet  
amoris,/Antoni, durum cum Caesaris hauserit ignis/Pectus?*

LUC. *Phar.* 10.59–72

The shame of Egypt, the fatal Fury of Latium, whose unchastity was Rome's great calamity. As the wicked beauty of the Spartan woman overthrew Argos and Troy, so did Cleopatra stir up the frenzy of Italy. Her rattle shook the Capitol (dare I say it) and with unwarlike Canopus she stood against the Roman standards, hoping to lead Caesar captive in an Egyptian triumph. And by the time of Leucas [the battle of Actium], it was a question of whether the world should be ruled by a woman who was not even one of ours. Her impudence was due to that night which first brought the lewd descendant of the Ptolemies to the bed of a Roman general. Who can refuse to forgive you for your insane love, Antony, when even the hard heart of Caesar took fire?

75 For references to this subject in other poetic works of the same period, see Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.6–17, Prop. *Eleg.* 3.11.39–46, 49–51, 57–58. On the much-debated question of poetic freedom and independence in the Augustan era, see Griffin 1984 and Zetzel 1982.

76 See, e.g., Benario 1970, 2–6; Horsfall 1973–1974, 1–13; Keith 2000, 68–69; Syed 2005, 184–193; Reed 2007, 73–100.

77 Syed 2005, 177–178, 186, 191.

Lucan's depiction of Cleopatra as *Latii feralis Erinys* reflects the narrative, popular among the Augustan authors, that blamed the civil war and its culmination at Actium on the queen.<sup>78</sup> Antony's alliance with Cleopatra gave Octavian a pretext to frame his war as a foreign conflict, instead of declaring war on another Roman commander.<sup>79</sup> However, besides alluding to this historiographic tradition, Lucan's choice of words also immediately calls to mind Dido's promise to eternally haunt the Romans with war. This means that the poet's representation of Cleopatra as a Fury set to destroy the Romans is not only a respectful nod to his epic predecessor, but also an effort to establish the Dido-Cleopatra association as a solid part of the Roman epic tradition.

What is more, this association is utilised to construct an archetype that is larger than either Dido or Cleopatra alone: the figure of the Absolute Other, a character against which Roman-ness is defined. *ne nostra quidem matrona* underlines Cleopatra's otherness both in terms of gender and in terms of ethnicity and culture. She is a non-man, a non-Roman—and on top of everything, a queen, something that the Roman Republican mindset was traditionally averse to. She is therefore an antithesis of the Roman citizen male, and the very last person who should wield imperial power over the world.

Nevertheless, as is often the case, when one scratches the surface of the Absolute Other, what is revealed is actually an *abject* other—a character who is estranged and alienated by exaggerating the characteristics that make her different. According to Kristeva, abjection is a way of distancing oneself from the threatening world of animalism, imagined as representatives of sex and murder.<sup>80</sup> This is why the death and the sex drives, in particular, can often be observed as the defining elements of the Absolute Other: the locating of these uncomfortable aspects of humanity into 'the other' creates an illusory line that distinguishes human from animal, the mind from the body and the symbolic from the semiotic—and establishes a clear hierarchy between the two. Accordingly, abjection, in its very core, is an illusion of control, achieved through a creation of the Other.

78 Farrell & Nelis 2013, 3–4. Besides the episode in *Aeneid* 8, see Prop. 2.31, 4.6; Hor. *Carm.* 1.31, 1.37. Lucan's description of Cleopatra's bloodlust recalls Propertius' notion that *scilicet incesti meretrix regina Canopi, / una Philippeo sanguine adusta nota, / ausa Iovi nostro latrantem opponere Anubim, / et Tiberim Nili cogere ferre minas, / Romanamque tubam crepitanti pellere sistro, / baridos et contis rostra Liburna sequi, / foedaque Tarpeio conopia tendere saxo, / iura dare et statuas inter et arma Mari. / septem urbs alta iugis, toto quae praesidet orbi, / femineas timuit territa Marte minas.* Prop. 3.11.39–58.

79 See, e.g., Williams 2001, 195–196.

80 Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 229–246).

In Lucan's treatment of Cleopatra, this kind of typecasting can be clearly observed. The poet makes use of the *meretrix regina* archetype, representing the queen as a dangerous seductress who bewitches the Roman generals and uses them to satisfy her bloodlust.<sup>81</sup> This is apparent by the way in which the narrator recurrently implies that Caesar, mesmerised by Cleopatra's allure, was about to give the Empire away. He states that "he preferred to give Pharos as a gift [to her], rather than conquer it for himself" (*donare Pharon, dum non sibi vincere mavolt*), and blames Cleopatra for being "not content with the crown of her own, or her brother for a husband" (*nec sceptris contenta suis nec fratre marito*).<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the poet further emphasises the connection between Cleopatra's sexual insatiability and her lust for power, claiming that she "runs from one husband to another, possessing Egypt and providing her services to Rome" (*interque maritos/discurrens Aegypton habet Romamque meretur*).<sup>83</sup>

These passages clearly recall Jupiter's fear that Aeneas, conquered by the charms of the foreign queen, might put the interests of Carthage before his own mission.<sup>84</sup> In the *Aeneid*, the hero comes close to forsaking his destiny; when Aeneas' heart is softened by Dido's love, he seems content with the idea of ruling on the twin thrones of Carthage with the queen.<sup>85</sup> However, the idea is completely against the Fate, as Jupiter's messenger Mercury reminds:

*tu nunc Karthaginis altae/fundamenta locas pulchramque uxorius urbem/  
exstruis? heu! regni rerumque oblite tuarum!*

VERG. *Aen.* 4.265–267

Are you now laying the foundations of mighty Carthage and building a beautiful city, under your wife's heel as you are? Alas! Forgetful of your own kingdom and your own business!

One of Virgil's most obvious allusions to Cleopatra, this passage reflects the idea spread by Octavian's party during the civil wars: that Antony, bewitched by the queen, would move the centre of power from Rome to Alexandria.<sup>86</sup>

81 On the concept and its particular association with Cleopatra, see Wyke 2009.

82 Luc. *Phar.* 10.81, 10.138.

83 Luc. *Phar.* 10.359.

84 Verg. *Aen.* 4.259–264.

85 See Verg. *Aen.* 4.259–264. Dido's wish to share her throne with Aeneas is mentioned in Anna's speech in 4.47–49: "*quam tu urbem, soror, hanc cernes, quae surgere regna/coniugio tali! Teucrum comitantibus armis,/Punica se quantis attollet gloria rebus!*".

86 Cass. Dio 50.5.3–50.6.1; for further discussion, see Williams 2001, 195–196. According to

Lucan's rewriting of this story, when he describes Cleopatra's degrading influence on Caesar, immediately calls to mind the Virgilian model, strengthening the archetype of a dangerous seductress queen who will conquer and destroy Rome—either by means of sex or by means of war.<sup>87</sup> The Absolute Other, therefore, appears as a war-bringing Fury in whose person the terrifying sex and death drives are merged. She is the complete opposite to the self and subject of the epic, but at the same time, it is implied that the subject is not immune to her corrupting influence. She constructs *Romanitas* by being different from the Roman citizen male—but at the same time, the reader gets an uneasy feeling that the citizen male is not safe from turning into her.

This point is of primary importance, since it concerns the gradual unmasking of the Absolute Other as the abject other. It seems, in the tradition of Roman war epic, that ultimately the danger of the Absolute Other lies in her ability to 'contaminate' the subject. However, if the subject and the other were so fundamentally different in essence, why would there be a danger of that? Or is the difference only skin-deep—and that is the truly horrifying thing about the other? According to the Kristevan theory, what the subject really fears about the other is the inescapable truth that they are, in fact, the same, or at least used to be at some prior stage of existence. In the passage quoted above, Lucan tells how Cleopatra "stirred up the frenzy of Italy" (*Hesperios auxit—Cleopatra furores*). Intriguingly, this choice of words makes it seem that the threatening and irrational *furor* that Cleopatra is blamed for is not only something characteristic of *her*, but something that resides in the Latin hearts as well, only waiting to be evoked by the Absolute Other.

To top it all, even the *direction* of this interaction and this contamination is not as clear as it would seem at first sight. There are two specific lines in the passage quoted above that make the reader feel that perhaps the guilt of war

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Williams, Antony was considered "more conquered by, than conqueror of, the Orient"—not a victor who made Egypt a part of the Roman Empire, but a mere tool in Cleopatra's pursuit for the dominion of the world. On Cleopatra's alleged influence on Antony, see also Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 25.1, 60.1.

87 Lucan stresses the link between Cleopatra and Virgil's Dido through various allusions and references to the *Aeneid*. The scene where Cleopatra is shown feasting with Caesar is strikingly similar to the banquet given by Dido to Aeneas. The choice of words when describing the splendour of the feast and the appearance of the queen explicitly recalls the Virgilian narrative. Compare Luc. *Phar.* 10.107–171 with Verg. *Aen.* 1.637–642, 1.697–708. The allusion is underlined further, when Cleopatra is represented as clothed in the "fabric of Sidon" (*Candida Sidonio perlucet pectora filo*, Luc. *Phar.* 10.141); *sidonia* is an attribute that Virgil uses to describe the Carthaginian queen throughout his epic. Verg. *Aen.* 1.446, 4.137; the parallel passage concerning Dido's dress can be found in 4.682.

should not be seen as external to Roman society, but should instead be internalised. When the poet describes the corrupted personality of the queen, he states that “her impudence was due to that night which first brought the lewd descendant of the Ptolemies to the bed of a Roman general” (*hoc animi nox illa dedit, quae prima cubili/miscuit incestam ducibus Ptolemaida nostris*).<sup>88</sup> The implication seems to be that Cleopatra’s promiscuous and bloodthirsty nature is not an innate characteristic of the queen—on the contrary, it was *she* who was first corrupted by the Romans.

Thus, Lucan has no inhibitions about revealing the civil war for what it really is. Although he harshly blames Cleopatra for being a man-eating, power-hungry harlot queen who uses Caesar and Antony to wreak havoc on Rome, at the same time it is implied that Caesar is the one who corrupted her in the first place. The foreign woman is not a tool, or a scapegoat, or the origin of destruction, but is equally guilty with the Roman citizen male of bringing about the war. Thus, Lucan paints a picture of civil war as an event that, instead of constructing or strengthening Roman identity in contrast to the other, calls it utterly into question.

This idea of the shared guilt of war is another way in which Lucan makes use of the Virgilian model. It is crucial to note that it is not only Dido’s radical otherness, but also her underlying ‘sameness’ that is reflected in Lucan’s Cleopatra. As Horsfall points out, there are many similarities between Dido and Aeneas in Virgil’s epic—more than the differences, in effect. They are both exiles, recently widowed and striving to start afresh in a new homeland.<sup>89</sup> This special relationship between Aeneas and Dido appears to be allegorical of the relationship between Rome and Carthage. As Jacobs notes, the defining characteristic of the relationship between these two Mediterranean powers, before the destruction of Carthage, was not their difference but their similarity: in their military might and imperialistic behaviour, Carthage and Republican Rome appeared as mirror images.<sup>90</sup> In a sense, Dido and Aeneas are symbolic of their peoples, who have similar aims and who face similar obstacles, and who therefore understand each other, until their interests clash.

It would be easy to disregard the underlying similarity of Dido and Aeneas by stating that it is something that characterises the beginning of their story, and is designed to anticipate and emphasise its tragic end. However, it can also be speculated whether Dido and Aeneas’ underlying sameness could, in fact, be a way of implying their shared guilt over the future destruction. Undeniably,

88 Luc. *Phar.* 10.68–69.

89 Horsfall 1973–1974, 6. Dido herself points this out in Verg. *Aen.* 1.628–630.

90 Jacobs 2010, 123–139. See also Gruen 2011, 134–135; Pyy & van der Keur 2019.

Dido is the warmonger whose curse condemns Romans and Carthaginians to an eternal enmity. But is it not Aeneas who turns her into such a character? At the beginning of Virgil's epic, Dido is a considerate and peaceful monarch—by the end of book four, she has turned into a bloodthirsty Fury much like Lucan's Cleopatra. And this is not only because of her liaison with Aeneas, but also because of the way in which it ends. In book four, Dido explicitly asks Aeneas to delay his departure until her rage has calmed down.<sup>91</sup> He does not; instead, he flees in the dead of night, without so much as a farewell.<sup>92</sup> As Gruen has suggested, Aeneas causes Dido's death, and he shares her blame for the clash between their peoples.<sup>93</sup>

This is particularly crucial with regard to Dido as Cleopatra's *alter ego*. By revealing Dido and Aeneas' underlying sameness, and by implying their shared guilt of war, Virgil initiates a discussion that Lucan continues when he assimilates the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra. It appears that locating the guilt of war in the foreign seductress queen is not as simple as it seems at first sight. In the epics of Virgil and Lucan, the foreign woman certainly is more a warmonger than an innocent scapegoat; however, it is the man who turns her into one. In the end, the construction of common identity on the basis of difference and war guilt seems tricky, because, in a civil war, there are no innocent parties.

Virgil's Dido, therefore, can be considered a starting point of many discussions of the beginning of war and its justification in the tradition of Roman war epic. Another variant of the theme can be found in Silius Italicus' *Punica*, where the poet depicts Dido's death as one of the underlying motives for the second Punic War.<sup>94</sup> In the first book of the poem, Hannibal swears eternal hatred towards Rome at the place of Dido's death, by her ghost and in front of her statue. In a temple dedicated to Dido's spirit, the founder of Carthage is depicted with the Trojan sword laid at her feet—the sword with which Virgilian Dido took her own life.<sup>95</sup> The poetic effect is powerful; although Dido herself is not physically present, she is the fuel that ignites the conflict.<sup>96</sup> It has been

91 Verg. *Aen.* 4.429–434.

92 Verg. *Aen.* 4.554–583.

93 Gruen 2011, 135. This also seems to be implied in the episode where Dido and Aeneas yield to their desire and spend the night in the cave on their hunting trip; it is stated that *ille dies primus leti primusque malorum/causa fuit*. Verg. *Aen.* 4.169–170.

94 Reed 2007, 73–100.

95 Sil. *Pun.* 1.81–122. *ante pedes ensis Phrygius iacet* (1.91). Hannibal's oath strongly associates Dido's spirit or shade with a native war goddess, which strengthens the link between the queen, the war and the patriotic imagery: *hanc mentem iuro nostri per numina Martis, per manes, regina, tuos*. Sil. *Pun.* 1.118–119.

96 As Keith points out, Hannibal is strongly associated with 'feminine warmongering'

argued that Silius uses Dido to emphasise Hannibal's responsibility for starting the conflict—and indeed, the dramatic scene at the place of Dido's death stresses the impression of Hannibal as the threatening other, whose motivation is grounded in the emotional sphere, rather than in political reasoning. His decision to break the pact with Rome is depicted as an act of bitterness, fuelled by the fate of his father and by the fate of the queen—by stressing this, Silius constructs cultural identity in contrast to the enemies of Rome, and strengthens an idea of Romans as the righteous and reasonable people who honour their treaties.<sup>97</sup>

This, however, is not the only way of reading the episode. It is crucial to point out that while Hannibal certainly becomes a warmonger in the *Punica*—the *ultor* that Dido calls for in the *Aeneid*—Dido herself appears more as a pitiable victim than as a blood-thirsty *dira*. Silius' Hannibal acts out of the conviction that Dido was wronged by Aeneas' treacherousness, just as the Carthaginians of his and his father's generation have been wronged by the treachery of Aeneas' descendants. Silius' Hannibal believes Dido's version of the story—the version that one can find when reading between the lines of the *Aeneid*, according to which Dido and Aeneas were married and his leaving her was a *nefas*. Therefore, Dido's narrative voice from the *Aeneid* finally gets heard in Silius' *Punica* and, in this way, resonates throughout the Roman epic tradition. Unlike most epic women, Dido eventually has someone to hear her out, and someone who relates to her, in another epic and in another day and age. In this web of warmongering and shared guilt, it is difficult to rule who started what in the first place—and this is one of the elements that make the *Punica* as much of an epic about the civil war as it is an epic about an imperial war. For Silius, too, Dido represents a mirror against which *Romanitas* can be defined—but much as in the case of Virgil and Lucan, this mirror turns out to be disconcerting, since what it ultimately reflects is the image of the self.

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throughout the epic. He is both the instrument of Juno's rage and Dido's rightful avenger, and this characterises him as the executor of the *forces majeures* against the Romans. Keith 2000, 91–92.

97 The issue over the guilt of war in the second Punic War was not an unambiguous matter, as we see in the differing opinions of Roman authors who discuss the topic. On the one hand, we are told that Carthage repeatedly breached a treaty with Rome after the first Punic War (see e.g. Plut. *Vit. Cat. Mai.* 26–27); on the other, Polybios claims that the main cause of the second Punic War was the seizure of Sardinia by the Romans (see Polyb. 3.10.3–5, 3.15.10, 3.30.4). In most contemporary studies, the prevalent conception is that by attacking Saguntum, Hannibal did not technically violate any treaty with Rome. Dominik 2003, 477. For further discussion of this subject, see Gruen 2011, 122–132.

### 3 Divine Interventions and Semiotic *furor*: Virgil's Amata and Turnus

As the case of Dido shows, the warmongering women who defy the binary opposition between female frenzy/male rationality are often the most multifaceted and memorable characters in the Roman war-centred epics. They cannot be easily categorised either as 'absorbed' into the male ideology of the poem, or as 'opposed' to its teleological drive. While they disrupt the flow of the narrative and shake the temporal order by agitating for chaos and destruction, they simultaneously constitute the dynamic force that drives the story forward, and towards its ultimate goal. Besides Dido, another excellent example of this kind of character is Amata, the queen of Laurentum, who in *Aeneid* 7 is largely responsible for igniting the war between the Trojans and the Latins. Arguably, Amata has rarely been recognised for the complex character oscillating between reason and emotion that she is—usually, she has been labeled as a textbook example of a 'transgressive' epic woman, doomed to be erased from the narrative.<sup>98</sup>

Amata's reputation is largely due to her role as the pawn of divine *furor*. She is the channel through which the Fury Allecto releases her venom into the Laurentian society, and because of this direct connection to the chthonic sphere, we can observe Amata herself taking on some of the characteristics of the Fury. At the beginning of her story, however, there is no sign of destructive drives about her. On the contrary, her position as the queen of Laurentum makes it clear that she is a woman completely capable of adapting to the patriarchal society's ways of functioning—and has benefitted from them personally. However, in book seven, Amata has to face the limits of her power within the system, since she is bitterly disappointed at her husband's decision to marry their daughter off to Aeneas. At the beginning of *Aeneid* 7, we are told that the queen had strongly preferred Turnus, whom she, "driven by wondrous love, was in a hurry to link to her as her son-in-law" (*quem regia coniunx/adiungi generem miro properabat amore*).<sup>99</sup> When Allecto first finds her, she is mulling the matter over in her heart with ardour 'typical of women': we are told that "[overcome by] a woman's passion, she was troubled by cares and angers over the arrival of the Trojans and Turnus' marriage," (*super adventu Teucrum Tur-nique hymenaeis/femineae ardentem curaeque iraeque coquebant*).<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, Amata is a receptive target for the Fury's meddling: the seed of anger

98 Zarker 1969; Burke 1976; Brazouski 1991; Nugent 1999; Mack 1999, 142–146.

99 Verg. *Aen.* 7.56–57.

100 Verg. *Aen.* 7.344–345.

already resides in her heart, and all she needs is a little push for this seed to grow into full-blown *furor*. This push comes in the form of Allecto's venomous snakes; the narrator relates how

*huic dea caeruleis unum de crinibus anguem/conicit, inque sinum praecordia ad intima subdit,/quo furibunda domum monstro permisceat omnem./ille inter vestis et levia pectora lapsus/volvitur attactu nullo, fallitque furentem/vipeream inspiras animam; fit tortile collo/aurum ingens coluber, fit longae taenia vittae/innectitque comas et membris lubricus errat.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.364–353

The goddess flings onto her a snake from her dark hair, and thrusts it into her breast, into her innermost heart, so that, driven mad by that monstrous creature, she would go and enmesh the entire house. Slipping between her clothes and her smooth bosom, it finds its way unfelt by the frantic queen, and breathes its viperous breath. The giant snake becomes a twisted gold necklace; it becomes a garland in her long ribbons, it entwines itself in her hair, and slithers over her limbs.

On the one hand, the reader is told that Amata's anger is already present in her heart before the Fury's meddling; on the other hand, it appears to penetrate her mind without her even noticing. It seems, therefore, that the difference made by Allecto's intervention is that it transforms Amata's anger from reasonable and righteous anger into uncontrollable bodily frenzy. In the passage quoted above, before Allecto's arrival, Amata's feelings are described as *ira* and *cura*, and the queen herself as *ardens*—and while *ardens*, undeniably, carries connotations that hint at the loss of emotional control, these terms can otherwise be seen as referring to powerful emotions that nevertheless still involve thinking and reasoning. It is only *after* Allecto releases her snake on Amata that this element of reasoning disappears and is replaced by an overwhelming emotion that seems to derive from deep within the body. Notably, this is when *furor* appears for the first time: the queen is now described as *furibunda* and *furens*, terms which clearly manifest her loss of control over her own feelings. On the narrative level, the moment when Allecto's snake gets to the queen, is therefore the moment when the semiotic pressure on the symbolic language makes its presence known.

Intriguingly, the advent of the semiotic, however, does not mean that all logic would instantly go out of the window. Instead, the poem builds up the suspense by having the two modalities coexist in Amata's person, before the scale gradu-

ally falls in favour of the *chôra*. Immediately after Allecto's interference, the queen is shown pleading with her husband:

*Ac dum prima lues udo sublapsa veneno/pertemptat sensus atque ossibus  
implicat ignem,/necdum animus toto percepit pectore flammam,/mollius et  
solito matrum de more locuta est,/multa super natae lacrimans Phrygiisque  
hymenaeis:/exsulibusne datur ducenda Lauinia Teucris,/o genitor, nec te  
miseret nataeque tuique?/nec matris miseret, quam primo Aquilone relin-  
quet/perfidus alta petens abducta uirgine praedo?—quid tua sancta fides?  
Quid cura antiqua tuorum/et consanguineo totiens data dextera Turno?—'*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.354–362, 7.365–366

And while at first the disease, sinking in as liquid poison, thrills her senses and envelops her bones with fire, not yet has her mind absorbed the flame in all her heart. Softly, as is the usual habit of mothers, she spoke, shedding many tears over the marriage of her daughter and the Phrygian: “Is it to the exiled Teucrians that Lavinia is given in marriage, O father? Have you no pity for your daughter and for yourself? Have you no pity for her mother, either, whom with the first north wind the faithless traitor will abandon, steering for the deep with the girl as his booty?—What about your sacred promise? What about your age-old care for your own people, and your right hand so often offered to your kinsman Turnus?”

Although the Fury's poison is slowly being absorbed into her breast, at this point, the queen is still able to connect to the logic of the symbolic order. She appeals to the king's familial pity, sheds tears, and stresses her own and her daughter's suffering. She then proceeds to find logical arguments for her case. Since Latinus is convinced that Lavinia should marry a foreigner, Amata endeavours to assure him that Turnus, being of alien origin, could also be considered a stranger.<sup>101</sup> Amata's appeal—a combination of emotional and rational entreaties—is described as *solito matrum de more*. The words imply that this manner of speech is not only appropriate for an elite matron, but something that could be expected from one. Like Argia's plea to her father in Statius' *Thebaid*—clearly fashioned on this Virgilian model—Amata's speech does not question the hierarchy of power within the family, nor does the queen overstep her boundaries in the role that the society assigns to her. She still plays

<sup>101</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 7.367–372.

by the logic of language and by the rules of the temporal scene—but underneath the surface, the pressure of the *chôra* is waiting for its ultimate release.

When her petition has no influence on the king, Amata's cup boils over. Suddenly, she rejects all conventional patterns of conduct and is overcome by irrational fury. We read:

*His ubi nequiquam dictis experta Latinum/contra stare videt, penitusque in viscera lapsum/serpentis furiale malum totamque pererrat,/tum vero infelix, ingentibus excita monstris,/immensam sine more furit lymphata per urbem./ceu quondam torto volitans sub verbere turbo,/quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum/intenti ludo exercent—ille actus habena/curvatis fertur spatiis; stupet inscia supra/impubesque manus mirata volubile buxum;/dant animos plagae: non cursu segnior illo/per medias urbes agitur populosque ferocis.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.376–384

When, after trying in vain with these words, she sees that Latinus stands against her—when the snake's frenzied poison has been absorbed deep into her flesh and roams all through her—then, indeed, the wretched one, aroused by great horrors, rages unbridled and demented through the vast city. As sometimes a spinning top, which boys intent on play drive in a big circle around an empty courtyard, turns under the lash—driven by the whip, it speeds on, round after round, and the childish crowd marvels over it ignorantly, awed at the spinning boxwood, and the blows give it life—thus, with her course none the less swift, she is driven through the midst of cities and fierce peoples.

Amata's complete loss of self-control is a perfect example of a situation where the words fail an epic protagonist and, as a result, she resorts to the semiotic modality of communication. The logic of language and rhetoric was of no use to Amata, so now she rushes around aimlessly, like a spinning top that children play with—the metaphor strengthens the impression that she is possessed by *furor* and not in control of her actions.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, the queen is referred to as *lymphata*, and her behaviour as *sine more*. The latter term in particular makes it clear that Amata's public display of emotions is something very unsuitable to a royal matron. The narrator stresses the contrast between this episode and Amata's earlier plea to the king: suddenly, her behaviour has been transformed

102 Verg. *Aen.* 7.378–382.

from *solito matrum de more* into *sine more*. The juxtaposition of a respectable queen and a raging lunatic is striking, and its poetic effect powerful.

This contrast, however, is not as clear-cut as it might seem at first sight. As McAuley has perceptively pointed out, while Amata's behaviour is controversial in view of social norms, she herself does not see it as such: she still appears to believe that her behaviour is in line with her role as a mother.<sup>103</sup> When she incites the other matrons of the city to join her in her revels, she does this in the name of their shared motherhood:

*Io matres, audite, ubi quaeque Latinae:/si qua piis animis manet infelicis  
Amatae/gratia, si iuris materni cura remordet,/solvite crinalis vittas, capite  
orgia mecum.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.400–403

O mothers of Latium, wherever you are, listen to me! If in your pious minds you still have goodwill for miserable Amata, if concern for the maternal rights stings you, loosen the ribbons from your hair, join the revels with me!

It is noteworthy that in Amata's own mind, the violation of her maternal authority is the main motivation for her outburst. It is not only her pride and her feelings that have been hurt by Latinus' inflexibility, but her right as a mother to have a say in her daughter's marriage. Therefore, even if she is enraged and out of control, she is not spreading havoc and destruction only for the sake of it—in her opinion, she appears to be fighting for the power and authority that are due to her. As McAuley points out, the narrative in book seven is constantly blurring the line between “conscious agency” and “Dionysiac loss of control”, and between what constitutes “aberrant” maternal behaviour and what is *inherently* maternal behaviour, “i.e. either natural or conventional”.<sup>104</sup>

McAuley also brilliantly examines Amata as Dido's textual counterpart in this sense. She argues that Virgil's two queens are “both culpable and victimised, torn apart by the impersonal forces of *fatum* and convention”: Dido because she was deceived and robbed of her *pudicitia*, Amata because her maternal right, sanctioned by custom, has been taken away from her.<sup>105</sup> The frantic frenzy of both of Virgil's queens, therefore, can be read as a reaction to

103 McAuley 2015, 78.

104 McAuley 2015, 78–79.

105 McAuley 2015, 81.

the epic's attempts to marginalise and dismiss them. Both Dido and Amata are women who, at the beginning of their stories, are doing their best to 'make it' in the patriarchal society by playing by its rules and by honouring its inner logic. It is only after they have become bitterly disillusioned with that system, and after they are robbed of whatever little power they thought they were entitled to, that they are seized by *furor* and respond to the call of the *chôra*. Their outbursts, therefore, could be considered as prime examples of 'hysterical symptoms'—that is, psychological anxiety related to the inevitable and continuous marginalisation of women within and by the patriarchal society.

In Amata's case, these symptoms gradually spiral out of control, because she eventually seems to completely forget the rational motivation that she had for her outrage and merely revels in her madness—or, in Kristeva's words, "takes her jouissance in an anti-Apollonian, Dionysian orgy".<sup>106</sup> After rushing through the city, she flees into the forests and indulges in Bacchic revelry. By now, the queen seems to be completely out of her mind: at one point, she is represented as devoting her daughter to Bacchus, but only a few lines later, she sings wedding songs for Turnus and Lavinia.<sup>107</sup> To make matters worse, the other matrons of the city catch the queen's frenzy.<sup>108</sup>

*fama volat, furiisque accensas pectore matres/idem omnis simul ardor agit  
nova quaerere tecta./deseruere domos, ventis dant colla comasque;/ast  
aliae tremulis ululantibus aethera complent/pampineasque gerunt incin-  
tae pellibus hastas.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.392–396

Rumour travels fast, and the matrons, their hearts kindled by fury, are all driven on by the same frenzy, to seek new shelters. Their homes abandoned, they bare their neck and hair to the winds. Others fill the air with vigorous howling and, dressed in calf-skins, carry spears wrapped with vine.

The Bacchanalia episode in *Aeneid* 7 has been repeatedly read as an expression of female opposition to the male-dominated society and as a juxtaposition

106 Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 154).

107 Verg. *Aen.* 7.385–391, 7.397–400.

108 As Zarker observes, in Roman epic, matrons as a collective group tend to represent 'the public opinion'. Zarker 1969, 10; Zarker 1978, 22. The issue has also been addressed by Quinn, who considers Virgil's epic matrons an important internal audience and a reflection of the Euripidean chorus in the *Troades*. Quinn 1968, 282, 348.

of civilisation and nature.<sup>109</sup> However, some scholars have also observantly stressed another aspect of the episode, pointing out that instead of proper cult practice, Amata's actions are only *simulatio numine Bacchi*—imitation, or feigning, of the actual ritual practice.<sup>110</sup> This can be read as a reflection of Amata's distorted maternal role: just as her behaviour has turned from the traditional into *sine more*, so has the cultic activity of the Laurentian matrons. Moreover, the inappropriate cult practice can be viewed as an insult and a *sac-rilegium* that foreshadows a war that is proclaimed unjustly: a *nefas* that breaks all bounds *religionis et foederis*.<sup>111</sup>

This argument could be strengthened by claiming that it is not only the appropriate cult practice that gets distorted in the episode—simultaneously, the Laurentian matrons' mass hysteria rewrites the Roman exemplary tradition of the peace-bringing power of female groups. Unlike legendary figures such as Veturia and the Sabine women, who figure prominently in the historiographic works of Virgil's contemporaries, Virgil's female groups stir up violence and anarchy. In this sense, the maenadic Laurentian matrons play a role similar to the passive *casus belli* characters discussed above: they become the travesties of their literary models in legendary history, and they turn the peace-oriented female role into that of a war-bringing Fury.

Rapidly, the women's violent *furor* seizes the men who take up arms—the ritual spears of maenadic matrons are thus replaced by actual weapons of war. It is related that

*tum quorum attonitae Baccho nemora avia matres/insultant thiasis (neque enim leve nomen Amatae)/undique collecti coeunt Martemque fatigant./ilicet infandum cuncti contra omina bellum,/contra fata deum perverso numine poscunt.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.580–584

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- 109 See e.g. Brazouski 1991, 133–134; Panoussi 2009, 123; Hardie 2012, 87, 100–101. In Roman thinking, the Bacchanals were closely associated with the threatening empowerment of women and with a distortion of the respectable role of a matron. The secretive nature of the cult, the general ignorance about the ritual practice and the lack of official state control made the Senate hostile to the movement, and the cult was suppressed in 186 BCE. Liv. 39.9; CIL 1(2) 581. For further discussion, see, e.g., Hänninen 1998, 115–123. With regard to the Bacchanalia episode in *Aeneid* 7, scholarly interest has usually focused on the symbolic value of the episode; for some thoughts on the ritual appropriateness of the rite, see Tupet 1970, 229–248; Panoussi 2009, 118–120.
- 110 In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid clearly recalls Amata's *simulatio* when he depicts Procne's maenadic rage: *concita per silvas turba comitante suarum/terribilis Procne furiisque asitata doloris,/Bacche, tuas simulat*—. Ov. *Met.* 6.594–596.
- 111 See, e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 7.386 (*maius adorta nefas maioremque orsa furorem*).

Then those whose womenfolk, frenzied by Bacchus, were wandering around the pathless woods in dancing bands (Amata's name carries no light weight!), gathered round from every side to make their appeal to Mars. Right away, despite the omens, despite the destinies decreed by the gods (since the the divine will was overthrown) they all cry for unjust war.

Keith has argued that in the *Aeneid*, the outbreak of the Latin war is a result of the cooperation between female agitators and male executors: the women's turmoil represents both the prelude to war and a catalyst to it, while the men's activity is needed, so that the disorder can be actualised in military activity.<sup>112</sup> In a sense, this gendered casting of roles holds true, and we can see how it recurs in the works of Virgil's Flavian successors. Argia's tears and pleas would be futile if they did not provoke in her father an impulse to act. In the *Punica*, it is Hannibal who carries out Dido's curse and brings the war on Romans. The constant cooperation between female and male agents is the lifeblood of epic warfare. Moreover, it is the ultimate factor on which the guilt and the responsibility for the war depend.

Having said this, I would also suggest that the roles at the beginning of epic warfare cannot always be categorised according to the 'female agitators/male dupes' idea. Quite often, these roles get fused and confused—especially when it is men who are affected by fury and bloodlust that escape all reason. The beginning of the war in *Aeneid* 7 is a particularly good example: although the chaos is usually blamed on the Juno-Allecto-Amata triad, it is important to notice that Amata is not the Fury's only instrument, nor the only one spreading the bloodlust around. After planting the seed of *furor* in Amata's mind, Allecto pays a visit to Turnus, exciting him to warlike frenzy.

Intriguingly, whereas Allecto never reveals herself to Amata, but lets her venomous snake glide onto her bosom and do its work, with Turnus she tries a different approach. In her first attempt to incite the youth's anger, the Fury disguises herself as Juno's priestess and tries to win him over by reasonable arguments. The different approach seems significant: it is as if the narrative suggested that because Turnus is a man, he can (and must) be reasoned with. Unlike Amata, *he* operates by the logic of the symbolic order, so that the way to get to his heart is through his mind, not through his body. The binary opposition between male/female and symbolic/semiotic appears as clear as day—that is, until Turnus turns Allecto down (on the grounds of this very distinction!). The

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112 Keith 2000, 74.

youth harshly mocks the old priestess, whom he considers ill-advised in the matters of war. He states that

*sed te victa situ verique effecta senectus, / o mater, curis nequiquam exercet,  
et arma / regum inter falsa vatem formidine ludit. / cura tibi divum effigies et  
templa tueri; / bella viri pacemque gerent quis bella gerenda.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.440–444

But you, O mother, old age—conquered by decay and barren of truth—distresses in vain, and amidst the wars of kings it mocks the prophet with false fears. Your job is to maintain the gods' images and temples; war and peace will be made by men, whose business it is to wage war.

The speech is an allusive nod to Hector's speech to Andromache in *Iliad* 20, only more aggressively patronising. Ironically, by preaching the gender difference and the strict distinction between the male and the female spheres of life, Turnus proves Allecto wrong in her belief that there is a difference between men and women in the communicative sphere. Her initial assumption that, since he is a man, Turnus could be reasoned with, turns out to be wrong, and consequently, Allecto decides to get to him through the channels of the body, just as she did with the queen. We read that "while the youth was speaking, a sudden tremor seized his body" (*at iuveni oranti subitus tremor occupat artus*), and the text goes on:

*Tum flamma torquens / lumina cunctantem et quaerentem dicere plura /  
reppulit, et geminos erexit crinibus anguis, / verberaque insonuit—facem  
iuveni coniecit et atro / lumine fumantis fixit sub pectore taedas. / olli som-  
num ingens rumpit pavor, ossaque et artus / perfundit toto proruptus cor-  
pore sudor. / arma amens fremit, arma toro tectisque requirit; / saevit amor  
ferri et scelerata insania belli, / ira super: magno veluti cum flamma son-  
ore / virgea suggeritur costis undantis aëni / exsultantque aestu latices, / furit  
intus aquai / fumidus atque alte spumis exuberat amnis, / nec iam se capit  
unda, volat vapor ater ad auras.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.448–451, 7.456–466

Then, rolling her flaming eyes, she pushed him away as he hesitated and tried to say more. And she lifted a couple of snakes from her hair, and cracked her whip—. [S]he threw a torch at the young man, and fixed the firebrand, smoking with murky light, in his breast. A great terror broke his sleep, and his bones and flesh were bathed in sweat, pouring from his

entire body. Out of his mind, he cries for arms; he is looking for weapons in his bed and in his dwelling. Love of the sword rages in him, the wicked folly of war and, above all, anger: just as flaming sticks, crackling loudly, when they are piled under the sides of a swelling pot, and the liquids revel in the heat. Inside the steaming water rages, and the flow of foam is bubbling up high; and now the wave can no longer restrain itself, and the dark vapour rises into the air.

Now it is Turnus who, like the epic war-bringing brides, is associated with uncontrollable fire—who in fact *has* the fire flaming in his very heart. It is remarkable that Allecto's way of infiltrating Turnus' mind through his body is more violent than her attack on Amata—perhaps because Turnus puts up more of a fight, or perhaps because the Fury is personally insulted and wants him to feel her power. The results of the intervention, however, are very similar: just like Amata, Turnus is captured by a mad frenzy that escapes all reason and is beyond words.

The striking similarities between the Turnus and the Amata episodes have sometimes been overlooked by those who tend to emphasise the gender difference and the juxtaposition of the male and the female as intrinsic characteristics of war epic. Syed, for instance, views these episodes as antitheses to each other: she argues that while Amata is turbulent and passionate, fertile ground for the Fury's meddling, Turnus represents 'manly' calmness and self-discipline in his efforts to resist Allecto's influence.<sup>113</sup> Syed's reading is problematic, because she insists on focusing on the beginnings of these episodes (where she can easily find the gender difference), but pays no attention to the way they continue. Admittedly, Turnus does make an effort to resist Allecto's advances, which Amata never does (nor is she given an opportunity to do so). Nevertheless, even if it takes more effort to excite Turnus to a mad lust for war, in the end, the effect of the Fury's intrusion is very similar in both victims. Virgil states about Amata that "first the disease, sinking in as liquid poison, thrills her senses and envelops her bones with fire" (*prima lues udo sublapsa veneno/pertemptat sensus atque ossibus implicat ignem*); about Turnus, he notes that "a great terror broke his sleep, and his bones and flesh were bathed in sweat, pouring from his whole body" (*olli somnum ingens rumpit pavor, ossaque et artus/perfundit toto proruptus corpore sudor*).<sup>114</sup> The similarity of their reactions is also stressed with the help of metaphors: While Amata in her state of frenzy is compared to

113 Syed 2005, 117–122.

114 Verg. *Aen.* 7.354–355; 7.458–459.

a spinning top, Turnus is depicted as a cauldron that boils over.<sup>115</sup> And while Amata mobilises the Laurentian matrons as instruments of her frenzy, Turnus, in like manner, spreads his fury to the other Rutulian soldiers.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, although Turnus needs more persuasion, when he finally yields, he proceeds to the furious mode far more quickly than Amata. While Amata seems to be able for some time to fight off the pressure of the *chôra*, and at least tries to get through to Latinus peacefully, Turnus immediately jumps out of bed and reaches for a sword. He rushes for action without a further thought, because there are no more thoughts—only emotions, and drives. In fact, Turnus appears to lose himself in the semiotic sphere more quickly and profoundly than Amata does. This does not mean for him a complete renunciation of the symbolic—after all, he is still able to gather his forces and put an army together—but compared to Amata who, even in her disoriented and delusional Bacchic frenzy is still speaking, Turnus is barely able to string together a sentence. After Allecto's intervention, he no longer engages in direct speech in book seven, and the two indirect speeches that he is shown delivering are short and poorly structured, repeating, with intermittent phrases, commands to his army.<sup>117</sup> It seems that the turmoil that is raging inside Turnus truly is beyond words, even more so than is the case with Amata.

I would therefore argue that Turnus can hardly be considered an antithesis to Amata in the process that leads to the Latin War. He is, rather, an *alter ego* of a sort, a comparative and complementary agent to the queen. They both appear as representatives and leaders of their respective social groups—and therefore, they manifest how every segment of the people is absorbed into the war and swept off by its unstoppable drive. Moreover, these groups have a powerful impact on each other's actions. The Latin matrons' joining in Amata's Bacchic revelry follows immediately after Turnus has incited his own soldiers to war. Consequently, the matrons' fury excites their own menfolk to take up arms. This domino effect between armed men and maenadic matrons seems to blur the distinction between the male and female roles as either agitators or inciters of war. The chaos that reigns in Latium in *Aeneid* 7 does not differentiate between male and female agency, but merges everything together into a destructive torrent of war.

Turnus is not the only male warmonger in Roman war epic who can aptly be considered as a male counterpart to the war-bringing queens. The most impressive portrait of such a character can be found in Statius' *Thebaid*, where

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115 Verg. *Aen.* 7.462–466.

116 Verg. *Aen.* 7.467–476.

117 Verg. *Aen.* 7.467–470, 7.577–579.

the original cause for the war—long before Argia's plea—is Oedipus' hatred of his sons. Turned bitter by his own misery and enraged because of his sons' lack of empathy, Oedipus is already *furens* at the very beginning of the epic.<sup>118</sup> Feeling deserted by the celestial gods, he addresses the Styx instead, and Tisiphone in particular:

*tu saltem debita vindex/huc ades et totos in poenam ordire nepotes./indue quod madidum tabo diadema cruentis/unguibus abripui, votisque instincta paternis/i media in fratres, generis consortia ferro/dissiliant. da, Tartarei regina barathri,/quod cupiam vidisse nefas. nec tarda sequetur/mens iuvenum: modo digna veni, mea pignora nosces.*

STAT. *Theb.* 1.80–87

Do you at least, my fitting champion, come and begin to weave a punishment for all my descendants. Put on your head this gore-soaked diadem that I tore off with my bleeding nails. Roused by a father's prayers, go between the brothers, shatter the familial partnership with steel. Queen of Tartarus' abyss, grant the outrage that I desire to see. Nor will the young men's minds be slow to follow. Only come, you who are worthy, and you shall know them to be my true sons.

As Fantham rightly notes, Oedipus' curse is parallel to Dido's curse in book four of the *Aeneid*—like Dido, the bitter and lonely Theban king imposes enmity between others.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, Oedipus' prayer, where he calls on the Fury to bring war and havoc on Earth, is clearly modelled on Juno's commands to Allecto in *Aeneid* 7.<sup>120</sup> In the *Aeneid*, the bloodlust spreads from Juno to Amata and Turnus, and from them to the matrons and the soldiers. In the *Thebaid*, these three levels are Oedipus, Tisiphone and, finally, Polynices and Eteocles. Statius' way of making the most of the Virgilian model can be particularly well observed in the episode where Tisiphone does Oedipus' bidding. We read that

*Atque ea Cadmeo praeceps ubi culmine primum/constitit assuetaque infecit nube penates,/protinus attoniti fratrum sub pectore motus,/gentilisque animos subit furor aegraque laetis/invidia atque parens odii metus—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 1.123–127

118 Stat. *Theb.* 1.73.

119 Fantham 1997, 200.

120 Hershkowitz 1998, 274.

And when she first dashed headlong to the Cadmean citadel, where she stood still and poisoned the house with her usual mist, immediately a shock shook the brothers' hearts, and the family frenzy invaded their minds—and envy, anxious at another's happiness, and fear, the parent of hatred.

As with Virgil's Amata, here too it is implied that the *furor* that takes over the twins is not a strange external fiend, but in fact already resides in their hearts, because of their family's curse. Like Amata, Polynices and Eteocles are easy targets, vulnerable to the Fury's meddling—but, one wonders, perhaps only slightly more vulnerable than anyone else would be? As one remembers from Turnus' futile resistance, while some persons might be more susceptible to the pressure of the *chôra* than others, nobody in Roman epic is safe from it. From a Kristevan viewpoint, it could be argued that this is simply because the bodily drives of which the epic *furor* is one are part of each human being, and while they might endanger the character's textual subjectivity (that is, the reader's willingness to identify with him/her), they are essential for his or her attaining *psychological* subjectivity—for becoming and remaining a speaking subject.

Statius therefore rewrites the roles that Virgil depicts at the beginning of the Latin war, and depicts Oedipus as the original warmonger: the one preceding the Fury herself. In the *Thebaid*, the origin of the destruction is not *ira* dwelling in divine hearts, but the bitterness and resentment in human hearts. This kind of beginning casts a shadow over Statius' epic from the very outset. By opening his *maior opus* with the dramatic disgrace of Oedipus the antihero, and by representing him in a light that makes it impossible for the reader to relate to him, the poet warns the reader of what is to come: that this is an epic of destruction and uncertainty, where nothing is clear and no one is necessarily worthy of epic heroism.

The characters of Turnus and Oedipus demonstrate the fluidity of gender roles connected to the beginning of war in Roman epic. In the light of these episodes, it is not easy to characterise epic women as warmongers and trouble-makers, nor the men as self-evidently worthy of narrative subjectivity. In their own manner, Virgil, Lucan and Statius all fuse and confuse the male and female roles at the beginning of war, and show that the guilt of war is anything but a simple or unambiguous issue. In particular, this phenomenon leaves a strong imprint on the civil war rhetoric in their narratives. Instead of imperial wars that define *Romanitas* in contrast to the other, the wars in Roman war epic mostly appear as civil struggles, caused by a dissolution within the people and the state, and by competing ideas of what Roman-ness is and who should have the power to define it.

## Victims of War: Gendered Dynamics of Suffering

In any war narrative—prose or poetry, ancient or modern—feelings of fear, sorrow and suffering inevitably play an important role. In war-centred epic, where the plot is structured around battles, sieges and sackings of cities, these feelings are so omnipresent that the reader is in danger of becoming numb to them. The narrative pattern in which fear, pain, and loss figure prominently obviously derives from Homeric epic, from Graeco-Roman historiography and from Athenian drama, but in the epics of the early Principate, it is often modified slightly to suit the milieu of the narrative.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I scrutinise this narrative pattern in more depth, in order to examine how it contributes to the establishment of gender dynamics and gendered focalisation in the genre.

Western culture has a long tradition of labeling transgressive female behaviour as maenadic, hysteric, ‘overemotional’ or just plain irrational—in other words, as ‘the other’ in terms of the symbolic order of logic and reason. This tradition of ‘gendering emotions’ can be observed both in Roman war epics themselves and in the modern research tradition. In particular, the idea of the dominating male vantage point in Roman war epic appears to be strongly based on the idea of women’s overemotional behaviour. Scholars who stress the juxtaposition of genders in the genre often argue that the victimised position of women in war epic marks them as marginalised objects, when compared to the “male, mobile hero of epic”—instead of taking action, they are acted upon, and the suffering is inflicted on them by the male-driven war narrative.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, it has been suggested that epic women’s intense outbursts of grief or pain serve the purpose of alienating the reader from them, urging him to identify with the male protagonist instead.<sup>3</sup> These are valid arguments, and to

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- 1 Fantham discusses in more detail the ways in which the Roman epic poets combine and mix literary models in their representation of negative emotions. Fantham 1999, 221–232. See also Murnaghan, who examines female lament in Homeric epic and its similarities to the phenomenon in Greek tragedy. Murnaghan 1999, 205–217.
  - 2 Keith 1999, 218, 228–230. See also Zarker 1978, 22; Newlands 2009, 391, 393–396; Ganiban 2007, 207–232.
  - 3 Syed 2005 (see e.g. 116–135.); see also Brazouski 1991, 133–134; Nugent 1992 (*passim*); Gill 1997, 228–229; Wright 1997, 174–179; Mack 1999 (*passim*); Dietrich 1999, 47–48; Keith 2000, 67–73; Panoussi 2009, 123.

some extent, they do seem to explain the strongly male-centred focalisation in the genre. Epic women are indeed marked by strong, negative emotions, and as Fredrick notes, intense emotions (such as fear, pain, or grief) tend to be “language-destroying”. They are usually better expressed not verbally, but through asymbolic communication: silence, non-verbal wailing or bodily movements.<sup>4</sup> Epic women’s suffering is very often *beyond words*, and this is why, in a phallogocentric order, they easily get labeled as threatening others.

While there are various episodes in the Roman war epics where this phenomenon can be clearly observed, equally interesting are the storylines that seem to question this conventional casting of roles. There are storylines where women’s expressions of fear and grief seem to invite the reader to share their viewpoint and their emotional turmoil, as well as episodes where the suffering that is beyond words is expressed through the male subject of the epic, instead. These, I suggest, are equally noteworthy for our understanding of gender dynamics in the genre, and therefore deserve to be discussed in more detail.

## 1 The Victimised Female Body and the Construction of Roman Identity

If one popular way of reading gender in Roman war epic is that of examining female characters as warmongers and troublemakers—a tradition discussed in more detail in the previous chapter—another is to read them as innocent and helpless victims, whose personal experience of war questions the heroic drive of the poem. Zarker, for example, has suggested that the women in the *Aeneid* movingly reveal the futility of epic heroism; he sees them as “persons without a voice in the epic decisions; yet they pay the terrible costs of war”.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars have argued that the phenomenon is even more prominent in post-Virgilian epic.<sup>6</sup> In their studies of the *Silvae* and the *Thebaid*, Newlands and Ganiban, for instance, suggest that Statius utilises female suffering to emphasise the utter pointlessness of war and to question what is called Virgil’s imperial, Augustan vision.<sup>7</sup> While these readings clearly differ from each other on the age-old question of Virgil’s ‘Augustan optimism’, what they appear

4 Discussed further in Fredrick 2002, 238.

5 Zarker 1978, 22.

6 See e.g. Augoustakis 2012; Newlands 2006; Micozzi 1998, 114.

7 Newlands 2009, 391, 393–396; Ganiban 2007, 207–232. Besides Ganiban and Newlands, the structural role of female lament in Flavian epic, and its tendency to challenge the heroic

to agree on is the function of female grief in Roman epic—to all three scholars, women's suffering is an element of pathos that questions the heroic drive of the epic, and reveals the human suffering behind Rome's great imperial narrative.

The idea of female suffering as juxtaposed to the unstoppable drive of war is perhaps best crystallised in the personifications of ravaged, raped and destroyed cities.<sup>8</sup> This is a Homeric topos: in the *Iliad*, the sack of Troy is often depicted with an imagery and vocabulary that aligns the city with a suffering woman.<sup>9</sup> As Scully points out, metaphors of motherhood and metaphors of sexual violence are entwined in the Homeric language: Troy is repeatedly depicted as a fertile city ravaged by war.<sup>10</sup> This is a feature that is prominent in the Roman epic tradition, as well.<sup>11</sup> In Statius' *Thebaid*, Jupiter claims that

*ipse manu Thebas correptaque moenia fundo/excutiam versasque solo  
super Inacha tecta/effundam turrets aut stagna in caerula verram/imbre  
superiecto—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 3.248–251

With my own hands I will seize Thebes and her walls, knock her off her foundations, tear up her towers and spread them over the Inachian houses, or throw a storm-cloud over them and sweep them into the dark blue waters.<sup>12</sup>

Thebes is humanised and gendered when Statius depicts it as a sentient being to be acted upon. The city is violated, mutilated, and ruined by the ultimate

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thrust of epic, have been argued, e.g., by Fantham, Malamud and Vinchesi. See Fantham 1999, 232; Malamud 1995, 188; Vinchesi 2005, 97–98.

8 The topos of *urbs capta* is particularly popular in the tragic depictions of the fall of Troy (Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Andromache* and *Troades*) and in Roman historiography. For further discussion of its origins in ancient literature, see, e.g., Rossi 2002, 232–238, 243–249.

9 See, e.g., Hom. *Il.* 6.58–59, 22.77–86.

10 Hom. *Il.* 16.100. Scully 2003, 193–194, 197.

11 The humanising and gendering of conquered cities is a phenomenon that strongly colludes with the traditions of Roman visual arts and, particularly, with the Roman history of imperial conquest. Roman imperial art typically features female personifications of conquered areas, and considerably often these are represented as subjugated, compliant, and melancholic, expressing traditional signs of mourning. The association of the female with a conquered area is symbolically rich; these personifications manifested the fertility of the area, while also firmly linking the concept of Roman imperial hegemony with the male dominion over the female. See Syed 2005, 142; Huskinson 2000, 8.

12 See also *Theb.* 10.870–872.

male agent, Jupiter himself. The ravished city itself is completely passive and does not react to its destruction in any way.

Another way of discussing this topos can be found in Silius Italicus' *Punica*. In his epic, Silius recurrently introduces a humanised personification of a city, who both acknowledges its suffering and reacts to it. The first time this happens is at the siege of Saguntum:

*Sed postquam clades patefecit et horrida bella/orantum squalor, praesens  
astare Sagunti/ante oculos visa est extrema precantis imago.*

SIL. *Pun.* 1.630–632

But when the unkempt appearance of the suppliants revealed the disasters and horrors of war, they [the Senate] thought they saw before their eyes the figure of Saguntum, close to her end, beseeching for help.<sup>13</sup>

A similar metaphor is utilised later, in book 13, when describing Capua's distress:

*at Capua, aut maestis ululantum flebile matrum/questibus, aut gemitu  
trepidantum exterrita patrum,/tormentis finem metamque laboribus orat.*

SIL. *Pun.* 13.258–260

But Capua, terrified either by the sad howling and distressed complaints of the mothers, or by the moans of the frightened senators, prays for an end to her sufferings and a limit to her hardships.

The Lucanian influence is strong in these passages; they seem to be modeled on an episode in the *Pharsalia* where the distressed city in question is Rome herself. But whereas Silius mentions the misery of Saguntum and Capua only briefly, Lucan provides Rome with a suffering voice of her own:

*Ut ventum est parvi Rubiconis ad undas,/ingens visa duci patriae trepidantis  
imago/clara per obscuram voltu maestissima noctem,/turrihero canos  
effundens vertice crines,/Caesarie lacera nudisque adstare lacertis/et gemitu  
permixta loqui: 'Quo tenditis ultra?/Quo fertis mea signa, viri? Si iure  
venitis,/si cives, huc usque licet.'*

LUC. *Phar.* 1.185–192

13 Silius uses a similar kind of imagery when describing Carthage. Sil. *Pun.* 17.349–356.

When he reached the waters of little Rubicon, the general saw a great figure of his frightened homeland. Her deeply sad face could be clearly seen in the darkness of night, and white hair streamed down her head, crowned with towers. She stood before Caesar, with her arms bare and torn, and her speech was mixed with moans: "Where further do you proceed? Where are you taking my standards, O men? If you come respecting the law, then here, citizens, you must stop."<sup>14</sup>

Thanks to the traditional signs of mourning—loosened hair, torn garments—the image of Rome appears submissive and supplicant. Lucan depicts the city as completely defenseless, left to the mercy of the invader.

In these episodes, the idea of the female body as a *locus* of male action and imperial conquest is clearly discernible. The conqueror takes the city into his possession and has the power to redefine its identity either by completely demolishing it or by forcing it to adapt to his own—the formation of identity is, in this imagery, represented as exceptionally violent. The erotic overtones further strengthen the impression of 'male' imperial dominion over a 'female' city or people. War becomes allusive to rape, and the power dynamics of the epic universe are defined according to the law of the strongest.

Considering the popularity of this imagery—female personifications of ravaged and grieving cities—in Roman war epic, it is striking how few references to actual physical war-time violence against women there are in the genre. Rape, for instance, is practically non-existent as a topic:<sup>15</sup> the episode that comes closest is a short passage in the second book of the *Aeneid*, where Cassandra is dragged out of Athene's temple in chains.<sup>16</sup> Other acts of violence against women are extremely rare as well, as are deaths of women at the hands

<sup>14</sup> See also Luc. *Phar.* 1.84–86.

<sup>15</sup> There is one explicit rape episode in Roman war epic; however, it takes place, not during a war but, instead, during the Bacchanals: this is Achilles' rape of Deidamia in the *Achilleid* (Stat. *Achil.* 1.619–647). For further discussion of the episode, see Davis 2006, 132–137. Dealing with the theme of sexual violence is one of the aspects in which Ovid's epic poetry considerably differs from the war-centred epics of the Principate; the repetition of the rape theme is one of the characteristic features of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*.

<sup>16</sup> *ecce trahebatur passis Priameia virgo/crinibus a templo Cassandra adytisque Minervae,/ad caelum tendens ardentia lumina frustra,/lumina, nam teneras arcebant vincula palmas.* Verg. *Aen.* 2.403–406. Virgil evokes the passage in Euripides' *Troades*, where Cassandra is violently dragged from the safety of the temple by the soldiers. However, the Roman poet also appears to allude to an alternative tradition, according to which Ajax raped Cassandra inside the temple, thus committing an outrageous *sacrilegium*. This version is supported by Quintus Smyrnaeus (Quint. Smyrn. 13.422) and Tryphiodorus (*The taking of Ilios* 644).

of men.<sup>17</sup> It would appear that instead of describing actual violence against women, the Roman epic poets are more interested in the pathos created by the expectation of violence. As in much of the contemporary Western screen entertainment, where the actual rape cannot be shown because of the system of ratings, the suspense is created by constantly hinting at the possibility of rape—by making the audience imagine that which cannot be explicitly shown. In the *Pharsalia*, Lucan describes the danger that would befall Cornelia, wife of Pompey, when her husband ponders leaving for Parthia. When expressing his objection to Pompey's plan, Lentulus argues that:

*Sed tua sors levior, quoniam mors ultima poena est/nec metuenda viris. At non Cornelia letum/infando sub rege timet.—Proles tam clara Metelli/stabit barbarico coniunx millesima lecto/quamquam non ulli plus regia, Magne, vacabit/saevitia stimulate Venus titulisque virorum.*

LUC. *Phar.* 8.395–397, 8.410–413

But your lot is easier, since death, the ultimate punishment, is not frightening to strong men. But death is not what Cornelia fears under the abominable king.—So the noble descendant of Metellus will stand by the bed of the barbarian, as his thousandth wife; however, O Magnus, the king's desire will be devoted to her more than to any other, because it will be fuelled by his cruelty and by the renown of her husbands.<sup>18</sup>

Lentulus' speech reflects a strong orientalist attitude towards the Parthian culture, which is depicted as barbaric, uncivilised, bestial and hypersexualised. The potential rapist appears as the Absolute Other, into whose character the animalistic drives of sex and death are located.<sup>19</sup> It is particularly interesting that while this abjection works in the same way as in Lucan's depictions of Cleopatra, for example, in this passage the gender roles are reversed. It is Cornelia, the Republican noblewoman of most distinguished birth, who becomes

17 As for other forms of war-time suffering, one reference to a famine is to be found in the *Punica*. During the battle of Saguntum, the Spanish matrons are depicted as conquered by famine. Sil. *Pun.* 2.489–491.

18 Cornelia was the daughter of Q. Caecilius Metellus Pius Scipio Nasica, the consul of the year 52 BCE. Scipio Nasica was of extremely distinguished birth, belonging to one of the most respected patrician *optimates* families of the late Republic. Before her marriage to Pompey, Cornelia was married to P. Licinius Crassus, who died at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE.

19 For further analysis on the strong association between the Orient and aggressive, unconventional sexuality in Roman thinking, and on the repetitions of the theme in Roman epic, see, e.g., Reed 2007, esp. 73–100.

the representative of values that are defined as ‘Roman’—and her Roman-ness, in turn, is underlined by juxtaposing it with the contemptible barbarian Other. The juxtaposition between righteous republicanism and corrupted monarchy, a question that is at the heart of Lucan’s epic, is thus turned into a matter of cultural significance, where an inclination to monarchy signifies barbarism and a lack of self-discipline in all other aspects as well. Intriguingly, on this occasion the poet does not complete the picture of the Absolute Other by associating it with femininity as well. Instead, by means of the character of Cornelia, Lucan introduces another kind of femininity, the kind that is firmly absorbed into and in line with the ideals of Roman society and culture.

This means that the episode grants Cornelia considerable subjectivity, since it makes her a potential point of identification for the projected Roman reader, who would like to think of himself as a representative of the values that she embodies. There is nothing particularly surprising or revolutionary about this, since female exemplarity was an established part of the historiographic tradition long before Lucan’s time. However, the fact that the poet deliberately engages with this tradition seems significant, since it clearly challenges the idea of a male hero as the self-evident subject of war epic. The passage shows that feelings of fear and the role of a helpless victim could indeed be utilised to encourage the reader’s identification with epic women, and not only to alienate him from them.<sup>20</sup>

Rhetoric of a similar sort can be perceived in another passage from the *Pharsalia* where the fear of wartime rape is discussed. When the narrator depicts Caesar addressing his soldiers before a battle, he states that

*Non illis urbes spoliandaque templa negasset/Tarpeiamque Iovis sedem  
matresque senatus/passurasque infanda nurus—.*

LUC. *Phar.* 5.305–307

Unrestrained by him, they would have sacked cities and temples, even the Tarpeian seat of Jupiter; and they would have inflicted outrage on the senatorial mothers and daughters-in-law—.

What this passage has in common with Lentulus’ speech—besides the anticipation of a potential rape—is the use of *infandum*, a word that emphasises the outrage and shamefulness of the act that is feared. The narrator appears to

20 This alienating function of women’s negative emotions has been argued for, e.g., in Syed 2005, esp. 53–113.

consider even the *potential* raping of Roman elite women as a sacrilege of the worst kind; it is comparable to the ravaging of Jupiter's temple on the Capitol, the holiest of all places and the signifier of the Roman state at large. Accordingly, this passage clearly locates the defining aspects of Roman-ness in the victimised female characters. It depicts *Romanitas* as crystallised in *pietas* and *pudicitia*, the values embodied by the senatorial women.<sup>21</sup> Female virtue, therefore, comes to define and construct Roman-ness in contrast to the enemy.

What is particularly intriguing here is that, whereas in the episode about Cornelia, the threat to her *pudicitia* came from the barbarous Parthians, in this case, the enemy is none other than Caesar's army, a troop of Roman soldiers whom the civil war has turned into reckless beasts and enemies of the Republic. In other words, those who should be the best representatives of Rome and its defining virtues become a threat to them instead. Caesar's soldiers are assimilated with barbarians intent on sacking the holiest shrine of Rome and tearing down its defining features. Not only have these men become strangers to their people, but they also threaten to strip Rome of its identity and make its people 'strangers to themselves'.<sup>22</sup> The episode demonstrates the volatility of the categories of 'Roman' and 'other'—an aspect of Lucan's epic that I have discussed in the previous chapter, when examining the conflation of the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra. In this episode, when the poet discusses the potential raping of *Romanitas*, the phenomenon is clearer still. In the *Pharsalia*, civil war exposes the dissolution within Roman society, and reveals the illusory nature of collective Roman-ness. Abroad, Caesar's legions are representatives of Rome who defend its values against the barbarians; in the city, they are the enemy.

When examined from a Kristevan perspective, the *Pharsalia* could therefore be considered a prime example of a work that acknowledges the deceptive nature of 'otherness' and discusses the process of abjection. The passage about Caesar's bloodthirsty army makes it clear that what makes the Parthian king the

21 Another example of this phenomenon is in the Claudia Quinta episode in the *Punica*, where female chastity is depicted as representative of the moral state of society. Sil. *Pun.* 17.1–47. For the definition and the value of *pudicitia*, see, e.g., Sen. *Dial.* 12.16.4, or Val. Max. 2.1.3, 7.1.1. For a thorough analysis of the moral and religious aspects of *pudicitia*, see Langlands 2006, 37–77.

22 We should note that with this message, Lucan deliberately challenges Caesar's own account of his role in the civil war. In the *Bellum Civile*, Caesar consistently represents himself as *defensor rei publicae* (see, e.g. Caes., *BCiv* 1.5, 1.9, 1.32, 3.10) and as a liberator who defends the *patria* against Pompey's 'barbaric' troops. As Whittaker points out, Caesar's rhetoric deliberately constructs Pompey and his supporters as the Other in relation to the *res publica* (see, e.g., Caes. *BCiv* 1.6, 1.19.2, 1.27, 3.14). Whittaker 2011, 63–68.

Absolute Other is actually something that resides in the heart of the Roman citizen male, as well—‘otherness’ is circumstantial and easily exposed. However, Lucan seems to believe that instead of embracing and accepting these animalistic drives, one should practice Stoic self-control to banish them altogether. Cornelia is a perfect example of someone who does exactly that: her ‘feminine’ fear and vulnerability do not explode in a violent outburst, but are confined within the limits of language, logic and social norms. Caesar’s troops, on the contrary, have given in to the drives of sex and death, and revel in them. Intriguingly, in this equation, gender seems to make no great difference. In the *Pharsalia*, while women might in general be more susceptible to overwhelming emotions and more vulnerable to the pressure of the semiotic *chôra*, gender or sex alone does not determine how one turns out. The decision to devote oneself to the temporal order is made by each individual for him- or herself—that is true Roman-ness.

This idea clearly distinguishes Lucan’s civil war epic from Silius Italicus’ imperial epic. In book fifteen of the *Punica*, the poet takes up the theme of potential sexual violence, when the young Publius Cornelius Scipio is shown in Tarraco viewing the booty gained in the battle. Among the captured civilians, there is a virgin betrothed to the leader of the Spanish enemy tribe. Silius relates that upon seeing the girl, Scipio summoned her fiancé and, “was happy and delighted to give the girl (famous for her beauty) back to him, and the groom rejoiced in an untouched bride” (*hanc notam formae concessit laetus ovansque/indelibata gaudenti virgine donum*).<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the episode is all about highlighting Scipio’s virtuousness. In a speech that follows, the Roman warrior Laelius draws a comparison with the commander to the Greek heroes of the Trojan war, claiming that “you alone showed more respect to a barbarian girl than was shown to Apollo’s Trojan priestess” (*tibi barbara soli/sanctius Iliaca servata est Phoebade virgo*).<sup>24</sup> This is a reference to the rape of Cassandra, a story about *nefas* and about the downfall of epic heroism. Accordingly, Silius uses rape of a woman as a way of assessing male behaviour in war. The objectification of the female body is part of the discourse that defines the heroic code of action.

23 Sil. *Pun.* 15. 270–271.

24 Sil. *Pun.* 15.281–282. On Scipio’s *pietas* and his association with sexual continence in particular, see Tipping 2009, 201, 209; Tipping perceives in this episode reflections of Domitian’s familial *pietas* and his moral reform. See also Marks 2005a, 209–288, 237–242; Tipping 2010, 12–13. Asso likewise considers Scipio as the best possible model for Roman virtue in the *Punica*, the semi-divine son of Jupiter who, like Hercules, the comparative hero of the epic, “chooses the toils of virtue over the seductions of vice”. Asso 2009, 189.

When we compare this episode to Lucan's dealing with the theme in the *Pharsalia*, a distinct difference can be observed: whereas Lucan uses the foreshadowing of rape to imply the potential barbarism of Romans themselves, Silius uses it to stress the honour and the self-restraint that define a Roman leader and distinguish him from 'the others'. The Spanish maiden is different from Scipio in all respects; whereas he is Roman, she is foreign, whereas he is male, she is female, and whereas he is an active agent, she is a defenseless object. The dynamics of power between the two are clear; but instead of defining Roman-ness merely *in contrast* to the foreigners, Silius defines it in terms of behaviour *towards* them. When Scipio gives the bride back to the Spanish chief unspoiled, he renounces the violent form of imperial dominion, and by so doing redefines the Roman self-perception. Scipio's respectful treatment of the defeated enemy not only underlines his own virtuousness, but also epitomises the ideal of Roman imperial *clementia*.<sup>25</sup> It thus becomes an *exemplum* for both the internal and the external audiences to emulate and a model on which to fashion their Roman identity.

It is therefore clear that, while the foreshadowing of rape is recurrently utilised as a narrative element in war epic, the Roman poets' ways of dealing with the theme of gendered violence considerably differ from each other. Lucan challenges the dominant male focalisation of the genre and encourages the reader to identify with a female character, while also underlining the fluidity of the line that distinguishes *Romanitas* from barbarism. Silius, on the contrary, uses gender and ethnicity as complementary categories of otherness, and defines *Romanitas* in terms of behaviour towards the barbaric other. However, it is crucial to notice that in both epics, the Stoic ideal of the mastery of mind over body is evidently present. Both the *Pharsalia* and the *Punica* seem to suggest that banishing and renouncing the destructive animalistic drives that dwell in the human heart is not only something that one *can* do, but something that one's moral duty as a Roman requires one to aspire to do.

It can be argued that both Lucan's and Silius' ways of dealing with the theme reflect issues of concern to their contemporary societies. For Lucan, the fear of tyranny is aligned with the fear of the barbaric ravishing of female *pudicitia*.

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25 Arguably, Laelius represents Scipio's *clementia* and his capacity for reason, logic and self-control as characteristics that distinguish the Romans from the others (even from the Homeric heroes) and thus appear to justify their imperial dominion. While shaping the idea of Roman-ness, it also strengthens the power dynamics between Rome and the rest of the world. On the particular definition of *clementia* as an imperial virtue, and on its relationship to *pietas*, see Ganiban 2007, 214–232; McNelis 2007, 163–174. For the significance of the concept for the *Thebaid* and the *Punica*, see also Ripoll 1998, 425–467.

Civil war works as a metaphorical narrative frame for the shattering of the collective psyche: there is no more need for barbarians, since the Romans themselves have become savages. Drunk with violence, they give their animalistic drives free rein, and destroy the defining virtues of their Roman-ness. For Silius, on the contrary, wartime rape serves the purpose of discussing issues of imperial ideology that were topical in the Flavian period. In an age that saw the violent repression of several provincial uprisings, the poet delivers an image of the Roman Empire as an all-encompassing, merciful ruler that is able to control its violent drives and abstain from unnecessary cruelty. In both historical contexts, the objectified and victimised female body becomes a fertile ground for a discussion of the human—and, in particular, the Roman—psyche.

## 2 The Victim's Viewpoint: Female Gaze and Epic Subjectivity

While women's fear for themselves—and especially, the fear of sexual violence—is clearly an established part of the epic tradition, an even more prominent feature is women's fear for others—that is, for the safety of their menfolk. Usually, when the women of Roman epic worry about the war, they worry about their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons. One of the most telling examples can be found in book eight of the *Aeneid*, where Virgil depicts Aeneas' Pallantian allies' departure for war:

*vota metu duplicant matres, propiusque periclo/it timor et maior Martis iam  
apparet imago.—stant pavidae in muris matres oculisque sequuntur/pul-  
veream nubem et fulgentis aere catervas./olli per dumos, qua proxima meta  
viarum,/armati tendunt—.*

VERG. *Aen.* 8.556–557, 8.592–595

In alarm, mothers double their vows; fear draws near because of the danger, and the image of Mars now looms larger.—Mothers stand trembling on the walls, and follow with their eyes the cloud of dust and the troops shining with bronze. Through the undergrowth, where the goal of their journey is nearest, the armed men move forward—.

The women's vulnerability is made manifest in their immobility: they are incapable of acting, speaking or making any difference, and the trembling of their bodies is the only, averbal, form of communication that reveals their anxiety. The women's lack of both words and action marks them as outsiders not only to the symbolic order, but to the war and to the epic itself. The war narrative runs

past their eyes without involving them in its course. However, it is crucial to note that at the same time, the emphasis that the narrator puts on the mothers' anxious gaze, grants them some power in this narrative to which they remain marginal. The women's gaze directs the reader's attention to what they are seeing. It determines what the reader at this point will learn about the events. Furthermore, because the mothers' gaze is anxious and fearful, the episode is emotionally more charged and more full of pathos than it otherwise would be, if these events were described neutrally from the external narrator's viewpoint. Therefore, although it would be an overstatement to claim that these Virgilian *matres pavidae* enjoy textual subjectivity *per se*, their 'feminine' fear and anxiety are definitely used not only to colour the description of events, but also to invite the reader to relate to their suffering on an emotional level, albeit briefly and momentarily.

Virgil's way of utilising the female gaze as a narrative tool is recalled and remodeled by Statius, who builds on its pathos in book four of the *Thebaid*, when he depicts the Argive men leaving for the war:

*iamque suos circum pueri nuptaeque patresque/funduntur mixti summis-  
que a postibus obstant./nec modus est lacrimis: rorant clipeique iubaeque/  
triste salutantum, et cunctis dependet ab armis/suspiranda domus; galeis  
iuvat oscula clausis/inserere amplexuque truces deducere conos./illi, quis  
ferrum modo, quis mors ipsa placebat,/dant gemitus fractaeque labant sin-  
gultibus irae./sic ubi forte viris longum super aequor ituris,/cum iam ad vela  
noti et scisso redit ancora fundo,/haeret amica manus: certant innectere  
collo/bracchia, manantesque oculos hinc oscula turbant,/hinc magni caligo  
maris, tandemque relict/stant in rupe tamen; fugientia carbasa visu/dulce  
sequi, patriosque dolent crebrescere ventos.*

STAT. *Theb.* 4.16–30

And now children and wives and fathers, all mixed together, flock around their own men, blocking their way to the outer doorways. There is no limit to tears. Shields and crests are sprinkled with tears as they utter sad goodbyes, and to every set of arms clings a household to be sighed for. They wish to plant kisses through the visors of closed helmets, and to pull down fierce crests with their embrace. Those who just now rejoiced in the thought of the sword, in the thought of death itself, utter moans: their broken anger collapses in sobs. Thus, when men are about to go far overseas, when the wind is in the sails and the anchor returns from the ploughed seafloor, a loving woman clings to them. They struggle to wrap their arms around a neck, their flowing eyes are blurred by kisses and by

the great sea's mist. And, at last abandoned, they nevertheless stand on a cliff; it is sweet to follow the fleeing sail with their gaze, and they grieve that their country's winds grow stronger.

By reinventing the elegiac *relicta* theme—a literary topos about deserted women who are left behind waiting on the shore—the poet adds a touch of sentimental pathos to his description of the events.<sup>26</sup> The emphasised significance of the female gaze and the fog that blocks the view from unhappy eyes also strongly recall the Virgilian model. In this Statian simile, too, the women who are left behind stand motionless; they are simultaneously active viewers and passive, petrified victims. While they are marginalised as outsiders to the war, at the same time their viewpoint is utilised to construct a subject position for the reader.

In Statius' version of the scene, however, the victims' Stoic self-discipline is not as strong as in the Virgilian model. Whereas in the passage from the *Aeneid*, the semiotic *chôra* could be observed only in the women's lack of words and in the trembling of their bodies, in the *Thebaid*, their desperation breaks out in a more powerful manner: we are told that "there is no limit to tears" (*nec modus est lacrimis*). It would seem that while a certain degree of distress at the sight of the loved ones' departure for war might be understandable, here the family members' uncontrolled weeping crosses the line of appropriate behaviour regulated by social norms—much like Amata's fury discussed in the previous chapter, anger that was technically justified but out of control and *sine more*.

What seems important is that, in the *Thebaid*, this emotional breakdown is not something that would mark women alone: *pueri nuptaeque patresque* makes very clear that it is the entire family—all those who are not capable of taking up arms themselves—who lose control of themselves and let the fear and anxiety get the better of them. Moreover, this emotional recklessness

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26 As Skinner points out, this literary tradition was presumably strongly built on the lost episode of Callimachus' *Aetia*. Skinner 1997, 145. Catullus' hexameter poem 64 could be considered a starting point to the tradition in Roman poetry—his depiction of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus is an episode that appears to have greatly influenced other Roman poets later on. In the development of the topos, great credit is also due to Ovid, who designed the *Heroides* as a whole around the *relicta* theme—his influence can be clearly observed in the later epic repetitions of the topos. In the surviving Roman war-centred epic, Dido's abandonment by Aeneas is the first episode where water provides a barrier between the man who leaves and the woman who is left behind. Virgil's combination of tragic, elegiac and epic elements in this episode was highly influential on his epic successors. For further analysis of the *relicta* theme, see Bessone 2002, Fulkerson 2005.

spreads like a wildfire in the city, and contaminates even those who should be the most devoted servants of the temporal order: the departing warriors themselves. The narrator states that “those who just now rejoiced in the thought of the sword, in the thought of death itself, utter moans: their broken anger collapses in sobs” (*illi, quis ferrum modo, quis mors ipsa placebat, / dant gemitus fractaeque labant singultibus irae*). The warlike anger, *ira*, which is the fuel for heroic deeds and can be harnessed to serve society’s interests, is replaced by a more private and uncontrollable emotional turmoil. Unable to speak, the soldiers now engage in bodily, semiotic communication: indistinct moaning and wailing. At the moment of desperation that is beyond words, this is the one way in which they *can* communicate with their loved ones who are in the same state of mind.

Naturally, this kind of behaviour conflicts drastically with the so-called ‘heroic drive’ of the epic. It is interrupted abruptly when the soldiers are swept off by the war preparations, and the families are left behind, never to be mentioned again. However, the emotional turmoil has already done its job: the passage has powerfully affected the reader’s view and understanding of the events, inviting him to relate to the private suffering of these people and to judge the war as *nefas*. Importantly, it is not only women who are employed to deliver the message about the private costs of war—the fear and anxiety that are expressed in indistinct sobs are now something that mark the epic warriors themselves. The juxtaposition of genders, often argued to be the distinguishing feature of war epic, is temporarily dissolved, as the fear of war reduces the Argives as a whole into babbling infants.

These episodes challenge the idea of the dominant male vantage point of war epic, and demonstrate how the construction of subject positions in the genre is by no means a simple matter. The suffering, scared women are depicted as the internal audience of the narrative, whose viewpoint guides and determines that of the external audience. Intriguingly, this female vantage point temporarily alienates and removes the reader from the war narrative, making him ‘an outsider’ similar to the gazing women. While the war supposedly moves on in the centre stage of the story, the reader momentarily remains on the margins of the narrative with the distressed women, helpless and petrified. These episodes thus show that marginalisation and subjectivity are not necessarily mutually exclusive phenomena in war epic.

With their emphasis on the narrative significance of the female gaze, these passages from the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid* recall a specific feature of Graeco-Roman literary tradition: *teikhoskopia*. This is a scene where the female gaze, female fear and the female vantage point are closely entwined. The earliest epic model is in book three of the *Iliad*, where Helen and Priam gaze at the

Greek heroes from their position on the top of the walls of Troy.<sup>27</sup> In Roman epic, one can find several variants of this scene; one of the best examples is in the *Thebaid*, where Statius depicts Antigone on the top of the Theban wall. She is accompanied by an aged slave, Phorbos, who points some of the Argive warriors out to her.<sup>28</sup> It is noteworthy that while Antigone is free to observe the heroes, she herself is hidden from sight:

*Turre procul sola nondum concessa videri/Antigone populis teneras defenditur atra/veste genas—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 7.243–245

Far away on a tower, lonely Antigone, whom the people are not yet allowed to see, covers her tender cheeks with a black cloth.

Augoustakis perceptively points out that in the *Thebaid*, Antigone gradually moves from the private sphere to the public—from the protected domestic space into the world of war.<sup>29</sup> In this process, *teikhoskopia* marks the beginning. For the first time, Antigone engages in an interaction with the surrounding world of war; however, the fact that she is protected from the gaze of others still marks her as an outsider to the events of the battlefield. In particular, it would appear that Antigone's ignorance about all matters political increases her fear with regard to the upcoming war. She is *rudis Antigone*,<sup>30</sup> and her anxiety about it is clearly audible in her words:

*spesne obstatura Pelasgis/haec vexilla, pater? Pelopis descendere totas/audimus gentes: dic, o precor, extera regum/agmina—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 7.247–250

Father, is there hope that these troops can withstand the Pelasgi? We hear that all of the Pelops' races are marching down on us—tell me, I pray, of the foreign troops of the kings.

27 Hom. *Il.* 3.161–242. For comparative episodes in other literary genres, see, e.g., Tarpeia in Prop. 4.4, Scylla in Ov. *Met.* 8, and Antigone in Eur. *Phoen.* 88–201. On Statius' combination of literary models, see Vessey 1973, 205–209.

28 As Lovatt notes, Statius reverses the roles of the Homeric model, where Helen is the one who presents the Greek warriors to Priam. Lovatt 2006, 61.

29 Augoustakis 2010, 68–70.

30 Stat. *Theb.* 7.253.

Antigone is starved for information and insight, and wants to become an insider to the matters of war at hand. Moreover, her desire for knowledge is not kindled merely by a fascination of the unknown, but more importantly, by her anxiety about her own chances of survival. Ignorant as she is, Antigone knows how war works: she knows that if Thebes is overthrown, these strangers will sack the city and wreck her protected domestic sphere.<sup>31</sup> Like the city, she will be forced to let go of her identity and either perish or adapt to that of the conqueror. Antigone, therefore, is simultaneously the focaliser of the episode, whose viewpoint determines that of the reader's, and the victimised object. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that she clearly considers *herself* the subject of the story. For her, the foreign troops are faceless strangers, simultaneously fascinating and terrifying in their difference—the domestic female sphere is the domain of the Self, and the world of war represents the Other. Momentarily, the reader is forced to see the situation from another viewpoint, through Antigone's eyes.

An even more powerful example of the same theme can be found in another Flavian epic, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. In book six, the narrator describes how Medea falls in love with Jason when watching him in battle. The striking element in this episode, compared to Statius' *teikhoskopia* scene, is that the entwining of gender and ethnicity as complementary categories of otherness is an element that has greater significance in Valerius Flaccus' version. This can be explained by the protagonist of the episode: in many ways, Medea is the ultimate other of the Graeco-Roman literary tradition, a barbaric witch-woman who embodies the drives of sex and murder and the threatening world of animism.<sup>32</sup> In the whole of the Graeco-Roman mythological canon, there is no better manifestation of abjection than the story of Medea's slaughter of her children—it is a story that exemplifies the psychological need to construct 'an other' and to explain away the 'evil' in human nature as something that is characteristic of that other. Although the *Argonautica* finds Medea at an early stage of her life, the darkness of her psyche is constantly implied, as if to emphasise that it is an innate part of her being as a barbaric witch-woman (and not a sum of unexpected events and unbearable consequences that might bring out the darkness in any of us).

Considering this rather coherent representation of Medea as the abject other in the *Argonautica*, it is somewhat surprising to see her, in book six, suddenly becoming the focaliser whose experience determines the reader's view-

31 See Augoustakis' discussion of the episode in Augoustakis 2013, 165–166.

32 Vessey 1973, 243.

point. At first, Medea only reluctantly joins the other Colchian women who are standing fear-stricken on the top of the wall, watching the battle between the Argonauts and the Colchians. The external narrator relates that

*—ast illae murorum extrema capessunt/defixaeque virum lituumque fragoribus horrent,/quales instanti nimborum frigore maestae/succedunt ramis haerentque pavore volucres.*

VAL. FLACC. *Arg.* 6.503–506

—but they, pursuing the very edge of the walls, are petrified with fear at the uproar of men and trumpets. Like birds, distraught at the chill descending with storm-clouds, mount to the branches and cling to them, frightened.

Very much like the Virgilian *matres pavidae*, the women are depicted as paralysed by fear—not speaking, acting, or reacting in any way, they remain outsiders to the war narrative that is taking place before their eyes. Very soon, however, Medea’s eyes are drawn to Jason, who is fighting amongst the others, and her eager gaze begins to follow him across the battlefield.<sup>33</sup> Infatuated as she is with the hero, Medea quickly finds herself experiencing fear for him:

*At regina virum (neque enim deus amovet ignem)/persequitur lustrans oculisque ardentibus haeret;/et iam laeta minus praesentis imagine pugnae/castigatque metus et quas alit inscia curas—.*

VAL. FLACC. *Arg.* 6.657–660

But the royal lady pursues the man with a wandering gaze (for the god does not curb the fire), and clings to him with burning eyes; and now she takes less joy in the battle-scene before her, and scolds her fear and the worries that she nurses, not knowing why—.

The awakening of Medea’s desire—allegorised as all-consuming fire—is as strange an experience to her as is her sudden fear for Jason’s safety. These drives are rising simultaneously in her body and fuelling each other as they do. What feeds the fire is that Medea’s intense gaze seems to be answered by its object: “there fierce Jason, and no one else, met the poor woman’s eyes” (*saevus ibi*

33 Val. Flac. *Argon.* 6.575–586.

*miseræ solusque occurrit Iason*).<sup>34</sup> Lovatt perceptively observes that the interaction between Medea and Jason contains warlike and military overtones: The meeting of their eyes recalls a clash between two warriors in battle, and the lines *regina virum—persequitur lustrans oculisque ardentibus haeret* depicts Medea as pursuing Jason in battle, just as a warrior pursues the enemy.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it is noteworthy that while Medea pursues Jason with her fearful, desiring gaze, she herself is made vulnerable by what she sees.<sup>36</sup> This means that both participants in this interaction are victimised by Medea's gaze and her fear—a fear that is so strong that it contains violent, warlike overtones.

Because fear can be considered *the* defining female emotion in war epic, Medea's intense fear has sometimes been argued to be a matter that *per se* marginalises her and marks her as an outsider to the war narrative. Lovatt has suggested that Medea's strong identification with Jason is undermined by her dominating 'female perspective'; she states that "[t]he dangers inspire him to rejoice but her to fear, and she becomes a woman in the midst of an epic battle".<sup>37</sup> However, it is crucial to notice that it is only *after* stressing Medea's fear that the poet shows her identifying with Jason. I would suggest that instead of preventing the assimilation of the two, Medea's fear is the very element that causes it. It evokes in her such strong empathy that it makes her imagine herself in Jason's place, engaging with the events of the combat. When Medea watches Jason in battle, not only does she see him, but her intense gaze makes it possible for her to *become one* with him. She is depicted as running alongside him, and whenever he is attacked, she feels herself wounded.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, surprisingly, Medea's female fear—which ought to mark her as the outsider to the battle narrative—in effect enables her to identify with the man for whose safety she fears. The blurring of the line that separates the male,

34 Val. Flac. *Argon.* 6.586.

35 Lovatt 2006, 70.

36 As Bartsch points out, in the Graeco-Roman literary and philosophical traditions, there were varying views on the active and the passive aspects of gaze, its holder and its object. Bartsch classifies these different views in five categories: the intromission and the extramission schools, as well as the Platonic, the Aristotelic and the Stoic schools. According to a theory supported, for instance, by Lucretius, the holder of the (eroticised) gaze is in fact to be considered the vulnerable party. (Lucr. 4.1030–1036, 4.1045–1056). Thus, the gaze can simultaneously provide the viewer with a violating power over the viewed *and vice versa*. Bartsch 2006, 59, 62–66, 72–73, 75–77, 92–93. Arguably, this is what happens in the *teikhoskopia* scene in the *Argonautica*, when Medea feels wounded and vulnerable.

37 Lovatt 2006, 67–73, discussing 6.545–549. A similar way of reading is applied to the *Thebaid* by Bernstein, in Bernstein 2008, 85–86.

38 Val. Flac. *Argon.* 6.601, 6.683–685.

mobile hero of the epic from the Absolute Other is achieved through a powerful female focalisation that invites the reader to see the events through Medea's eyes. In Valerius Flaccus' depiction of Medea's gaze, one can observe how the non-verbal, petrifying fear, instead of marginalising the woman, might sometimes incorporate her into the male world of war.

### 3 Marginal Mothers? The Threatening Overtones of Maternal Fear

One of the most classic and recognisable epic archetypes is the figure of an anxious mother: a fearful character struggling with her son's entry into the temporal scene and with his adopting of a warrior identity. This archetype is strongly built on literary models drawn from both Homeric epic and Athenian tragedy—Homer's Hecuba and Euripides' Jocasta are the most obvious examples.<sup>39</sup> What is distinctive of maternal fear and anxiety in Roman war epic, then, is that they are phenomena that penetrate the celestial as well as the earthly sphere. The mother's fear is not something that concerns mortal women alone; it also plays a prominent role in the actions of the gods. Venus in the *Aeneid* is the ultimate concerned mother in the genre, and she has greatly influenced the many variants of the theme in Roman war epic. Heinze points out the differences between Virgilian Venus and Homeric Aphrodite, stressing that the Roman poet represents the goddess as considerably more human and relatable, a character who experiences feelings of fear, grief and worry.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Virgil's Venus is first and foremost a mother, and all her actions can be interpreted as deriving from that. Throughout the *Aeneid*, she personally guides her son and pleads to other gods to win their protection for him, too.<sup>41</sup> In these encounters, Venus repeatedly stresses family relations in general, and her devotion to her son in particular. In her speech to Jupiter in book one, she addresses the god as *genitor*, thus characterising her plea as a daughter's request to her father.<sup>42</sup> She also refers to her son as *meus Aeneas*, and to the Trojans as *tua progenies*—rhetoric that attempts to strengthen the familial link between Aeneas' line and Jupiter himself.<sup>43</sup> Venus does all she can to exploit her familial

39 See e.g. Eur. *Phoen.* 1217–1283; Hom. *Il.* 77–89. Hecuba is a prominent character in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Troades*, but since these plays depict the time after the fall of Troy, her motherly fear does not feature in them in the way it does in the *Iliad*.

40 Heinze 1903, 285–286.

41 See, e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 1.314–417, 2.587–623.

42 *quae te, genitor, sententia vertit?* Verg. *Aen.* 1.237.

43 Verg. *Aen.* 1.230, 1.250.

position, reminding the almighty father that the people in question are not just anybody, but his *own* grandchildren.

Besides protecting Aeneas from afar, Venus takes a more straightforward approach to war. In book eight, when the Latin war has broken out, we read that her mother's heart is shaken by fear. She is "the frightened mother, her mind troubled (and scarcely without reason) by the Laurentine threats and the vigorous uprising" (*haud animo nequiquam exterrita mater/Laurentumque minis et duro mota tumultu*).<sup>44</sup> Because she is no ordinary mother who must be content with watching by as the war narrative moves on, Venus takes action. To relieve her concerns, she seeks help from Vulcan, asking him to forge armour for Aeneas to wear in battle.<sup>45</sup> Once again, the goddess strongly relates to Aeneas, stating that the current hostilities are directed against herself and her family, *in me excidiumque meorum*.<sup>46</sup> The point is stressed further when she emphasises that she is asking for help as a mother, on behalf of her son (*arma rogo, genetrix nato*).<sup>47</sup> These final words reveal how Venus considers her own role in terms of the war: far from being a distant divine power, she is a worried mother neck-deep in the conflict. Jupiter's promise to take care of Aeneas is not enough for her, and her motherly fear makes her seek protection from both her husband and her father.

It is clear that the Virgilian Venus is located firmly in the celestial sphere; she relies on the Olympic order and hence constitutes a strong antithesis to Juno, who does not shrink from meddling with the underworld. Virgil's Venus, in fact, appears as a prime example of a woman absorbed into the logic of the temporal scene, estranged from the semiotic *chôra* and loyal to the mechanisms of a hierarchic patriarchal system—as the above-mentioned episodes show, her primary tactic is convincing either her father or her husband to do her bidding.<sup>48</sup> By doing so, Venus strongly resembles the archetype of a Roman elite matron from the late Republican period: politically active, yet not an overly threatening figure to the male-dominated social order. While the motherly con-

44 Verg. *Aen.* 8.370–371.

45 Once again, she emphasises the special relationship between herself and the addressee by addressing Vulcan as *carissime coniunx*, and by reminding him that she is entitled to the same favour that he had earlier granted to other (less significant) women. *carissime coniunx*, 8.377; *te filia Nerei, / te potuit lacrimis Tithonia flectere coniunx*, 8.383–384. Venus is referring to Thetis, mother of Achilles, and to Aurora, mother of Memnon. For Thetis, see Hom. *Il.* 18.428; for Aurora, see Verg. *Aen.* 1.489.

46 Verg. *Aen.* 8.386.

47 Verg. *Aen.* 8.383.

48 The notable exception is the episode in *Aeneid* 4, where Venus temporarily joins forces with Juno to unite Dido and Aeneas. Verg. *Aen.* 4.90–128.

cern resides strongly in her heart, Venus is able to keep these feelings in check and to channel them into productive action. She does what she can for her son, but she is not driven out of her mind by worry, nor does she ever resort to frantic fury.

The same cannot be said for everyone. Although Virgil's Venus is a powerful model for the other anxious mothers in Roman war epic, she also differs dramatically from most of them, thanks to her calm restraint and her respect for the patriarchal order. Perhaps the most intriguing point of comparison can be found in Statius' *Achilleid*, where the distressed mother in question is Thetis, Achilles' mother. She is divine, like Venus, but unlike her Virgilian model, her divinity does not seem to grant her much power within the narrative. The explanation for this is simple enough: while Venus' endeavours are firmly in keeping with the teleological, heroic drive of Virgil's epic, Thetis, on the contrary, is doomed to wage a futile war against the Homeric backstory, and against the Trojan war that is on the way. Whereas Virgil's Venus relieves her motherly anxiety by trying to advance her son's military endeavours, Statius' Thetis, on the contrary, does everything in her power to stop Achilles from getting involved with the war.<sup>49</sup> First, she pleads to Neptune, begging him to sink the Dardan fleet on its way to Troy. Obviously, the telos of Statius' epic requires that the plea be turned down, and therefore, Thetis' attempt to try on the role of the Virgilian Venus fails miserably before the first hundred lines of the poem are over.<sup>50</sup> She then decides to take matters into her own hands, and goes to Achilles' tutor Chiron, with a plan to kidnap her son for his safe-keeping. Thetis' speech to Chiron reveals the anxiety of a mother unable to protect her son from the horrors of war:

*non merito trepidus sopor atraque matri/signa deum et magnos utinam  
mentita timores?/namque modo infensos utero mihi contuor enses,/nunc  
planctu livere manus, modo in ubera saevas/ire feras; saepe ipsa—nefas!—  
sub inania natum/Tartara et ad Stygios iterum fero mergere fontes.*

STAT. *Achil.* 1.129–134

Do I not have a good reason for my anxious sleep, for the dark signs from the gods that evoke fears in a mother (would that they were lies!)? For indeed, now I see swords threatening my womb, now my hands bruised with mourning, now wild beasts going at my breasts. Often I myself (O

49 Stat. *Achil.* 1.20–396.

50 For further discussion, see Kozák 2013, 250–255.

horror!) am bearing my son down to the empty Tartarus, to dip him a second time in the waters of the Styx.

Throughout the *Achilleid*, Thetis acts in a defensive manner, stressing her status as the rightful mother of her son. She begins her speech to Chiron with aggressive *non merito*, although he has never questioned her reasons or her right to fear. Likewise, in her earlier plea to Neptune, Thetis represents her maternal fear as an irrevocable law of nature: “let it be my divine right to fear for my son” (*fas sit pro nato timuisse mihi*).<sup>51</sup> For one reason or the other—perhaps having been absent for most of Achilles’ childhood—Thetis appears insecure about meddling with her son’s life, and acts defensively from the very beginning. Of course, this defensive attitude could also be read as a manifestation of a rising anger and frustration at being so obviously marginalised by the epic narrative. In particular, Thetis’ repetitive underlining of her maternal right resembles Amata’s rhetoric in *Aeneid* 7. It seems that the anger of epic women, when they know their voices are not getting heard or are not cared about, is often crystallised in their furious demands for their maternal—hence, ‘natural’—rights.

Heslin and Kozák have analysed Thetis’ speeches in the *Achilleid*, pointing out the weaknesses of her rhetorical performance and her repetitive failures to persuade her addressees.<sup>52</sup> According to Heslin, Thetis’ failures demonstrate how epic speech is male by nature—its rhetoric and style are designed to match the social role of a military man, which is why epic women often lack credibility and fail to convince.<sup>53</sup> This reading is an excellent expression of the deep-rooted thinking according to which, in Roman epic, logic and language are the male domain, whereas women are illogical, irreversibly tied up with their emotions, and prisoners in their bodies. While in general, I am inclined to question this view—and will do so in more detail in chapter six—in this case, it appears to hold true. Admittedly, Thetis seems to have trouble in getting her point through to the listener—or to the reader—precisely because her pleas lack logical argumentation of any kind, and mostly revolve around her personal suffering. The above-mentioned passage, for instance, is rich in vivid imagery describing the horrors that reside in her heart. The pain that she feels is expressed with the help of extremely violent metaphors that revolve

51 Stat. *Achil.* 1.68–69.

52 Heslin 2005, 110–111, 131–134; Kozák 2013, 250–255.

53 Heslin analyses the speeches of Thetis in the *Achilleid* and those of Venus in the *Thebaid*, concluding that any rhetorical tools or psychological insight that might advance the goals of these goddesses are out of their reach. Heslin 2005, 131–134. See also Hardie 2012, 7; von Albrecht 1999, 283–284; Fuhrer 2010, 67–72, 75–77.

around her reproductive organs: Thetis describes her womb as threatened by swords, and her breasts as torn by beasts. Therefore, although it is a fairly well-structured speech, it is not exactly a triumph of logic. Rather, it consists only of deep dark images from her subconscious put into words. The semiotic modality of communication is dominant in Thetis' self-expression, and this is why her speeches fail: one cannot convincingly argue on the basis of vague fears that derive from the body. The conflict between the role that she is trying to play (the Virgilian Venus immersed in the logic of the temporal scene) and the essence of her being (uncontrollable despair and anxiety) is disturbing to the reader.

In effect, Thetis' turbulent emotions are so overwhelming that she *herself* seems to be disturbed by them and has difficulties in grasping their 'meaning': "O this pain! O fears that came too late to a mother's heart!" (*o dolor, o seri materno in corde timores!*), she exclaims in confusion.<sup>54</sup> Maternal fear appears to Thetis as a strange phenomenon that she cannot properly understand, presumably because of her distant relationship with the son she barely ever sees.<sup>55</sup> All of the dark dreams she relates—the swords piercing her womb and the beasts attacking her breasts—are about the bodily experience of motherhood: it is as if she was only now becoming aware of these physical tokens of her motherhood, only now hearing the call of the womb that she had repressed ever since her son was born.

The strange, distant relationship between the mother and the son is made evident in the scene where Achilles enters the cave and the two see each other for the first time in Statius' epic:

*Figit gelidus Nereida pallor:/ille aderat multo sudore et pulvere maior,/et tamen arma inter festinatosque labores/dulcis adhuc visu—necdum prima nova lanugine vertitur aetas,/tranquillaequae faces oculis et plurima vultu/mater inest—. [F]etam Pholoës sub rupe leaenam/perculerat ferro vacuisque reliquerat antris/ipsam, sed catulos apportat et incitat ungues./quos tamen, ut fido genetrix in limine visa est,/abicit exceptamque avidis circumlingat ulnis,/iam gravis amplexu iamque aequus vertice matri.*

STAT. *Ach.* 1.158–161, 1.163–165, 1.168–173

Icy paleness petrifies the Nereid: he was there, much sweat and dust made him seem bigger, and yet, in the midst of weapons and rushed toils, he

54 Stat. *Achil.* 1.42.

55 Konstan briefly addresses this issue, comparing Statius' representation of Thetis to that of Homer's. Konstan 1997, 86–87.

was still a sweet sight.—Nor yet was his first youth changing with new down, the fire in his eyes was calm and in his face, there was much of his mother—[H]e had struck down with a sword a pregnant lioness under Pholoë's rock and left her in the empty cave, but the cubs he had brought home and was playing with their claws. However, when he sees his mother standing on the dependable threshold, he casts them aside and, having captured her in his arms, envelops her with eager arms, already heavy with his embrace and now of the same height as his mother.

The episode is strange in its threatening overtones and in the imagery that mixes affection with violence. First of all, why is Thetis taken by *gelidus pallor* when she sees her son enter? Is it because the fear that she feels for his safety becomes more tangible at the sight of the boy? Or is it, as Heslin has suggested, because the mother is frightened by the contrast between Achilles' boyish appearance and the new manliness that he has acquired?<sup>56</sup> Whatever the reason may be, it is clear that Thetis is taken aback by her son's appearance, which is simultaneously familiar and strange—simultaneously representing the self and the other. It is explicitly stated that Achilles is going through a physical transformation, becoming bigger and stronger. On the other hand, we are told that “much of his mother” still remains in his looks. It would seem likely that the atmosphere of confusion and the looming threat that mark the passage concern this conflation of sameness and otherness. On the one hand, seeing the boy who so much resembles herself reminds Thetis of her motherhood and of the pre-Oedipal symbiosis with this child with whom she used to be of one flesh. On the other hand, the aspects of Achilles that represent the other to her—his obvious manliness, and his nearly grown-up physique—confuse the nymph and underline the fact that the bond between them has been broken. Seeing Achilles, therefore, reveals to Thetis her own position as an abjected (m)other. Since the child is no longer in her womb, her power to protect him is limited.

It is important to notice that in this passage, Thetis, who is otherwise an extremely marginalised character in Statius' epic, suddenly becomes the focaliser. It is *she* whose viewpoint the episode delivers, it is through *her* eyes that the reader sees Achilles for the first time, and it is against *her* subjectivity that the hero of the epic is defined as the threatening other. When Achilles appears, Thetis' motherhood, a topic that she has been incessantly talking about, to no

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56 Heslin 2005, 182.

avail, suddenly becomes real and experienced—and, surprisingly, it grants her a position as the identifiable focaliser of the narrative.

The powerful impact of this is strengthened by the fact that both Achilles and Thetis seem to have repressed their pre-Oedipal coexistence successfully up to this point. As Achilles later relates, he had been living with his foster-father Chiron ever since he was “still crawling”—apparently, for as long as he can remember. He continues, relating that

—*non ullos ex more cibos hausisse nec almis/uberibus satiasset famem, sed spissa leonum/viscera semianimisque lupae traxisse medullas.*

STAT. *Ach.* 2.98–100

—they say that I ate no food of the usual kind, and never sated my hunger on nourishing breasts, but gnawed the tough entrails of lions and the marrow of the half-dead she-wolf.

The explicit idea that he never received breastmilk, not even that of animals, underlines the lack of a physical mother-child bond, and creates an impression of a pre-Oedipal stage somehow tragically interrupted or skipped over. This lack, in fact, appears to have become the defining element of Achilles' personality and carved into his identity—as Barchiesi points out, the name Achilles possibly derives from *a-cheilos*, “no-lips”, or “no-suckling”.<sup>57</sup> Studied against this background, the moment when Thetis and Achilles see each other in Chiron's cave is a moment of painful revelation to both of them. The foundations of the self waver, when they both see someone with whom they used to be one.

The mixture of affectionate gestures and violent implications in the episode could perhaps be explained by this confusion. The first things that Thetis notices about Achilles is his size and that he carries weapons—yet, in the same sentence we are told that despite these threatening features, he is still “a sweet sight” (*dulcis adhuc visu*). When Achilles rushes to embrace his mother, his arms are described as “eager” or “greedy” (*avidis circumlingat ulnis*), and he himself as “powerful” or “heavy” in his embrace (*gravis amplexu*). It is difficult to avoid the impression that Achilles' embrace might be hurting Thetis, or that at least she is worried that it might. The reader is reminded of Thetis' rape by Peleus, an event that led to her becoming a mother in the first place. Arguably, when Thetis' and Achilles' bodies envelop each other for the first time since

57 Barchiesi 2005, 56. See Apollodorus *Bibl.* 3.13.6.

their separation a long time ago, this memory comes back to the mother—it seems as if love and violence, birth and death are indistinguishable in this episode.

Heslin has brilliantly discussed the curious mention of the lion cubs that Achilles is carrying in his arms, suggesting that this intensifies the violent charge of the episode. He observes an assimilation between the lions and the human protagonists: like the cubs whose mother he has killed, Achilles is gaining ferocious strength and becoming both violent and dangerous. Likewise, like the lioness, Thetis feels vulnerable and powerless to protect her son. Moreover, the potential violence *by Achilles against Thetis* also seems to be clearly implied. The assimilation between Achilles and the lion cubs brings to mind a detail from Thetis' dream where she imagines her breasts attacked by wild beasts. Achilles, who has never suckled at her mother's breasts, therefore does so in this perverted and violent re-enactment of their symbiotic coexistence. It seems that the mother and the son are trying to reconnect with the pre-Oedipal stage that they both have repressed, but because it is far too late for that, the attempt results in a threatening innuendo that carries stronger connotations of death than of birth. Strangers to each other, they both imagine one another as wild beasts, as representatives of animals and animalism: in short, as the abject other.

Heslin suggests that when Thetis kidnaps Achilles and dresses him up as a girl in order to hide him at Scyros, she is, in a sense, becoming a father figure to the boy, engaging in a reverse *toga virilis* ceremony and "creating him in her own image".<sup>58</sup> According to his reading, Thetis is attempting here to fill a void in Achilles' life, to become 'an adoptive father' and the identifiable other to the boy. While a symbolic initiation rite can indeed be observed in the episode, I am more inclined to agree with Rimell, who argues that Thetis' abduction of Achilles is not only "a repetition and rewriting of her own rape by Peleus", but also an attempt to "keep her son inside her own body, or to rebirth him".<sup>59</sup> It seems that instead of trying to act as the Name-of-the-Father, the identifiable other to Achilles, Thetis is trying to recreate the sameness of the pre-Oedipal stage. After seeing Achilles in Chiron's cave, she has powerfully felt her motherhood, and been convinced that it is the temporal scene that poses a threat to her child. All of Thetis' actions are an attempt to prevent Achilles' entrance into that scene and into political affairs. The 'feminine sphere' that Scyros represents is a womb-like receptacle in which Thetis tries to encage Achilles, in

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58 Heslin 2005, 128–129, 191, 291–292.

59 Rimell 2015, 262–270.

order to keep him safe, and to prevent him from turning into the threatening other. Ultimately, she is attempting to rekindle the symbiotic connection that neither of them appreciated when it was there.

This, of course, is an impossible mission, and its inevitable failure robs Thetis of the narrative power that her motherly fear momentarily granted her. In many ways, Statius' Thetis is an antithesis to Virgil's Venus: she is a passionate opponent of the temporal scene and the symbolic order, powerfully in touch with her bodily drives, and ultimately doomed to be marginalised by the epic narrative. Whereas Venus' motherly fear is channeled into action that does not challenge the telos of the epic or the Olympic hierarchy, Thetis' anxiety escapes reason and resonates in her body, causing her to try to rewrite one of the master narratives of classical mythology: the Trojan war.

The anxious mother who struggles to come to terms with her motherhood is a repetitive figure in Statius' epic. Another variant of this archetype can be found in the *Thebaid*, where the poet introduces Atalanta, the famous Amazon of classical mythology and mother of the young Parthenopaeus.<sup>60</sup> In book nine, Parthenopaeus joins the forces of the Seven against Thebes and rides off to war despite his mother's pleas—in this sense, the composition is parallel to the situation in the *Achilleid*. Unlike Thetis, however, Atalanta accepts her fate and lets her son go. After his departure, the external narrator depicts the mother waiting anxiously, tormented by nightmares: the bad omens regarding her son's fate "arouse the mother in all her heart" (*totoque erexit pectore matrem*).<sup>61</sup>

The similarities between Thetis in the *Achilleid* and Atalanta in the *Thebaid* are many and obvious. For neither of them was motherhood ever a choice; rather, it was a result of sexual violence. And like Thetis the water nymph, Atalanta the Amazon never seems to have adopted the traditionally nurturing role of a mother that society expects of a woman. Instead, she has led a most unconventional life dedicated to hunting in the wilderness. It is only now that her son is entering the world of war and offering his life in the service of the temporal order, that Atalanta painfully feels the connection to him. In one of her nightmares, we are told, she has seen "the quiver sliding from her shoulders, and her own images and familiar likenesses destroyed by fire" (*ex umeris fluxisse pharetras, / effigiesque suas simulacraque nota cremari*).<sup>62</sup> The anxious mother relates this to the destruction that she is convinced will be the fate of her son, and this act of identifying temporarily dissolves all difference between the two: in her subconscious, Atalanta imagines herself and her son as one being again.

60 Stat. *Theb.* 4.309–344.

61 Stat. *Theb.* 9.570–582, 9.584.

62 Stat. *Theb.* 9.581–582.

Like Thetis in the *Achilleid*, she is fantasising about the pre-Oedipal stage of the *chôra*: the stage that she may not have enjoyed when it was reality, but that she now, upon her son's entry into the temporal scene, would like to return to.

As humans in war epic are wont to do, Atalanta turns to her protective deity, Diana, and prays for help:

*hunc mihi (quid trepidae noctes somnusque minantur?)/hunc, precor,  
audaci qui nunc ad proelia voto/heu nimium tibi fisus abit, da visere belli/  
victorem, vel, si ampla peto, da visere tantum!—quod si vera sopor miserae  
praesagia mittit,/per te maternos, mitis Dictynna, labores/fraternumque  
decus, cunctis hunc fige sagittis/infelicem uterum; miserae sine funera mat-  
ris/audiat ille prior!*

STAT. *Theb.* 9.622–625, 9.631–635

—him, I pray (what do the nervous nights and slumbers threaten?), him who now goes to battles with brave determination, trusting, alas, too much in you, let me see him victorious in war—or, if I ask too much, just let me see him at all!—But if sleep sends me true omens, by your mother's labours, gentle Dictynna, and by the glory of your brother, drive all your arrows through this miserable womb. May him hear first of the death of his poor mother.

Once again, motherhood comes across as a very physical experience. Atalanta wishes to perish together with her son—better yet, before him—in order to save herself from grief. The violence targeted at her womb—again, an element shared with Thetis in the *Achilleid*—metaphorically aims at *undoing* her motherhood, the cause of all her suffering. Once again, birth and death are very closely entwined in Statius' depiction of motherly anxiety. The sexual violence done to Atalanta is repeated in this self-destructive imagery, and the animalistic drives of sex and death get mixed and are charged through her dark dreams.

In a sense, Atalanta's transformation from an Amazon warrior into a fearful mother could be read as a transformation whereby she is incorporated into a more conventional gender system and into more conventional dynamics of war—after all, fearing for their sons is what mothers are supposed to do in war epic. However, I would argue that Atalanta's obvious discomfort with the mothering role disturbs this transformation, and results in a form of fear that is not relatable, but threatening, violent and self-destructive. Statius' epic is playing with the essentialist and the performative ideas of gender and motherhood: Atalanta's world is shaken by the 'call of the womb' and by her awakening to the biological realities of her motherhood. On the other hand, however, this

biological certainty is not sufficient: because she is unfamiliar with the social role of a mother, her fear turns into self-destructive anxiety.

Therefore, whereas Thetis' motherly fear momentarily granted her some narrative power and a vantage point, Atalanta's situation is quite different. In this episode, she quickly travels from one marginalised position to another, from the Amazon huntress to a self-destructive maenadic mother. In Kristevan terms, she is like a woman who goes from 'playing a superman' to playing the role of a recluse hysteric (in every possible sense of the word). When alone in the forest, praying for her own death and for the piercing of her womb, she has become one of the "others—more tuned in to their unconscious drives, [who] sullenly hold back—occasionally punctuated by some kind of outburst: a cry, a refusal".<sup>63</sup> Unlike Thetis, Atalanta does not actively go against the heroic drive of the epic. But in her aggressive, sullen anxiety and seclusion, she does question the purpose of it all.

In a way, Statius' Atalanta and Thetis complete each other, and together they deliver a rather threatening and gloomy idea of the darker side of motherhood. Their position as outsiders to the human community—one a divine water nymph, the other an Amazon huntress—marks them as different and marginal, out of reach of society's expectations. Then suddenly, when their sons reject the isolation in the periphery and choose to dedicate their lives to the temporal scene, the narrative demands that the mothers do the same. They, however, are tragically unable to do so, never having been trained in the socially prescribed role of a warrior's mother (or any kind of mother, for that matter). As a result, Thetis and Atalanta become figures of a kind of motherly fear that does not fit well with the heroic narrative, since it reveals the animalistic drives of the body and confuses caring anxiety with impending self-destruction. As Augoustakis has aptly put it, Statius' epic is characterised throughout by "the inability to carry on female lamentation within the boundaries of his epic poem".<sup>64</sup> In the light of these episodes, it seems evident that it is not only grief and lament that function this way in the *Thebaid* and in the *Achilleid*, but also fear and anxiety that do not find socially approved channels for their outburst. These mothers' experience of motherhood is exceedingly bodily, extreme and threatening to the norms that hold the patriarchal society together.

What makes this phenomenon even more intriguing is that it does not seem to be limited to Amazon warriors and rebellious nymphs—nor even to female characters in general. In Statius' epic, the non-verbal, bodily anxiety of

63 Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 155–156).

64 Augoustakis 2010, 29.

a mother is such a crucial theme that one can see reflections of it even in those whom one might expect to be the most devoted servants of the temporal scene: male, political leaders. As I have pointed out above, men playing female roles is not a rare phenomenon in Statius' epic: in the previous chapter, I discussed Oedipus' role as a warmongering Fury. Here, it is worth noting one example of a situation where the role of an anxious mother is played by a male character. In book ten of the *Thebaid*, Creon, the viceroy of Thebes, finds out that his son Menoeceus is demanded as a sacrificial victim in order to turn the luck of war.<sup>65</sup> Taken by instant panic, Creon refuses to accept the oracle, and does everything in his power to convince his son that the omens are false. The passage where the oracle is first uttered is descriptive: it shows how the father's entire demeanor changes in a heartbeat from that of a composed political leader into that of a terror-stricken anxious 'mother':

*Stabat fatidici prope saeva altaria vatis/maestus, adhuc patriae tantum  
communia lugens/fata, Creon: grandem subiti cum fulminis ictum,/non  
secus ac torta traiectus cuspide pectus,/accipit examinis sentitque Men-  
oecea posci./monstrat enim suadetque timor; stupet anxius alto/corda metu  
glaciante pater: Trinacria qualis/ora repercussum Libyco mare sumit ab  
aestu./mox plenum Phoebos vatem et celerare iubentem,/nunc humilis  
genua amplectens, nunc ora canentis,/nequiquam reticere rogat—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 10.616–626

Near the prophetic seer's cruel altar stood Creon. He was sad, but still mourning only the fates of his country and his community—then, he feels the mighty stroke of a sudden thunderbolt, just as though a flying lance had pierced his breast, when he learns of the council and hears that Menoeceus is demanded. Truly, fear guides and urges him on: deep terror freezes his heart and the anxious father stands stunned, just like the Trinacrian shore receiving the sea back from the Libyan surge. Then he in vain begs the seer, who is full of Phoebus and orders haste, to be silent, now humbly embracing his knees, now trying to silence his lips as he chants.

The beginning of the passage, where Creon is standing sad and motionless, already hints at his future role as a mourning mother. Like the Virgilian *matres pavidae* on the wall, he is a *stabat mater* character—only at this point still

65 Stat. *Theb.* 10.616–720.

unaware of it himself. In the beginning of the episode, Creon thinks he knows what fear and grief are: he is worrying about the body politic, and his anxiety is controlled and regulated by social norms. However, this emotion—located in the mind and in the symbolic order—is no fear at all, as Creon is soon to find out. When he hears that it is *his* son whose life is demanded, the true bodily fear penetrates him and becomes a lived experience out of reach of both words and logic. It is explicitly stated that *grandem subiti cum fulminis ictum, non secus ac torta traiectus cuspide pectus*—he feels as if his heart is being pierced by a spear. The similarities of this imagery with that used to describe Thetis' and Atalanta's overpowering anxiety are striking: since Creon does not have a womb to be pierced, his heart becomes a surrogate 'motherly organ' to be destroyed by war. Furthermore, the mention of "deep terror" "freezing" his heart (*stupet anxius alto/corda metu glaciante pater*) reminds the reader of Thetis' "icy pallor" at the sight of her son. In a heartbeat, what is political becomes personal and the body overcomes the mind. Creon's composed grief becomes corporeal, overwhelming and impossible to control. When his words fail to convince the seer, the father actually attacks the man and engages in physical violence to stop him from talking. His behaviour lacks both logic and restraint, since he is now completely driven by the *chôra*.

The episode ends abruptly, as if to emphasise the semiotic pressure on the narrative logic; the reader will not know what happens to Creon at this point, nor whether he manages to put himself together. He returns, in his role of an anxious mother, sixty lines later when Menoeceus storms through the city, convinced by the oracle and adamant on taking his own life. The poet relates that

*Iamque iter ad muros cursu festinus anhelus/obtinet et miseros gaudet vitasse parentes,/cum genitor ----- /steteruntque ambo et vox haesit utriusque,/deiectaeque genae.*

STAT. *Theb.* 10.686–688

And now he makes his way to the walls, short of breath and in a hurry, and he is glad to have avoided his miserable parents, when his father ----- and both stood still, with their faces downcast, and neither can find the voice to speak.

The surprising rupture in line 1.688 and the following silence are very untypical of Statius' epic style. The line abruptly breaks off after *cum genitor*, and the following line, an intact six-foot verse, seems to continue from something that has been left out. Logically, what should have followed is probably Menoeceus' suddenly running into his parents on top of the wall, where they may have

been waiting for him, aware of his suicidal plans. However, this encounter is not explicitly described and, intriguingly, the mother is not mentioned at all—it might be that she *is* there, standing next to the father, both equally dumbstruck by their fear, but the line that follows does not make this clear.

I am tempted to suggest that this break in the hexameter, instead of being a trace of later corruption of the manuscript, is deliberate and intended to draw attention to Menoeceus' sudden stop at the sight of his father. Creon, petrified by fear, becomes a very tangible obstacle on his way, stopping him from advancing towards his destiny. In this way, Creon has more narrative power than Thetis did when she tried to stand in the way of the heroic drive of the epic. The father's powerful, threatening presence not only temporarily stops Menoeceus, but also interrupts the flow and the logic of Statius' hexameter. *cum genitor*—violently forces the reader to halt and to take in the semiotic pressure on the narrative. Creon's anxiety is so strong that it cannot be bypassed, not by his son and not by the reader.

The invisibility of Menoeceus' mother in the episode is also telling, as is the fact that immediately before the break in the line, Creon is referred to as *genitor*, not as *pater*. This choice of words appears to stress and underline the biological nature of his fatherhood over the social role of a father. When he is standing on the wall, he is not thinking of his son's heroism or of the glory that his death will bring to the family. He is there because his bodily drives—an indissoluble connection to his child that could perhaps be called 'love'—force him to go against the role that the society expects from him as a father and as a leader. In a way, he becomes both mother and father to his son: both the object of primal abjection, and the identifiable other.

After this break in the narrative, Creon momentarily regains his restraint and strives for symbolic communication. It is related that “finally, the father spoke first” (*tandem pater ante profatus*). In his speech, then, Creon tries hard to put his feelings into words, and to convince his son by logical arguments. He claims that the prophecy is false, directed against him and his family (one can hear echoes of the Virgilian Venus in this argument). He also swears that, if Menoeceus only refrained from taking his own life, he would happily let his son face the horrors of war, since this would be the right way of serving his country (*hoc malunt Thebae*). Creon also begs Menoeceus to wait and reconsider: “do not let your ardent mood lead you; give it time, a brief delay—impulse is always a bad master” (*ne frena animo permitte calenti, / da spatium tenuemque moram, male cuncta ministrat / impetus*).<sup>66</sup> His arguments, however, fail to convince, since

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66 Stat. *Theb.* 10.703–705.

they appear to be both contradictory and false. On the one hand, Creon argues that he only wants his son to serve Thebes in the best possible manner; on the other, he claims that true honour can be found only in one's devotion to the family, not to the state. His attempt to plead to Menoeceus' reason and logic also seems distorted, considering that he himself is acting out of impulse and has fallen victim to sudden, uncontrollable emotions. Creon's speech, therefore, is rhetorically weak because it is in fact nothing but an expression of his inner tumult, much like Thetis' pleas in the *Achilleid*. He is trying to perform the role that he was comfortable with earlier—the political leader and *paterfamilias* deeply absorbed into the symbolic order—but his poorly composed speech betrays him, since it reveals that he is now completely dominated by the pulsation of the *chôra* that has aroused the *genitor* in him.

The most telling part of Creon's speech is his reference to Menoeceus' mother: "I beg you, son, by your years and mine, by your poor mother's breasts—do not believe the seer, boy!" (*'per ego oro tuosque,/nate, meosque annos miseraeque per ubera matris,/ne vati, ne crede, puer!'*)<sup>67</sup> Again, the reader becomes painfully aware of the father's physical inadequacy (he does not have breasts of his own to flaunt) and of his consequent lack of the rhetorical means that epic mothers generally employ. Earlier on, Creon's heart played the role of an epic mother's womb in his self-destructive hallucinations. Here, the father draws attention to the nourishing breasts of the lad's mother, as if to represent them as his own. The mother, whom one does not hear speak once in the episode, seems to be there (*if* she is there) for her physique only; she is a substitute body that Creon uses like a theatre mask in his performance of the role of a *misera mater*.

Of course, as is usual with *miserae matres*, Creon's attempt to hinder the course of the epic narrative is ultimately unsuccessful, and after his failure, he is cast into the margins of the story. As Menoeceus rushes off, we read that the father's "heart is drowned in a dark fog, his senses confused. His sense of duty roams uncertain, his fears are in conflict" (*illi atra mersum caligine pectus/confudit sensus; pietas incerta vagatur/discordantque metus*—).<sup>68</sup> It would be difficult to find another passage in the whole of Roman epic where someone so obviously falls victim to the Kristevan 'marginalisation'. Creon finally gives in to his mixed and confused emotions; he "sullenly holds back" and resigns the symbolic order.<sup>69</sup> By so doing, he masters the role of an epic mother, becoming one of the characters that "forever remain in a sulk in the face of history, politics

67 Stat. *Theb.* 10.694–696.

68 Stat. *Theb.* 10.735–737.

69 See Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 155).

and social affairs; symptoms of their failure, but symptoms destined for marginality".<sup>70</sup> After this event, Creon is gradually faded out of the narrative, and he never again appears as his former self, the capable viceroy and devoted servant of the temporal scene.

While Statius' Creon is a somewhat unique character in Roman war epic—in the role of an anxious mother, he is more convincing than many actual epic mothers—he is not alone. In effect, men who try on stereotypically feminine epic roles seem to constitute a phenomenon typical of Flavian epic at large.<sup>71</sup> In Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, the anxious and fearful 'mother' is Pelias, king of Iolcus. He is father to the young Acastus, whom Jason lures to take part in Argo's voyage, against his parents' wishes. In Valerius Flaccus' version of the story, Acastus' free will remains dubious: it is stated that he is abducted (*raptus*) by treachery. Unsurprisingly, upon finding out what has happened, his father is both furious and fearful. Intriguingly, Pelias does not even momentarily try to control his rage or to disguise it in the cloak of logic, but proceeds directly to the semiotic mode: we read that "all his fury bursts on them" (*ruat omnis in illos/quippe furor*).<sup>72</sup> The use of *furor* immediately makes clear that the king's rage is beyond words and reason. The narrator continues, relating that

*Saevit atrox Pelias inimicaque vertice ab alto/vela videt nec qua se ardens effundere possit.—quin etiam in thalamis primoque in limine Acasti/fusus humo iuvenis gressus et inania signa/ore premit sparsisque legens vestigia canis—“qua te, infelix, quibus insequar oris?/non Scythicas ferus ille domos nec ad ostia Ponti/tendit iter, falsae sed captum laudis amore/te, puer, in nostrae durus tormenta senectae/nunc lacerat.—o domus, o freti neququam prole penates!”/dixit et extemplo furiis iraque minaci/terribilis “sunt hic etiam tua vulnera, praedo,/sunt lacrimae carusque parens.”*

VAL. *Arg.* 1.700–701, 1.709–711, 1.715–719, 1.721–725

Savage Pelias rages when he sees, from a high summit, the sails of his enemy, and does not know how to vent his frenzy.—Furthermore, he lies stretched out on the threshold of Acastus' bedroom. The ground where the youth has stepped, and the empty traces of him, he presses with his lips, and with his grey hair dishevelled goes through every footprint: “—Where, you poor thing, to what coasts can I follow you? Neither the houses of Scythia nor the gates of Pontus are the purpose of that savage

70 Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 156).

71 For further discussion, see Bernstein 2008, 68.

72 Val. Flac. *Arg.* 1.698–699.

man's journey—but you, boy, captured by the love of false glory, that hard-hearted brute now destroys, tormenting me in my old age.—O, my house, O spirits of my ancestors that in vain trusted your offspring!” He spoke, and immediately, threatening fury and anger made him seem terrifying: “Here, robber, are also the means to hurt you, here are tears and your dear father.”

It is evident that the king is out of his mind with anger—and, especially, with fear of what might befall his son. His speech is intermittent and not really directed at anyone; at one time he is addressing Acastus, at another he rages to Jason, and (perhaps realising that neither of them can hear him), he at times seems to be muttering to himself or just crying out his pain. In this sense, Pelias resembles Virgil's Amata at the height of her frenzy, when she engaged in the delusional simulation of the Bacchic ritual. Moreover, the episode in the *Argonautica* clearly recalls the elegiac *relicta* topos, as Pelias tries on the role of a left-behind woman, a deserted lover gazing at the sea and crying out her bitterness at the treacherous lover. The passage is full of allusions to an unhappy love affair: while Jason's abduction of Acastus hints at the classical bride rape theme, the father's crawling on Acastus' bedroom floor (*thalamis in limine*) evokes ideas of a wedding chamber and of related rites of passage.

This kind of confusion between the roles of an anxious father and a betrayed lover seems odd, at first sight; however, I would suggest that the association is deliberate and meaningful, since it clearly recalls another passage in the canon of Roman epic: Dido's *furor* upon Aeneas' departure. The episode makes use of a vocabulary similar to that which Virgil uses to describe Dido's desperation: *durus*, *ferus* and *falsa* all strengthen the impression of Jason as a version of Aeneas, someone who makes empty promises and sets sail in secrecy and in haste. *Furor*, *saevus* and *ardens*, for their part, remind the reader of Dido's emotional response. Arguably, these allusions stress the seriousness of Pelias' madness, and anticipate his terrible revenge. As his speech implies, he is planning on killing Jason's parents, so that Jason should suffer the same fate as he himself has: a violent and forcible separation of the parent and the son. When a priestess warns Jason's parents of the king's plan, she states that “against you the unstable king is preparing a bitter crime, a familial war, and is nursing the savage flames of his anger” (*sed tibi triste nefas fraternaue turbidus arma/rex parat et saevos irarum concipit ignes*).<sup>73</sup> The reader recalls Dido's curse of eternal war, as well as her prayers that Aeneas should live to see his son killed. In her

73 Val. Flac. *Arg.* 1.747–748.

agony, Dido even regrets that she did not murder the child herself when she had a chance.<sup>74</sup> This means that Pelias is clearly fashioned as a version of Virgil's Dido: a bloodthirsty, vengeful epic woman—only, his lack of self-control appears even more complete. His son is not even dead yet, but his fear has already turned into a violent rage that knows no limit or logic and cannot even temporarily be curbed by the symbolic order. His attempt to play the role of a mourning mother, apparent in the mention of his dishevelled hair, fails, since he rather resembles a bloodthirsty *dira*, impossible for the reader to relate to and hence inevitably marginalised.

From these examples one can observe how extreme fear and anxiety often appear to challenge the role that the character is supposed to play in the narrative and to throw him or her into a sudden bodily turmoil and inner crisis. This is equally true of the distant mothers Thetis and Atalanta as it is of Creon and Pelias, who are committed to their roles as political leaders. For all four of them, these social performances fall apart when primitive fear for one's child pierces their bodies and paralyses their minds. It would appear that, at least in Flavian epic, maternal fear and anxiety are extremely powerful emotions that derive from the body and 'destroy the language'. When reasonable communication is ruled out by the pressure of the *chôra*, these characters are inevitably marginalised by the epic narrative. The fearful mother is a difficult character for the reader to relate to, because what she (or he!) is experiencing is, by its very nature, beyond words, and cannot be grasped or communicated by the logic of language. She remains alien and threatening to the audience—pitied perhaps, but inevitably destined for a lack of subjectivity.

#### 4 Grief, Lament and the Dissolution of Differences

It goes without saying that, in the violent world of Roman epic, a mother's fear is rarely groundless. On the contrary, motherly anxiety is grounded on another integral feature of the epic narrative: constant and repetitive loss.<sup>75</sup> Because of this, female lament has a structurally significant role in the Roman war epics of the early Principate—as it does in Roman literature in general.<sup>76</sup> In war nar-

74 Verg. *Aen.* 4.601–602.

75 The archetypal starting point of motherly grief in epic can be found in Hom. *Il.* 24.748–759, where Hecuba mourns Hector's death. This is the model that the Roman epic poets repeatedly rework in their depictions of mourning mothers.

76 See Fantham 1999; Whittaker 2011; Hope 2011; Newlands 2012, 110–135. On the complexities of gender and emotion in the Roman culture of death, see McCullough 2011. For the socio-

ratives, where disorder and insecurity are constant, the proper mourning rites that are conducted in detail provide structure as well as a feeling of order and continuity. It is therefore important to point out that female grief is not always or exclusively something that would challenge the logic of the temporal scene and society's ways of working. It is also—when prescribed by social norms—something that validates and enforces the said order.

Furthermore, Roman war epic is rich in episodes where female grief clearly validates and strengthens the heroic drive of the poem. Motherly grief, in particular, was strictly institutionalised in the Graeco-Roman culture and hence in the epic tradition; in the Roman poets' works, it is repeatedly depicted as an essential (and final) stage on the hero's journey towards valour and glory.<sup>77</sup> Typically, the mother's public lament manifests the virtuousness of both the dead son and the mother herself.<sup>78</sup> This can be observed, for instance, in Hannibal's speech to his fallen brother in Silius Italicus' *Punica*:

*dignus Carthagine, dignus/Hasdrubale ad manes ibis; nec te optima mater/  
dissimilem lugebit avis, Stygiave sub umbra/degenerem cernens noster vit-  
abit Hamilcar.*

SIL. *Pun.* 5:595–598

Worthy of Carthage, worthy of Hasdrubal, you go down to the underworld. Your good mother will mourn you as no differently from your ancestors; and when our father Hamilcar meets you under the shadows of the Styx, he will not shun you as degenerate.

In this episode, female grief clearly underlines and enhances the fallen warrior's heroism, and the mother's tears are depicted as a kind of triumph that a courageous soldier deserves. It is particularly interesting that in this epis-

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cultural background of (female) lament in Roman epic, see Greene 1999; Murnaghan 1999. The significance of the phenomenon can be observed particularly clearly in Roman historiography, where lamenting matrons often have a functional position as the internal audience of exemplary stories. See Mustakallio 1990; Mustakallio 2003; Mustakallio 2012, 169–171.

77 Fantham aptly defines lament as “women's contribution to celebrating the life and death of a man or a community”. Fantham 1999, 221. Moreover, female lament, and the appropriately conducted funeral ceremony of which it was a part, had a crucial place in the Roman culture of commemoration—for Romans, a post-mortem oblivion was a real and particularly frightening fate, as it could happen even to those who were powerful and prominent in their lifetime. Whittaker 2011, 61.

78 For some episodes in Homeric epic, see Hom. *Il.* 11.450–455; Hom. *Od.* 11.421–425.

ode, the foreign enemy becomes a mouthpiece of values and ideas that are apparently considered universal. When Hannibal stresses the significance of motherly lament, the symbolic importance of female grief becomes a connecting link between the Romans and the Carthaginians.<sup>79</sup> The shared values between Rome and ‘the barbaric other’ are underlined, and the Roman reader presumably would have had no difficulties in identifying with this glorification of heroic death.

The fear that the body of a loved one would be denied proper grieving rites is a repetitive theme in Roman war epic—the topos derives from Sophocles’ and Euripides’ *Antigone*, but it certainly reflects the anxieties of the war-centred Roman society, as well.<sup>80</sup> Dyson describes death without burial “the epic hero’s nightmare”—and certainly, as Micozzi states, the theme serves to develop drama and pathos in the epic narrative.<sup>81</sup> The episode in the *Thebaid* where Antigone and Argia defy the law and secretly bury Polynices’ body is the most famous example of this topos in Roman war epic.<sup>82</sup> Another example is in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, where Pompey’s wife Cornelia is robbed of her right to grieve her husband in an appropriate manner. Cornelia is forced to watch from a ship Pompey’s decapitation on the Egyptian shore; the dismembered body is then left by the sea to be consumed by nature.<sup>83</sup> However, in the dead of night, Cordus, a veteran of Pompey’s troops, sneaks to the beach and secretly burns the body. Cordus is well aware of the inadequacy of the rite, and moreover he laments aloud the fact that Pompey’s wife is not there to execute it:

*Sit satis, o superi, quod non Cornelia fuso/crine iacet subicique facem con-*  
*plexa maritum/imperat, extremo sed abest a munere busti/infelix coniunx*  
*nec adhuc a litore longe est.*

LUC. *Phar.* 8.739–742

79 See Ripoll 1998, 332–336.

80 The ritual and religious importance of the burial can be observed in Servius’ notion that *cum pontificibus nefas esset cadaver videre, magis tamen nefas fuerat, si visum insepultum reliquerent*. Serv. *Aen.* 6.176; see also Hor. *Carm.* 1.28.

81 Micozzi 1998, 105.

82 Stat. *Theb.* 12.312–463. For other examples, see, e.g., women’s desperate search for corpses on the battlefield, as depicted in the *Pharsalia* and in the *Thebaid*: Luc. *Phar.* 3.756–761; Stat. *Theb.* 3.114–132; 9.351–403; 10.354–355. Dyson discusses death without burial in the *Aeneid*: Dyson 2001, 74–94. Van der Keur examines the importance of burial and funerary rites in Flavian epic: van der Keur 2013, esp. 333–342.

83 Luc. *Phar.* 8.663–691.

Be content with this, O gods, that Cornelia does not lie prostrate with dishevelled hair, nor does she embrace her husband or order the torch to be lit—that his miserable wife is not there to do her last service by the burial mound, although she is still not far off from the shore.

Cornelia herself is grief-stricken because of her inability to fulfil her duty. Her shame and grief are enhanced by her knowledge that she was not able to give a proper burial to her first husband either. Anxiety caused by the pattern of a repetitive failure can be heard in her speech:

*Similisne malorum/sors mihi semper erit? Nunquam dare iusta licebit/coniugibus? nunquam plenas plangemus ad urnas?/quid porro tumulis opus est aut ulla requiris/instrumenta, dolor? non toto in pectore portas,/in pia, Pompeium? Non imis haeret imago/visceribus? quaerat cineres victura superstes.*

LUC. *Phar.* 9.66–72

Is my wicked lot always going to be the same? Will I never be allowed to do right by my husband? Am I never going to mourn over an urn that was not empty? Also, what need is there of a grave, or why do you require any properties, O grief? Do I not, undutiful wife, carry Pompey in all my heart? Does his image not cling to my inmost parts? Let a wife intent on outliving her husband look for his ashes.

It would appear that with these words, Cornelia is trying to convince herself that genuine feeling is more important than an appropriate conduct of the funeral rites. The crucial point, however, is that she seems to be more worried about her own reputation than about her husband's journey to the underworld—her words make it clear that the socially prescribed manner of mourning, with its rules and rituals, is more about the living than about the dead. In order to compensate for her inability to grieve properly, Cornelia, after her return to Rome, executes a funeral rite for Pompey's armour and arms.<sup>84</sup> With this last tribute to her husband, she endeavours to regain what is left of her role as the most respectable matron in Rome. In a laconic way, Lucan depicts the moral devastation of the civil war: the dishonourable death of Pompey on a distant shore, and Cornelia's inability to play the part of a virtuous wife for

84 Luc. *Phar.* 9.171–181.

the people to look up to. In this manner, female grief becomes a measuring rod of the moral state of society.

These episodes are firmly in keeping with the 'heroic drive' of the epics: they are, after all, mostly about female *conduct* regulated by social norms, and have very little to do with *emotions*. Arguably, public lament and private grief are two entirely different phenomena, one of which belongs in the symbolic sphere of communication and the other in the semiotic modality. In another episode from the *Pharsalia*, this difference is beautifully demonstrated, when the narrator describes the immediate reactions of a household after a warrior has fallen:

*Sic funere primo/attonitae tacuere domus, cum corpora nondum/conclamata iacent, nec mater crine soluto/exigit ad saevos famularum brachia planctus,/sed cum membra premit fugiente rigentia vita/voltusque exanimis oculosque in morte minaces;/necdum est ille dolor, nec iam metus: incubat amens/miraturque malum.*

LUC. *Phar.* 2.21–28

Thus, at the first moment of death a household is stunned and speechless, when the body has not yet been laid out to be lamented, nor does the mother yet with dishevelled hair summon her handmaids to beat themselves with cruel arms. Instead, she is still pressing herself against the limbs stiff with the departure of life, and the expressionless face, and the eyes threatening in death. She does not yet feel grief, and fear no longer: incapable of thought, she lies on her son and marvels at her misfortune.<sup>85</sup>

The passage offers a rare glimpse of the experience of grief *before* the tragedy has sunken in and before society has imposed on the family its institutionalised ways of recovery. The poet pays attention to the two natures of grief—the private sorrow in seclusion, and the public ritual lament.<sup>86</sup> Public mourning is marked by the traditional signs of female grief: the loosened hair, the tearing at one's cheeks and the ritual wailing. It is significant that these are symbols and signals with a very clearly determined meaning, and with great communicative value in the symbolic order: they are signs that deliver messages about the

85 Epic models for this episode can be found, e.g., in Hom. *Il.* 6.293–311 and in Verg. *Aen.* 1.479–481, 11.477–482. Sannicandro also argues in favour of a probable Livian model, in Liv. 26.9.7–8 and 27.50.5. Sannicandro 2010a, 109.

86 For further discussion of the public and private natures of lament in the ancient world, and on the relationship between grief and mourning, see Hope 2011, 92–95.

family's loss to the surrounding community. Their social function is stressed by the collective nature of the ritual: the choreography of lament is carried out by female groups (*famularum*), and gazed upon by other members of the household and the community.

*Private* grief is private in more senses than one: besides taking place within the walls of the household, it takes place in everyone's body privately—it is the kind of experience that cannot be shared, because it cannot be communicated in any sign system that the symbolic order knows of. *Attonitae tacuere* clearly refers to grief that is beyond words. A couple of lines later, we read that *necdum est ille dolor, nec iam metus: incubat amens/miraturque malum*. This formulation makes it clear that the bereaved mother lacks words, and that she is also struggling to string coherent thoughts together. While the fear has disappeared, the grief has not yet entered: emotionally and cognitively, she is empty, incapable of finding a connection to the sphere of logic. *Miratur*, a word that is often used in epic to express marvel at the sight of something supernatural or divine, completes the picture of a woman who is stunned speechless.<sup>87</sup> Incapable of expressing herself in any other way, the mother resorts to bodily communication and embraces her son's lifeless corpse: it is therefore when words fail her that the semiotic modality comes to her aid, and the pressing of her body against his (as they once were of one flesh) is the only message that is left.

In Lucan's epic universe, motherhood is a powerful metaphorical tool. In addition to addressing individual suffering, it symbolises the continuity of the family, and the future in general. For this reason, the figure of the grieving mother—one of the recurring archetypes in the *Pharsalia*—could perhaps be viewed as allegorical of Rome herself, the mother of the people who slaughter each other in a fraternal strife. This episode has been perceptively read by Sannicandro as a metaphor in which female lament forms a bond between the private world of family and the wider sphere of *civitas*. She argues that a mother's grief at the sight of her son's body becomes symbolic of the Roman citizens' suffering in the civil war, and gradually transforms into a public lament over the death of the Republic.<sup>88</sup> Sannicandro's observant reading shows how, in the Lucanian civil war narrative, female grief is not a feature that would necessarily stress the difference between the epic's public and private (or male and female) spheres. On the contrary, it links them metaphorically to each other. Furthermore, I would suggest that the passage represents the pious female lament as a feature that defines the self-perception of Roman

87 See, e.g., Horsfall 2000, 527. *OLD* (1997) defines an object of the verb as “cause of wonder, marvelous, remarkable, extraordinary”.

88 Sannicandro 2010a, 109; see also Sannicandro 2011, 252–253.

people. The basic components of *Romanitas* are crystallised in the character of a grieving mother who, after a devastating experience, puts herself together, re-enters the symbolic order and carries out of her socially prescribed duty. The semiotic and the symbolic are not mutually exclusive; both are powerfully present in the character of this exemplary matron—the dynamics between the two are simply determined by the occasion. In this way, the *Pharsalia* transforms female grief from something that is marginal to the war narrative into something that defines and upholds the crumbling ideals and values of *Romanitas*. For Lucan's civil war epic, it seems like a natural choice to associate the personal loss of a mother with the bigger picture of the collapsing state.

In other Roman epics, too, the civil war theme is repeatedly raised in the episodes that represent female lament—but a peaceful harmony between the symbolic order and the semiotic pressure, such as one can observe in the *Pharsalia*, is rare. Instead, bitterness, frustration, and the futility of death are recurring issues that simultaneously enhance the emotional pathos of a mother's lament and point critique towards the unrighteousness of the war in question. If the war is unholy or utterly pointless, the mother's loss is all the more impossible to overcome. Thus, female grief is used to emphasise the futility, not necessarily of war in general, but of *bellum sine hostes* in particular. One of the best examples can be found in *Aeneid* 9, where the poet discusses the sacrifices of the Latin war by describing a mother's grief over her son's death. The unprompted grief of Euryalus' mother is the first surviving example of a motherly lament in Roman epic,<sup>89</sup> and an influential model for all later variants on the theme:

—*at subitus miserae calor ossa reliquit, / excussi manibus radii revolutaque  
pensa. / evolat infelix et femineo ululatu / scissa comam muros amens atque*

89 Fantham and Keith discuss female lament in pre-Virgilian Roman epic, namely, in Ennius' *Annales*—although this kind of frantic, uncontrollable lament is not to be found in the surviving fragments, there are other episodes related to the subject that demonstrate that the Roman epic tradition concerning lament went back further than to Virgil. For instance, in Enn. *Ann. frag.* 61, the poet depicts the collective grief of the Roman people after Romulus' disappearance (an episode that Fantham compares with Luc. *Phar.* 7.37–39.) In *Ann. frag.* 147, an unnamed woman prepares the body of King Tarquin for funeral rites. See Fantham 1999, 222–223; Keith 2007, 72 (the *Annales* edition by Skutsch, 1985). Of course, in their ways of representing female lament, Roman epics are also heavily indebted to the historiographic tradition; for further discussion of the development of the literary topos and of the interplay between different literary genres, see Hope 2011, 97–105, 107–114; Mustakallio 2003, 86–87, 91–95.

*agmina cursu/prima petit, non illa virum, non illa pericli/telorumque memor, caelum dehinc questibus implet—.*

VERG. *Aen.* 9.475–480

Then immediately warmth left the poor woman's bones: the shuttle is cast aside from her hands, and the thread comes unwound. The miserable lady rushes forth and, with womanly howls and torn hair, out of her mind she makes her way to the walls and to the front line troops. She is unmindful of the danger of men and weapons. Then she fills the sky with her complaints—.

Unlike in the example from the *Pharsalia* (discussed above), where the two modes of grieving were kept apart, in this episode, the private (semiotic, non-verbal) grief and the public (symbolic, institutionalised) lament get strangely confused and mixed. On one hand, the mother is depicted as acting on impulse and rushing through the city in a maenadic frenzy, much like Amata in book 7. On the other hand, her tearing of her hair, while it might be an impulsive act, clearly alludes to the public rites of lament. *Femineo ululatu*, moreover, could mean frantic, mindless moaning—an averbal expression of private pain—but it could equally well be a reference to women's ritual wailing at funerals. The episode therefore deliberately blurs the line between private and public grief, and shows the semiotic pressure making itself heard *through* the logic of the symbolic order, through its institutionalised signs of grieving.

This same phenomenon can be observed in the speech that the mother pours out:

*heu, terra ignota canibus date praeda Latinis/alitibusque iaces! nec te tua funere mater/prodixi pressive oculos at vulnera lavi,/veste tegens tibi quam noctes festina diesque/urgebam, et tela curas solabar anilis./quo sequar? Aut quae nunc artus avulsaque membra/et funus lacerum tellus habet? hoc mihi de te,/nate, refers? hoc sum terraque marique secuta?/figite me, si qua est pietas, in me omnia tela/conicite, o Rutuli, me primam absumite ferro;/aut tu, magne pater divum, miserere, tuoque/invisum hoc detrude caput sub Tartara telo,/quando aliter nequeo crudelem abrumpere vitam.*

VERG. *Aen.* 9.485–497

Alas! You lie in a strange land, given as prey to the dogs and vultures of Latium! Nor did I, your mother, escort you to your death, or close your eyes, or bathe your wounds, or wrap you in the robe on which I worked in a hurry, night and day, for you, soothing with the loom the cares of old age.

Where am I to follow? What earth now holds your torn limbs and your dismembered corpse? Son, is this all of you that you bring back to me? Did I follow by land and sea for this? Pierce me, if you have any decency, hurl on me all your spears, O Rutulians, destroy me first with your swords—or you, great father of the gods, have pity on me, and with your lightning bolt thrust down to Tartarus this hateful life, since in no other way can I break free from this cruel life!

In her bitter complaint, one can observe the desire of Euryalus' mother to be part of the temporal scene and to fulfill her socially prescribed role as a mother. However, since she has been denied what she considers her natural maternal right—to give her son a proper funeral—she declines that role altogether and resorts to an overwhelming desperation that lacks reason and logic. Again, one can perceive reflections of Amata who, after the negation of her maternal right, gave in to the destructive drives of her body. Moreover, the wish of Euryalus' mother to be pierced by the Rutulian steel and to become the sole target of the war recalls the self-destructive dreams of Statius' Thetis and Atalanta (and very probably inspired them). Clearly, motherhood has been the defining feature of this woman and the essence of her very being: she has followed her son over land and sea and dedicated her entire life to him. Having now 'failed' at this role, since she is unable to carry out its symbolically most significant task, she wants to have her motherhood and herself erased from the world and from the narrative.

And erased she will be, although not in the manner that she had had in mind. While her outburst receives no direct reply whatsoever, its impact on the internal audience is nonetheless powerful. We read that

*hoc fletu concussi animi, maestusque per omnis/it gemitus, torpent infractae ad proelia vires./illam incendentem luctus Idaeus et Actor/Ilionei monitu et multum lacrimantis Iuli/corripiunt interque manus sub tecta reponunt.*

VERG. *Aen.* 9.498–502

This wailing shakes their souls, and a moan of grief passes through all. Their strength for battle is numbed and shattered. She is inciting grief, so Idaeus and Actor, on the orders of Ilioneus, with Iulus weeping profusely, pick her up and carry her indoors in their arms.

It is explicitly stated that the mother's wailing puts a dent in the Trojans' war morale. Her bodily drives are contagious: *maestusque per omnis it gemitus cre-*

ates an impression of a strong, primitive bodily reaction that her cries evoke in the warriors. Because of this “kindling of grief”, the episode has been often discussed as a classic example of the epic setting where the female, private perspective is juxtaposed with the male military quest. The grief-stricken mother has been interpreted as unable to understand the inevitability of the political events, and her over-emotional outburst has been considered as uncontrolled behaviour typical of epic women—behaviour that aims at hindering the heroic, teleological drive of the epic.<sup>90</sup> Wiltshire, for example, has argued that “for this mother the official themes of epic—*arma virumque cano*—cease to exist. She experiences only the costs”.<sup>91</sup> Because of the contagious nature of the mother’s grief, she needs to be removed from the stage in order for the epic to continue: Dietrich argues that the erasure of the woman and her overwhelming suffering is necessary for Aeneas’ founding mission to continue.<sup>92</sup> This reading is supported by the structure of the episode: immediately after Euryalus’ mother has been carried away, the war narrative suddenly and abruptly resumes—with a blow of a trumpet, the scene is cut and the narrator moves on to the battlefield.

We should, however, note is that while the telos of the epic might demand the erasure of the grieving mother, this does not mean that her powerful, bodily pain would mark her as altogether marginal. In effect, the very reason for her removal is that her pain is so relatable: it brings the warriors to tears and lets the semiotic pressure disrupt the logic of the narrative. And it is not only the internal audience who are moved by the mother’s misery: the external narrator, too, appears to empathise with her, calling her *infelix* and granting her a voice of her own. By so doing, the narrator delivers the woman’s viewpoint to the reader and invites the reader to relate to her suffering. Moreover, the sudden removing of the unhappy mother only strengthens this relatability, since the reader cannot help but wonder where she is carried to and what the rest of her story might have been like—did the war finally get her too, as she was hoping it would, or was she destined for a lonely old age? Thus, by quickly and irreversibly erasing the character and moving on, the narrator actually kindles the reader’s interest. As the internal audience tries to suppress and marginalise the woman’s voice, the external audience is, as a result, drawn to it—in this sense, the situation resembles the episodes discussed earlier, where the powerless and fearful women on top of the wall simultaneously appeared as both focalisers and outsiders.

90 See, e.g., Nugent 1999, *passim*; Dietrich 1999, 47–48.

91 Wiltshire 2000, 191–193. See also Wiltshire 1999, 172–176.

92 Dietrich 1999, 47–48.

The intense grief of Euryalus' mother thus demonstrates that subjectivity in an epic narrative is more than a sum of its parts: one might be marginalised in the narrative, yet still become a character to whom both the internal and the external audiences are capable of relating. One's self-expression might be dominated by the pulsation of the *chôra* and by the lack of logic, but that does not inevitably mean that she would not get her message through to the reader. The threatening elements of semiotic modality can, in some cases, become a more efficient—even an excessively efficient—means of communication than words, songs, and symbols. While Euryalus' mother is deprived of her right to express her maternal love with the socially prescribed means, she manages to express it more efficiently through her uncontrollable, self-destructive outburst. It is, however, worth stressing that the reaction that her intense grief evokes in the internal audience is exceptional in the tradition of Roman war epic: in her ability to reach the male subject of epic and to penetrate through his emotional shield, Euryalus' mother is a somewhat unique version of the archetype of a grieving mother (paralleled only by Jocasta in the *Thebaid*).

In Flavian epic, the depiction of female grief builds on the Virgilian and the Lucanian models; however, its narrative significance is further accentuated. Statius, like Lucan, appears to particularly benefit from the tragic element of pathos that female lament brings into his war narrative. It has often been noted that grief has an important structural role in the *Thebaid*, since recurring episodes of lament greatly contribute to the development of the plot, and stress the crucial turning points in the narrative.<sup>93</sup> In Statius' epic, not only does female grief take place after each decisive tragedy, but it often also anticipates them as a foreshadowing of doom—examples are Jocasta's mourning attire before the duel between her sons, and Atalanta's premature grief that precedes Parthenopaeus' death.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, as Ganiban points out, female lament also repeatedly intrudes into seemingly pacific environments: the episode where Eurydice and Hypsipyle grieve at the death of baby Opheltes can be read as a prelude to the upcoming war.<sup>95</sup>

The remarkable prominence of female, especially motherly, lament in Statius' epic has been widely discussed. Many of these readings juxtapose the female, private suffering with the male, public, political quest. Newlands, for

93 E.g., Stat. *Theb.* 3.114–168, 5.588–698, 6.33–37, 6.126–192, 7.470–478, 8.641–654, 9.351–403, 9.570–636, 9.722–725, 10.791–826, 12.105–110, 12.312–463, 12.467–480, 12.782–809. For further discussion, See Augoustakis 2010, 51–61, 75–91; Micozzi 1998, 97–98, 114–119.

94 Stat. *Theb.* 9.570–636, 9.722–725.

95 Stat. *Theb.* 5.588–698, 6.33–37, 6.126–192. Ganiban 2007, 71–95. See also Augoustakis 2010, 47–61; Newlands 2006, 207–210; Micozzi 1998, 114–119.

instance, clearly builds on Dietrich's reading of the *Aeneid* when she considers the grieving mothers as embodiments of the irrational in epic, as characters who challenge the preordained, war-centred, masculine worldview.<sup>96</sup> This kind of clear-cut dichotomy, however, seems to overlook some crucial features and nuances of Statius' epic style. First of all, I believe that the emphatic significance of female grief in Statius' epic, instead of being targeted against epic heroism in general, is an accentuated critique of *civil war* in particular. Statius' narrative revolves around unholy familial strife and, as Ganiban aptly points out, the civil war theme is every bit as strong as in Lucan's epic, only in a mythological disguise.<sup>97</sup> The fraternal war is depicted as the ultimate self-destructive act that shatters the collective self and reveals the 'strangeness in ourselves'. Therefore, it is problematic to examine female lament as hindering the heroic drive of the epic (as in the case of the *Aeneid*, for example), because there is nothing particularly heroic about this epic, the only telos of which is death and destruction. The female characters, with their violent and self-destructive outbursts of grief, are just as entangled in this drive as are the male characters.

Moreover, what has rarely been sufficiently discussed is that Statius' accentuated critique of war and violence is not expressed *exclusively* through suffering women. On the contrary, the Flavian poet systematically complements his depictions of female lament with those of male grief. In these outbursts of human suffering, the drive of war is often attacked and opposed at least as harshly as in the mothers' complaints. In book nine of the *Thebaid*, the river-god Ismenos fiercely laments the death of his grandson. In his bitter address to the gods, Ismenos becomes one of the most passionate voices in the Roman epic tradition that denounce warfare and its costs:

—*stetit arduus alto/amne, manuque genas et nexa virentibus ulvis/cornua concutiens sic turbidus ore profundo/incipit: 'huncne mihi, superum regnator, honorem/quod totiens hospesque tuis et conscius actis/(nec memorare timor)—aspice quas fluvio caedes, quae funera portem/continuis telis alioque adopertus acervo./omne vadum belli series tenet, omnis anhelat/unda nefas, subterque animae supraque recentes/errant et geminas iungunt caligine ripas./ille ego clamatus sacris ululatibus amnis,/qui molles thyrsus Baccheaque cornua puro/fonte lavare feror, stipatus caedibus artas/in freta quaero vias; non Strymonos impia tanto/stagna cruore natant, non spumifer altius Hebrus/Gradivo bellante rubet.'*

STAT. *Theb.* 9.418–423, 9.429–439

96 Newlands 2006, 211; Dietrich 1999.

97 Ganiban 2007, *passim*.

He stands tall in the midstream and, beating his cheeks and shaking his horns bound with green sedge, thus wild he begins his intense speech: “Is this the reward I get, O ruler of the gods, I who so often have been a host and an accomplice to your doings (nor am I afraid to remind you).— Look what slaughter, what death I carry in my stream. Continuously I am covered in piles of spears and other stuff too. The series of wars occupy all my stream, all my waves breathe out horror, recent ghosts wander below and above, rejoining my two banks in a foggy mist. I myself, a river resounding with sacred howls, I who am reported to wash soft thyrsos-staffs and Bacchus’ horns with my pure fresh water, I am crammed with dead corpses and seek a narrow channel to the sea. The impious waters of Strymon do not swim with such gore, nor does the foaming Hebrus turn redder when Gradivus is on the warpath.”

At first, Ismenos’ private grief over the loss of his grandson is charged through his body: he is depicted as beating his face and shaking his body from side to side. Nevertheless, immediately after this, his private suffering grows into a political critique of the war. He condemns the war as *nefas*, and demands an end to all the suffering that he has had to witness. A male voice, therefore, is utilised to express the values traditionally deemed ‘feminine’ in the epic universe.

A similar attitude can be observed in Statius’ Creon, whose fear I have discussed above. After Menoeceus is dead, Creon’s grief features grim bitterness and hatred towards the unholy war—a war that he himself is somewhat guilty of stirring up and devising.<sup>98</sup> In book eleven, Creon demands that Eteocles face his brother in a final duel to put an end to the war once and for all. His ardent anger is motivated by his private loss, an emotion that grows into a political resolution:

—*sed ardens/ecce aderat luctu dicturusque omnia belli/libertate Creon:  
urit fera corda Menoeceus,/nulla patri requies, illum quaeritque tenetque,  
illum sanguineos proflantem pectore rivos/aspicit et saeva semper de turre  
cadentem. ‘ibis’, ait, ‘neque te ulterius, fratrumque ducumque/pessime, fune-  
ribus patriae lacrimisque potentem,/Eumenidum bellique reum, patiemur  
inulti.—redde agedum miseris fratres natosque patresque,/redde arvis  
domibusque viros!*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.262–267, 11.269–271, 11.279–280

98 On Oedipus, see Stat. *Theb.* 11.580–633. On Creon, 11.262–267, 12.60–92.

—but here comes Creon, burning with grief and intent on freely speaking his whole mind concerning the war. Menoeceus inflames his fierce heart, the father has no peace. It is him he seeks and holds, it is him whom he sees panting out streams of blood from his breast, evermore falling from the cruel tower.—“You shall go”, he says, “and no longer, you worst of brothers and worst of leaders, powerful in your country’s deaths and tears, guilty of the Furies and the war, no longer shall we suffer you unavenged.—Come on! Give back to the poor ones their brothers, sons, and fathers, give back men to the fields and households.”

We should note that this is not controlled grief, regulated by social norms. Creon’s speech is inspired by a passionate feeling of loss that “burns” him: he is restless and *ardens*, with *fera corda*, and his mind is occupied by nightmarish visions of his son’s death. Again, the similarities to Statius’ Thetis and Atalanta are obvious and deliberate. However, as in the case of Ismenos, discussed above, Creon’s private suffering eventually finds an outlet that fits in with the logic of symbolic language. His burning pain is transformed into a critique of the war itself, and into a condemnation of all the futile suffering.

These episodes demonstrate that, at least in Statius’ *Thebaid*, the line that distinguishes the role of a mourning mother from that of a father appears to be extremely fine. Epic fathers convincingly perform not only the role of a fearful mother but also that of a grieving one, a figure who condemns the warlike drive of the epic. In some cases, the episode’s impact on the reader can be considered to be even more powerful when this condemnation comes from a father. To see a male political leader, a faithful servant of the temporal scene, question the meaning of it all raises questions of the costs of war even more powerfully than if the character had been a mother—someone ‘naturally’ more in touch with the drives of her body and with her private suffering.

What is ironic and controversial is that very often, when they harshly condemn war and violence, the grieving mothers (and fathers) end up tangled in the web of violence and destruction themselves. The river god Ismenos is a good example: after harshly condemning the carnage of war, he vents his desperation in terrible violence and takes revenge on Hippomedon. His pain is too strong to be expressed in any other way, and therefore, he actually becomes an instrument of the violent drive of epic that he is criticising. As Newlands points out, this is a phenomenon that typically marks the mourning mothers of Statius’ epic: despite their virtual *pietas*, there is a frightening element about them that does not fit in with the ideal of motherhood. Epic mothers have blood on their hands, and their grief contains a possibility of further viol-

ence and destruction.<sup>99</sup> Newlands discusses the socio-historical frame of the phenomenon, suggesting that the insignificance of motherhood to the Flavian imperial propaganda and the breaking of the Julio-Claudian stereotype of the powerful mother can be perceived in the Flavian poets' negative image of motherhood. Furthermore, she seeks an explanation in the putative decline of mother-child relationships caused by high divorce and child mortality rates during the Flavian era.<sup>100</sup>

Although I strongly support Newlands' argument about the threatening aspects of motherhood in Flavian epic, I am reluctant to believe that the issue could be explained by the social circumstances of the Flavian age—especially since so little can be attested with certainty about the assumed 'decline of motherhood'. Furthermore, as Hope points out, the idea of the threatening overtones of female grief is deeply rooted in Roman Republican literature: for instance, in the *Pro Milone*, Cicero describes Fulvia as weeping over the body of the murdered Clodius, displaying his wounds and exciting his followers to revenge.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, rather than viewing it as a phenomenon typical of the Flavian era, I prefer to see the threatening elements of female grief as having some particular narrative and ideological significance in the larger Roman literary tradition.

In order to understand how the phenomenon plays out in the narrative strategies of different Roman war epics, it is useful to analyse a few select examples in more detail. Often, the looming threat connected to female grief becomes evident when the men who are responsible for the war express their worry about the mothers' fury that is to fall upon them. Polynices, upon planning the war against Thebes, first states that "let no household blame me for their suffering; let no furious mother glance at me askance" (*non me ullius domus anxia culpet/respectentve truces oblique lumine matres*)—fully aware that this is exactly what is going to happen if the war is carried out.<sup>102</sup> Fear of the consequences of his actions is likewise apparent in Silius Italicus' Varro, when the consul returns from the disastrous battle of Cannae. The narrator depicts his return as a ride of shame, stating that

*quod vero reduci tum se populusque patresque/offferrent, non gratari, sed  
poscere natos/quisque suos fratresque simul miseraeque parentes/ire vide-  
bantur laceranda ad consulis ora.*

SIL. *Pun.* 10.634–637

99 Newlands 2006, 203–205, 209–210.

100 Newlands 2006, esp. 220–223.

101 Hope 2011, 102–103. Cic. *Mil.* 28.21.

102 Stat. *Theb.* 3.376–377.

However, although the people and the Senate then showed up to meet him on his return, it seemed that they were not there to thank him, but that each one was demanding a lost son or brother, and that miserable mothers were prepared to tear the consul's face off.

Grim and frightening overtones of motherly grief are clearly present in these episodes; instead of being directed towards the mothers themselves—as in the case of Euryalus' mother—they are now targeted at the men responsible for their losses. Paradoxically, while opposing and condemning the violence of war, the women also fall victims to it, as their own private suffering turns into a drive of destruction.

The situation does not concern mothers alone. Some of the most impressive variants of this phenomenon deal with devoted, grief-stricken wives. In book two of the *Punica*, when depicting the siege and fall of Saguntum, Silius introduces Tiburna, a matron who mourns her fallen husband. The wife's grief is so intense that the Fury Tisiphone considers her an ideal instrument for spreading havoc and destruction.<sup>103</sup> The Fury disguises herself to look like the grieving matron and rushes amongst the people, inciting them to a mass suicide.<sup>104</sup> At first sight, the episode might seem strange and implausible: a noble matron of a distinguished family publicly stirring up violence and self-destruction is not the most likely scenario. But when one reads the text more closely, it is easy to understand why the internal audience—the despairing Saguntines—might consider Tiburna a plausible messenger of the gospel of destruction. Bereaved of her husband, she is known to have been in a state of intense mourning. Along with the husband, she has lost much of the social power and influence that she used to wield in the community—to the reader well-versed with Virgilian epic, this is already a strong indication that this woman might sooner or later be caught up in uncontrollable *furor*. The episode is clearly modelled on Amata's frenzy in *Aeneid* 7, and like its poetic model, it manifests the merging of different bodily drives: grief turns into fury, and fury leads to self-destruction. Intense sorrow, desperation and destruction are all funda-

103 Compare the episodes in Virgilian epic, where a deity intervenes in a form of someone whom the audience can easily imagine to be in a disturbed state of mind. In *Aeneid* 5, the Trojan women burn down the ships after Iris, disguised as a distraught elderly matron, stirs them up; in book seven, Turnus is approached by Allecto, disguised as an old priestess of Juno. The common denominators in these episodes are the age and gender of the messenger; arguably, to the projected reader of Roman epic, elderly women would seem more prone to overwhelming emotions and hence plausible agitators of upheaval and turmoil. See Zarker 1978, 21.

104 Sil. *Pun.* 2.558; compare the mass suicide of Pompeian soldiers in Luc. *Phar.* 4.558–573.

mental bodily drives that belong to the semiotic modality—therefore, they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. When the person is taken over by one of them, it is easy for the others to enter: in this way, grief makes the individual vulnerable to the drives of death and destruction.

The same theme is varied in Statius' *Thebaid*, where the poet explores the darker side of female grief through the figures of Argia and Antigone. In book twelve, Polynices' wife and sister temporarily join forces in order to bury his body at the dead of night.<sup>105</sup> The women's determination to do the right thing and disobey the law forbidding the burial has often been considered the best expression of *pietas* in the *Thebaid*.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, Argia's and Antigone's virtuousness appears in a different light when one pays attention to the violent overtones that mark their grief. When Argia sees the wound on Polynices' side, she curses his brother, swearing that she would "outdo the vultures, if only I could go [where he lies], and override the wild beasts" (*vincam volucres (sit adire potestas)/excludamque feras*).<sup>107</sup> The expression hints at a savage lacerating of the body—the idea is presumably evoked in order to emphasise the contrast between an honourable burial and the shameful fate of being consumed by vultures. However, it is also an expression of Argia's uncontrollable grief that awakens in her a bestial desire to attack Eteocles' body. The imagery of necromancy is hard to shake off, and it darkens the *pietas* of the faithful wife, whose intense grief, once again, opens the door for other animalistic drives to enter.

As for Antigone, her resort to the 'threatening world of animalism' is even more complete. The narrator depicts the princess as out of her mind with grief as she hastens out of the city:

—*amens, / ut paulum immisso cessit statio horrida somno, / erumpit muris,  
fremitu quo territat agros / virginis ira leae, rabies cui libera tandem /  
et primus sine matre furor.*

STAT. *Theb.* 12.354–358

105 Stat. *Theb.* 12.385–390. Lamari notes that the ban on burial after the Theban war was a much discussed topos in ancient literature, because it embodied important political, religious and social issues. Lamari 2009, 408, 413. For further discussion of the motif of burial in Statius' epic, see van der Keur 2013, 333–337.

106 Vessey 1973, 131–134; Delarue 2000, 356–362; Lesueur 1992, Arrigoni 1984, 882–884; La Penna 1981, 231; Lovatt 2006, 66. For some differing opinions, see e.g. Ganiban 2007, Hershkowitz 1998, 247–301.

107 Stat. *Theb.* 12.342–343.

—driven out of her mind, she breaks out from the walls (when the grim watchman had surrendered to sleep for a little while) with a roar like an angry cry of a virgin lioness, which terrifies the fields. Her rage was free at last and, with her mother nowhere around, her fury was unbridled for the first time.

*Horrida, ira, rabies* and *furor* are terms used to transform the royal maiden into something akin to a wild beast—they remind the reader of Argia's blood-thirsty desires ten lines earlier. Antigone's very humanity is called into question, as the animalistic death drive occupies her grief-stricken mind (or rather, her body). Thus, behind the pious façade of these two women lies uncontrollable rage and a desire to destroy. Their grief drives them into a *furor* that is in a risk of spreading and accentuating the violence already done. These women, despite their virtuous attempts to fulfill their duties as a grieving wife and sister, are not easy points of identification to the reader. Their grief might be a point of identification, but once it develops into an uncontrollable drive of destruction targeted at the surrounding world, they inevitably become threatening others, whose very humanity is called into question.

As with the archetype of a fearful mother, on this instance too, the male and female outbursts of emotion appear strikingly similar. Especially in post-Virgilian epic, it is easy to find men playing the role of a dangerous grieving woman. A few examples from the works of Lucan, Statius and Silius Italicus are worth comparing here, especially because these passages are strongly allusive in terms of each other, and because they repeat the same pattern whereby intense grief turns into destructive behaviour. In *Thebaid* 3, Statius depicts Ide, *magna parens iuvenum*,<sup>108</sup> desperately looking for her twin sons on the battlefield and, upon finding them, lamenting uncontrollably over their bodies. It is striking to see that Ide's search is represented as more threatening than pitiable:

—*Ide/squalentem sublata comam liventiaque ora/ungue premens (nec iam infelix miserandaque, verum/terror inest lacrimis), per et arma et corpora passim/canitiem impexam dira tellure volutans/quaerit inops natos omnique in corpore plangit.*

STAT. *Theb.* 3.134–139

—Ide, with hair standing up stiff and pressing her bruised face with her nails (no longer poor and pitiable, there is true terror in her tears). Passing

108 Stat. *Theb.* 3.134.

through both weapons and bodies everywhere, turning her unkempt grey hair on the dreadful earth, she helplessly seeks her sons and bewails them in every corpse.

With this tableau of an out-of-control grief, the poet marks the mother as a scary, semi-chthonic character. This impression is strengthened in the next line, when Statius compares Ide to a Thessalian witch searching for bodies on which to practice dark magic—as Micozzi points out, a reference to Erichtho in the *Pharsalia* seems obvious and deliberate.<sup>109</sup>

There is a parallel to this episode in the *Punica*. In the second book, during the siege of Saguntum, an anonymous mother mourns the suicide of her twin sons. The episode reminds the reader of Statius' Ide thrusting herself upon her sons' bodies; however, there is a particularly violent element about the grief of this mother in the *Punica*:

—*geminaeque nota decepta figurae, / funera mutato revocabat nomine mater, / donec, transacto tremebunda per ubera ferro, / tunc etiam ambiguos cecidit super inscia natos.*

SIL. *Pun.* 2.846–849

—the mother, deceived by the likeness of the twins, called back the dead by wrong names until, driving the sword through her own quivering breast, she fell down on her sons whom even then she still could not tell apart.

Whereas the conduct of Statius' Ide merely forebodes danger and violence, the anonymous mother in the *Punica* actualises her violent potential by choosing the road of self-destruction. She manages to do what many of the fearful or grieving mothers in epic—Thetis, Atalanta, Euryalus' mother—only dream of, and actually ends her suffering by erasing herself from the narrative. It is noteworthy that this act seems to be largely motivated by her confused state of mind; she is completely overtaken by her intense grief—unable to speak, unable to think and unable to see another way out. The narrator intriguingly stresses the likeness of the twins by stating that the anxious mother cannot tell them apart (*etiam ambiguos*)—more importantly, it would appear that she cannot tell *herself* apart from the sons who both are her flesh and blood, both

109 Micozzi 1998, 100–101; see Stat. *Theb.* 3.140–146. For further discussion of the Ide episode, see Vessey 1973, 124–125. Lucan's Thessalian witch Erichtho is analysed in more detail in Johnson 1987, 1–34, and in Danese 1994.

shaped in her likeness. Her final desperate act, therefore, when she takes her life with the same sword that her sons died from and collapses on top of their bodies, appears as a desperate attempt to erase the difference between the three. It is a negation of the primal abjection, whereby the mother and the sons become one again—all three of them.

It is intriguing to note the striking similarities that these two episodes bear to a passage in the *Thebaid*, where Statius describes Oedipus' 'effeminate' grief at the sight of his sons' bodies.<sup>110</sup> A deliberate gender role reversal can be observed here, as the father takes on all the classic attributes of a mourning mother—including the madness that implies further violence and destruction:

*—insternit totos frigentibus artus./nec vox ulla seni: iacet immugitque  
cruentis/vulneribus, nec verba diu temptata sequuntur./dum tractat galeas  
atque ora latentia quaerit,/tandem muta diu genitor suspiria solvit: 'tarda,  
meam, Pietas, longo post tempore mentem/percutis? estne sub hoc hom-  
inis clementia corde? vincis io miserum, vincis, Natura, parentem!/en habeo  
gemitus lacrimaeque per arida serpunt/vulnera et in molles sequitur manus  
impia planctus./accipite infandae iusta exsequialia mortis,/crudeles nimi-  
umque mei. nec noscere natos/alloquiumque aptare licet; dic, virgo,  
precanti,/quem teneo?—ei mihi, quos nexus fratrum, quae vulnera tracto!/  
solvite, quaeso, manus infestasque vincula tandem/dividite, et medium  
nunc saltem admittite patrem.'*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.607–613, 11.624–626

—he strews his whole body on the cold corpses. The old man has no voice to speak with; he lies and grumbles upon the blood-soaked wounds, but the words long attempted do not follow. But while the father tugs at the helmets, looking for the hidden faces, then at last his sighs, which for a long time remained mute, are released in words: “Tardy Piety, do you touch my mind after such a long time? Does human tenderness exist in this heart? You conquer, O nature, you conquer this miserable father! Look! I can moan, and tears creep down these withered wounds, and my impious hand follows and beats my breast as if I was some softy. Accept the funeral rites fitting to an abominable death, you savages, too truly mine. I cannot even distinguish my sons and adapt my words [to address them individually]. Tell me, girl, as I beg, which one am I holding?—Ah!

110 On male lament and its transgressions in Statius' epic poetry, see McCullough 2011.

What brotherly bonds, what wounds do I touch! Release your hands, I beg, break at last your infested chains, and now, at least, let your father come between you.”

At first sight, ‘being conquered by nature’ appears to refer to Oedipus’ final breakdown in the face of his loss: his hateful personality and self-centred bitterness are finally overcome by grief for another human being. However, I would suggest that *vincis, Natura, parentem* can also be read as Oedipus’ renunciation of the temporal scene. At the sight of his dead sons, his past and his present fade away, and all that is left is a connection to his sons, a connection that he feels as physical pain: *crudeles nimiumque mei*. Nature conquers civilisation, just as with Atalanta, for whom the fear for her son suddenly “aroused the mother in all her heart” (*totoque erexit pectore matrem*).<sup>111</sup> Like an epic mourning mother, Oedipus forgets about the surrounding world and about his place in it, as he longs for unity with the sons who are his flesh and blood. The history, the story, and its synchronic narrative—who did what and to whom—no longer matter, since they belong in the temporal scene and in the symbolic order, things that have ceased to exist for him.

Oedipus’ complete entry into the semiotic sphere is stressed by many details. In the beginning of the passage, it is explicitly stated that he struggles to find words to express himself (*nec vox ulla seni—, nec verba diu temptata sequuntur*). Even when he finally finds his voice, the most important part of his communication remains semiotic, as he himself acknowledges: *en habeo gemitus lacrimaeque per arida serpunt/vulnera*, he states. Clearly, there are no words for what Oedipus is feeling: it is something that can be communicated only with groans, moans, tears and touches. Like the mother of the twins in Silius’ *Punica*, Oedipus strokes the bodies and the faces of his sons. And as in the Silian model, here too the narrator stresses Oedipus’ inability to tell his sons apart—technically, this is a reference to his blindness, but read in comparison with the passage in the *Punica*, I suggest there could be another meaning to it. Like the mother of twins in the *Punica*, this father of twins, too, is not only at pains to distinguish between his sons, but also struggles to tell *himself* apart from them. Oedipus, too, gropes for a sword, desperately trying to unite himself with his sons in death—it is noted that had Antigone not removed all the weapons, he would have succeeded.

It is therefore clear that Statius’ Oedipus takes on the role of an epic mother whose grief is transformed into a desperate drive of destruction. As if to under-

111 Stat. *Theb.* 9.570–582, 9.584.

line this, when the king beats his breast with ‘womanly wailings’, he refers to himself as *parens*, not *pater*, thus breaking down the distinction between mothering and fathering roles. In chapter three, I discussed Oedipus as a male example of ‘feminine’ *furor* that makes the war ignite—here, he demonstrates that in Roman war epic, overwhelming grief and sorrow are no more a prerogative of women than are rage and bloodlust. All in all, Statius’ Oedipus reveals to the reader the difficulty of gendering the semiotic and the symbolic spheres in Roman war epic: overwhelming emotions could make anyone vulnerable to the surge of animalistic drives.

The Oedipus episode can be compared to a passage from book three of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*—there are many shared elements in these storylines, and it is not a stretch to assume that Lucan’s model might have influenced Statius in his creation of Oedipus’ character. In the *Pharsalia*, when the city of Massilia is falling after a lengthy siege, the father of the young Argus witnesses the fatal wounding of his son. When the tragedy sinks in, he immediately decides to give up the futile defense and to use his sword to take his own life.<sup>112</sup> The father’s experience is depicted in a manner strikingly similar to that of Oedipus:

*Non lacrimae cecidere genis, non pectora tundit,/Distentis toto riguit sed corpore palmis./Nox subit atque oculos vastae obduxere tenebrae,/Et miserum cernens agnoscere desinit Argum.—Ut torpore senex caruit virisque cruentus/Coepit habere dolor; ‘Non perdam tempora’, dixit/’A saevis permissa deis, iugulumque senilem/Confodiam.—Nondum destituit calidus tua volnera sanguis,/Semianimisque iaces et adhuc potes esse superstes.’*

LUC. *Phar.* 3.733–736 3.741–744, 3.746–747

No tears fell down his cheeks, no blows on his breast; he merely stretched out his hands and his whole body went stiff. Night came over him, and great darkness veiled his eyes; seeing the poor Argus, he ceased to recognise him.—When the old man recovered from his numbness, and cruel grief began to assert its power, he spoke: “I will not waste the time that the cruel gods have granted me, but will pierce this old throat.—Not yet has the warm blood left your wounds, and you lie there half-alive; you can still survive me.”

112 Luc *Phar.* 3.709–751.

The father's shock clearly recalls Lucan's depiction of the mother stunned speechless by her son's death, discussed earlier in this chapter. Here, too, the parent is dumbstruck and emotionally bare: *distentis toto rigit sed corpore palmis* makes it seem as if his body was acting on its own, without his command or awareness. The father sinks 'into the night'—one is reminded of Statius' Creon, whose heart was 'drowned in a dark fog' that confused his senses.<sup>113</sup> The shock, caused by the sudden loss, hampers the father's thinking and perception—and, once again, it is implied that he too has trouble recognising his son.

When the tragedy finally sinks in, Argus' father is filled, not with pious grief like the Lucanian matron in *Phar.* 2.21–28, but with fierce rage and bitterness. His *dolor* bursts out in a violent and self-destructive desire to perish together with his son, to join him in death. Like the Silian matron discussed above, he pierces his own breast and, eager to die, jumps down off the railing, "in such a hurry to die before his son that he would not trust a single mode of death" (*letum praecedere nati/Festinantem animam morti non credidit uni*).<sup>114</sup> This episode is perhaps the most powerful example of a strong drive of self-destruction that adds to the chaos of the battle scene. Arguably, like the many bitter and ferocious grieving women in Roman epic, Argus' father is not an easy character for the reader to relate to. While his parental grief is more than understandable and is depicted in a deeply humane and empathetic manner, the ensuing self-destructive rage robs him of his epic subjectivity and makes him a threatening other to marvel at. Presumably, for the poet of the *Pharsalia*, this kind of perversion of pious paternal love is a useful narrative tool, because it stresses the havoc of the civil war and its destructive impact on the moral state of the individual. On a deeper psychological level, however, the episode can be read as a triumph of the *chôra*: the father moves from speechless astonishment to violent fury and, by means of self-destruction, renounces the temporal scene that he has been serving so loyally and in vain.

From the episodes in the epics of Lucan, Statius, and Silius Italicus that we have discussed above, there emerges a clear pattern that defines how the dark and gloomy overtones of grief are discussed in post-Virgilian war epic. These passages are connected by repetitive elements that underline how 'beyond words' the experience of loss is: averbal groans and silences, disrupted sentences, weakened perception, and of course, the impending self-destruction. Intriguingly, however, this experience appears as far less gendered than has

113 Stat. *Theb.* 10.735–737.

114 Luc. *Phar.* 3.750–751.

often been assumed. The chthonic rage and the foreboding of violence are not typical of epic women alone: surprisingly often, it is the men—loyal servants of the temporal scene—who fall victims to a private grief that opens the door for the destructive bodily drives to enter. Consequently, this kind of complete lack of self-control and reason is something that dooms these characters to a lack of narrative subjectivity: because their experience cannot be expressed in words, it is impossible for the reader to relate to the fury that dwells in their hearts. At the same time, however, these women and men are prime examples of characters who are simultaneously central and marginal: although they end up being erased from the narrative, they remain in it as a memory of a nagging uncertainty that underlies and weakens the heroic drive of the epic.

## ‘Playing Supermen’: The Manly Matrons of Roman Epic

Whereas reckless behaviour and the lack of emotional control are something traditionally associated with women in epic, the ideals of Stoic magnanimity and self-restraint have usually been considered to be the ‘male’ ideals inscribed into the epic narrative. In the previous chapter, I sought to demonstrate that the gendering of emotions in war epic is not this simple, and that the resort to the semiotic modality of communication—a result of overpowering emotions such as fear, or grief—is something that very often marks male characters too. In this chapter, we shall look more closely at the other side of the phenomenon: at those women who appear to successfully manifest the male virtues of the genre and who challenge the preconception of epic women as ‘transgressive’ or ‘over-emotional’. These kinds of female characters can be considered as the best examples of women ‘absorbed’ into the male ideology of epic: their communication takes place almost exclusively in the symbolic sphere, and they fully subscribe to the norms and mechanisms of the patriarchal society. In Kristevan terms, they are “identifying with the father”—that is, with the values considered to be masculine—and this way, they “gain access to the temporal scene, i.e., to political affairs”.<sup>1</sup> Arguably, these women are the reason why the warlike, destructive conduct of some other female characters in epic appears all the more disturbing. The women who identify with the Stoic ideals of logic and self-restraint seem to show that this is something women can do—hence, they make the others who do not do so to appear either to have failed in the social role of a civilised human being or to have deliberately chosen the road of rebellion.

The best example of such a woman is the literary archetype of a devoted and virtuous wife, a recurring figure in Roman war epic. She is a character who appears to embody both male *and* female virtues, and is therefore sometimes referred to as *matrona virilis*—a manly matron.<sup>2</sup> Remarkably, the combination

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<sup>1</sup> Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 154–156).

<sup>2</sup> See Bessone 2002, 190. For further discussion of this topos in genres other than epic, see Petrone 1995, *passim*; Arrigoni 1984, 877.

of both male and female virtues in her person does not result in a conflict or a travesty, but typically creates a positive moral *exemplum* for the audience to admire and emulate. These are women who are 'playing supermen' in the best possible sense of the expression: overcoming their innate feminine weakness, they manifest courage and selflessness that outweigh those of many male characters. At the same time, however, they do not transgress the social norms that regulate acceptable female conduct; their behaviour does not question the hierarchy of the patriarchal society or its ways of working. By being simultaneously brave patriots and chaste and selfless wives, the manly matrons of Roman epic recall the exemplary tradition of Roman historiography: they bring to mind the stories of famous women who showed exceptional magnanimity without compromising their *pudicitia*. In this chapter, I will investigate into the narrative and ideological functions of this epic archetype, and examine how it contributes to the question of female subjectivity in the genre. My argument is that, because of the combination of male and female virtues, merged in their persons, manly matrons can become possible points of identification for both male and female readers of epic who wish to associate themselves with the defining ideals of *Romanitas*.

### 1 *Mentem aequare viros et laudis poscere partem: Female Groups in Defense of Their Cities*

Most typically in Roman war epic, the courage and high-mindedness of women comes to light at the crucial moments of the war, when the community is facing remarkable hardships. In *Aeneid* 11, the Laurentian matrons take part in the defense of the city when they see the death of Camilla, the Volscian warrior maiden. We read that amid the general chaos and confusion,

*ipsae de muris summo certamine matres/(monstrat amor verus patriae), ut  
videre Camillam,/tela manu trepidae iaciunt ac robore duro/stipitibus fer-  
rum sudibusque imitantur obustis/praecipites, primaeque mori pro moeni-  
bus ardent.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.891–895

Mothers themselves, when they see Camilla, in keenest struggle (true love of their homeland guides them), throw spears with trembling hands from the walls, and hastily substitute hard oak stakes and poles, sharpened with fire, for swords. And they are ablaze to be the first to die defending the walls.

The poet uses the word *imitantur* to underline that the women do not wield actual weapons, but use other objects in place of them. This has led some readers to suggest that Virgil views the women's actions, not as heroic, but rather as a pitiful mimicking of the male deeds of war. Arrigoni considers the women's reaction to be emotional and amateurish; Quinn views it as an act of "perverted heroism" and as a demonstration of war's corrupting influence on the women.<sup>3</sup> These arguments are clearly grounded on the popular way of reading war epic, which regards the binary opposition of genders as an integral part of the genre. According to this juxtaposition, female characters—always and without exception—cannot be assessed by the standards of epic heroism. Even when they manifest a patriotic spirit of self-sacrifice, this is at best an 'imitation' or 'perversion' of the idealised male conduct. The 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' double standard by which patriarchy tends to assess women is evident in these readings. Identifying with the male values of clan and *patria* is the best women can do—but even then, they are inevitably marginalised and belittled within these units of male power.

Zarker, on the other hand, has suggested an alternative way of reading this episode. He argues that the women's defense of the city walls should be taken seriously and seen as an exceptional expression of patriotic courage in the genre of war epic. He considers Virgil's Latin matrons to be "fit foremothers" of the strong women of the late Republic and stresses that, unlike most epic women, they are not acting out of divine inspiration, but of their own free will.<sup>4</sup> In his view, the matrons are actually imitating *Camilla's* example and, as a result, "become like Amazons themselves".<sup>5</sup> Although Zarker's attempt to align the Laurentian women's actions with the courage and skill of the warrior maiden might be something of a stretch, his argument concerning the women's patriotism and its value to the construction of Roman identity is observant. It is important to notice that these are the same women who, in book seven, spread chaos as maenadic warmongers. But now, in their community's hour of need, it is not private pain but *amor verus patriae*—an emotion firmly grounded in the political sphere—that drives them on. If not in their conduct, then at least in their state of mind they could very well be considered points of identification to the male reader of the *Aeneid*.

Another detail worthy of attention is that the concept of *patria* in question is not specified. It appears significant that the women of Laurentum are overwhelmed by patriotic love at the sight of *Camilla*, a Volscian warrior maiden.

3 Arrigoni 1984, 887; Quinn 1968, 251.

4 Zarker 1978, 21.

5 Zarker 1978, 20.

This does not seem to pose any kind of a problem to Virgil: without the slightest controversy, the women become representatives of the *esprit de corps* among the Italian peoples—and by doing so, they deliver a message about the future unity of Italy, an idea that is so crucial to Virgil's understanding of *Romanitas* at large. Thus, by conveying the Laurentian women's spontaneous emotion and action, the poet is able to represent the war in the *Aeneid* as a conflict that both dissolves identities and constructs new ones. *Patria* is a flexible concept, and the Laurentian matrons' identification with the Volscian warrior maiden underlines this.

Virgil's epic successors can be found repeatedly rewriting this episode to suit their own war narratives. When Statius depicts the Thebans preparing for battle, he stresses the manly courage of the matrons:

*illas cogit amor, nec habent extrema pudorem:/ipsae tela viris, ipsae iram  
animosque ministrant,/hortanturque unaque ruunt—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 10.570–573

Love urges them on; their ardour knows no shame. They themselves hand weapons to the men, they themselves supply the anger to their minds, exhort them, and rush along with them.

Statius' *matres* are notably less active in actual warfare than Virgil's Laurentian matrons. They do not participate in the battle themselves, but encourage the men with their warlike spirit. In addition to *Aeneid* 11, Statius is obviously alluding to *Aeneid* 7, where women's warlike frenzy excites the men to take up arms. However, there is a notable difference between the episodes in Virgil and Statius, since in the *Thebaid*, the warlike anger—referred to as *ira*, not *furor*—is a productive form of anger, channelled to the defence of community.<sup>6</sup> Another intriguing detail is that in the passage above, the Theban matrons are depicted as compromising their *pudor*, the ultimate feminine virtue, for the sake of this warlike anger.<sup>7</sup> They appear in public, stirring up battle lust and handling

6 Anger in Roman poetry and in Roman philosophy has been extensively studied during the past few decades. On some definitions of *ira* and *iracundia* in the Roman late Republican/early imperial context, see Harris 2001, 200–228. On the importance of *ira* and *furor*, and the different forms of anger in the *Aeneid*, see Harris 2001, 217–219; Wright 1997; Galinsky 1988; Gill 1997, 228–241; Putnam 1990; Hershkowitz 1998, esp. 95–124. For a more detailed analysis of the different aspects of anger and rage in the *Thebaid*, see Hershkowitz 1998, 247–301; Fantham 1997.

7 Stat. *Theb.* 10.570.

weapons—however, this behaviour is not represented as shameful or inappropriate, but as a laudable reaction to exceptional circumstances.

Silius Italicus, likewise, recalls the Virgilian model when he depicts matrons finding their courage and their patriotic devotion in times of trouble. When the Saguntines prepare for battle in *Punica* 1, the narrator stresses how all the citizens pull their weight to protect the city:

*hinc puer invalidique senes, hinc femina ferre/certat opem in dubiis miserando nava labori,/saxaque mananti subvectat vulnere miles.*

SIL. *Pun.* 1.561–563

Here a boy and feeble old men, and there a woman, struggle passionately to carry out the miserable toils at the moment of adversity, and soldiers with leaking wounds drag stones up [to fortify the walls].

In a very Virgilian manner, the matrons are praised for breaking their traditional roles in the community's hour of need. They take part in the defense of the city by reinforcing the wall, since all hands are needed for the task. Nevertheless, their actions are strictly supervised and regulated by the men. The women's behaviour transgresses the boundaries of their conventional social roles, but not up to the point where it would challenge the community's inner dynamics.

In another episode in the *Punica*, women's contribution to the war appears even more conventional. In book twelve, the Roman matrons are depicted as embodying the unity and the spirit of self-sacrifice amongst the Roman people—admirable emotions that the hardships of war have called forth. The poet relates how the news of a victory at Nola reaches the city and revives the morale of the people. Deserters are punished, and donations to the public cause are made:

*talia corda virum. sed enim nec femina cessat/mentem aequare viros et laudis poscere partem./omnis, prae sese portans capitisque manusque / antiquum decus ac derepta monilia collo,/certatim matrona ruit belloque ministrant./haud tanta cessisse viros in tempore tali/laudis sorte piget; factoque in saecula ituro/laetantur tribuisse locum. tum celsa senatus/subsequitur turba. in medium certamine magno/privatae cumulantur opes; nudare penates/ac nihil arcanos vitae melioris ad usus/seposuisse iuvat. coit et sine nomine vulgus./corpore sic toto ac membris Roma omnibus usa/exsanguis rursus tollebat ad aethera vultus.*

SIL. *Pun.* 12.306–319

Such were the hearts of men; and indeed, nor did the women delay in matching the manly minds, and claiming their share of the praise. All the matrons came forth together, bringing their old family ornaments for head and hand, and necklaces snatched from their necks, and eagerly rushed to give them as a contribution for the war. And it did not irk the men at all to come second to women in praise in such times: they rejoiced in allowing a deed that would be remembered for generations to come. Then, the eminent throng of senators followed suit. With great rivalry, they piled up private wealth for the public cause, happy to strip their houses bare and put nothing aside for their private use in better times to come. And the nameless common people, too, joined in. Thus a united Rome made use of all her members and again raised her exhausted face towards the heaven.

The passage is firmly built on the Roman historiographic tradition, where the economic contribution of women during times of crisis is a recurring topos. Silius recalls Livy, in particular, who relates similar episodes that took place from the Punic Wars onwards.<sup>8</sup> The women's voluntary donation of their jewelry is an act that demonstrates the patriotic spirit of self-sacrifice among the Romans.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is crucial to notice that the value of the act is not primarily about money: by giving away their ornaments, the women sacrifice the symbols of their social status and power.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a spontaneous willingness to let go of these assets is depicted as one of the greatest sacrifices that women could make for the public cause. In particular, the women's moral *exemplum* is depicted as something that encourages the men to identify with them and to emulate their behaviour. *tum celsa senatus/subsequitur turba* makes clear that the matrons' spirit of self-sacrifice kindles imitation in the very leaders of society.

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- 8 Liv. 5.25.8–10, 5.50.7, 27.37.9–10. See also App. *B Civ* 4.33; Plut. *Vit. Cam.* 8.3; Val. Max. 5.6.8.
- 9 During the Republic, elite matrons were repeatedly blamed for their love of luxury. See, e.g., the debate over the annulment of the *lex Oppia* in 195 BCE; Livy reports a speech by Cato the Elder on this occasion, in which the elite matrons are harshly scorned for greed and for hoarding luxury goods. Liv. 34.3.1–2. In general, accusations of greed as one way of defaming unpopular women is a feature very typical of Roman literature; see, e.g., Cassius Dio on Fulvia (Cass. Dio 47.8.2), and Tacitus on Messalina and Agrippina the Younger (Tac. *Ann.* 11.1, 12.7, 12.59). On Terentia and Servilia, see Cic. *Att.* 2.4.5, 11.2.2, 12.32.2, 15.17.1, 12.20.4. During the Republic, laws such as the *lex Voconia*, *lex Falcidia* and *lex Oppia* were applied as an attempt to restrict and control the elite's excessive consumption; they have often been understood to be targeted against elite matrons in particular. See, e.g., the analysis by Bauman 1994, 34; Hemelrijk 1987, 220–222; Herrmann 1964, 55; Culham 2004, 146.
- 10 Hemelrijk 1987, 223–224, 231. See also Hermann 1994, 63.

These examples show that female virtuousness, and especially the ability to overcome the characteristically feminine vices—timidity, weakness, *avaritia* and *luxuria*—in the name of a greater good, are of crucial importance for the construction of Roman identity. The yearning for unity that marks both the Augustan and the Flavian periods is strongly reflected in the self-sacrificing, virtuous matrons in the epics of Virgil, Statius and Silius Italicus. In these works, the women's contributions to war are examples of a selfless devotion that overcomes the whole of the populace. For a moment, the people becomes one in a very tangible manner: all difference is dissolved, and the shared goals and values of the people are stressed. We should note that this can happen only when epic women identify with the value system of the temporal scene: when the inner logic and hierarchy of the society are taken for granted and remain unchallenged.

It is telling that these kinds of episodes are lacking in the *Pharsalia*, an epic that falls between the Augustan and the Flavian periods and generally expresses much less belief in the unity and virtuousness of the Roman people. In the *Pharsalia*, the farthest Lucan ever goes in representing the spirit of self-sacrifice in a group of elite matrons is an imaginary situation. Before the battle of Pharsalia, Pompey urges his soldiers on with a speech that alludes to the Virgilian model:

*Credite pendentes e summis moenibus urbis/crinibus effusis hortari in  
proelia matres;/credite grandaevum vetitumque aetate senatum/arma  
sequi sacros pedibus prosternere canos,/atque ipsam domini metuentem  
occurrere Romam—.*

LUC. *Phar.* 7.369–373

Imagine the matrons hanging from the top of the city walls with dishevelled hair, urging you to battle; imagine that elderly senators, whose age prevents them from following the camp, strew at your feet their hallowed grey hair, and that Rome herself, fearing to be subjected to a master, comes to meet you.

The Roman people, matrons included, are represented as virtuous and valiant, deeply committed to the Republican cause. However, they are such merely in Pompey's imagination. He is urging his soldiers to believe in something that does not really exist, namely, the Roman solidarity and team spirit as embodied in the group of matrons. The allusion to Livy's virtuous female groups of the distant past is deliberate and bitter, because as the reader well knows, *Pharsalia* is a battle between Romans and Romans. The matrons, therefore, are also

divided in the matter of war: there is no Other, no outsider enemy who could unite them in virtue (although Lucan's Pompey is picturing Caesar as one). The illusionary idea of virtuous women, therefore, is used to underline the dissolution of Roman unity in the Republic's darkest hour. The association between Roman women and Roman virtue therefore works both ways, as Lucan artfully demonstrates.

## 2 *Fida coniunx—comes ultima fati?*

As the examples discussed above show, in Roman war epic, female virtue is very often a collective phenomenon that manifests itself in groups of women. This is a feature characteristic of Roman literature in general: from the legendary past to the recorded events of the civil wars, Roman women can be observed as being at their strongest and most valiant when they form a group.<sup>11</sup> Not only do women boost each other's virtuousness when they come together, but their appearance in the public sphere also seems less inappropriate and less damaging to their *pudicitia* when there is a multitude of them. To some extent, the tradition that emphasises the virtuousness and power of female groups is doubtless due to the ritual significance of these kinds of groups in the Roman religious sphere. On the other hand, it can be considered to reflect the literary traditions of Athenian drama, where female groups often represent the public opinion.

The strongly collective nature of female virtuousness notwithstanding, Roman epic poets also repeatedly depict individual matrons who are able to deal courageously with a crisis and to 'rise above their gender' all on their own. These characters are most typical of post-Virgilian epic, and what they all have in common is that the status of a wife is clearly their most defining characteristic. Their devotion to their husbands' political ideals and their willingness to share their partners' hardships are qualities that mark these women throughout their appearance. Like most of the recurring archetypes in Roman war epic, this character too strongly reflects the literary traditions of Roman historiography. In their depictions of the civil war period, Appian, Velleius Paterculus and Cassius Dio describe devoted wives who expose themselves to all sorts of dangers in order to save their husbands from proscriptions.<sup>12</sup> It has been argued that these stories were, at least partially, an attempt to shape

11 Discussed further in Mustakallio 1990; Mustakallio 2012.

12 App. *B Civ.* 4.39–40; Vell. Pat. 2.67.2; Cass. Dio 47.7.4–5.

reality through literary representation. As Hallett points out, in Republican politics, wives were often considered less reliable allies than blood relatives. Since marriages were generally short-lived and determined by political alliances, it is likely that many elite men felt more comfortable relying on their mothers and sisters in matters of political importance, rather than on their wives.<sup>13</sup> While it is almost impossible to prove such a claim, it is more than probable that the political environment to some extent influenced the literary portraits of devoted wives in the works of Roman authors. It is notable that in Roman historiography, an endlessly loyal and devoted wife, whenever she appears, comes off as a half-mythical figure, a treasure of immeasurable value and a cause of continuous amazement. This kind of glorification of women who played by the rules of the patriarchy and identified with values that were generally considered masculine could be a way of validating this kind of behaviour and of setting it up on a pedestal for others to emulate.

It is notable that in this narrative structure, the virtuous wives are usually highly aware of their own value to their husbands' cause. The most famous example is Porcia, daughter of Cato the younger and wife to Brutus. Porcia's reputation is based on her role as a member of one of the most prominent *optimates* families of the late Republic.<sup>14</sup> Because she was so strongly associated with 'the last Republicans', Porcia unsurprisingly became a character in whom the historiographers of the Principate could later locate all the virtues of an idealised Roman matron of the 'good old days'.<sup>15</sup> The result was an archetypal wife-figure, a sort of Cornelia "mother of the Gracchi" Africana reborn.<sup>16</sup>

Plutarch, in particular, makes Porcia not only a pinnacle of *pudicitia*, but also a moral *exemplum* in whom this idealised female quality is complemented by

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13 Hallett 1984, 214, 224–226. See also Valerius Maximus' exemplary stories on marital love, where loyalty and faithfulness are attributed mostly to husbands, not to wives. Val. Max. 4.6, 6.7.

14 Plut. *Vit. Brut.* 13.2–11, Val. Max. 3.2.15, Cass. Dio 44.13.2–4.

15 Porcia's reputation did not suffer from the fact that her husband was defamed as Caesar's murderer; in Roman imperial literature, her devotion to the family is always depicted as just, unshakable and admirable. After Brutus' death at Philippi, Porcia is said to have taken her own life by swallowing live coals. Plut. *Vit. Brut.* 53.4–7; see also Val. Max. 4.6.5.

16 Cornelia, daughter of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus (the victor over Hannibal), became one of the legendary female archetypes in Roman culture. Being both Scipio's daughter and mother to Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus (two of the most famous and controversial politicians of the late Republic), she exemplified virtuous female behaviour in all the roles suitable to an elite matron. See Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 1.1–2; Plut. *C. Gracch.* 4.2–4, 19.1–3; Val. Max. 4.4.

manly courage and *magnanimitas*. He relates a famous story about Porcia cutting her own thigh in order to demonstrate her indifference to pain—on this occasion, Plutarch gives her a voice of her own, and an elaborately constructed speech where she highlights her own virtue:

Ἐγώ, Βρούτε, Κάτωνος οὔσα θυγάτηρ εἰς τὸν σὸν ἐδόθην οἶκον οὐχ ὥσπερ αἱ παλλακευόμεναι, κοίτης μεθέξουσα καὶ τραπέζης μόνον, ἀλλὰ κοινωνὸς μὲν ἀγαθῶν εἶναι, κοινωνὸς δὲ ἀνιαρῶν. τὰ μὲν οὖν σὰ πάντα περὶ τὸν γάμον ἀμεμπτα. τῶν δὲ παρ' ἐμοῦ τίς ἀπόδειξις ἢ χάρις, εἰ μήτε σοι πάθος ἀπόρρητον συνδιοίσω μήτε φροντίδα πίστεως δεομένην; οἶδ' ὅτι γυναικεία φύσις ἀσθενῆς δοκεῖ λόγον ἐνεγκεῖν ἀπόρρητον. ἀλλ' ἔστι τις, ὦ Βρούτε, καὶ τροφῆς ἀγαθῆς καὶ ὀμιλίας χρηστῆς εἰς ἦθος ἰσχύς. ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ Κάτωνος εἶναι θυγατέρα καὶ τὸ Βρούτου γυναῖκα πρόσσεστιν. οἷς πρότερον μὲν ἦττον ἐπεποίθειν, νῦν δ' ἐμαυτὴν ἔγνωκα καὶ πρὸς πόνον ἀήττητον εἶναι.

PLUT. *Vit. Brut.* 13.4–6

Brutus, I am Cato's daughter, and I was brought into your house, not like a mere concubine, to share your bed and board merely, but to be a partner in your joys, and a partner in your troubles. You, indeed, are faultless as a husband; but how can I show you any grateful service if I am to share neither your secret suffering nor the anxiety which craves a loyal confidant? I know that woman's nature is thought too weak to endure a secret; but good rearing and excellent companionship go far towards strengthening the character, and it is my happy lot to be both the daughter of Cato and the wife of Brutus. Before this I put less confidence in these advantages, but now I know that I am superior even to pain.<sup>17</sup>

Hallett considers this episode to be one of the best examples in the whole of Roman literature where the emphasis is placed on gender likeness, instead of difference. She argues that by representing exemplary male courage in a woman, the author questions the alleged difference between the nature of men and women, depicting them in essence as potentially the same.<sup>18</sup> I would suggest, however, that what happens is actually the opposite, since Porcia's speech explicitly stresses the innate sexual difference and her successful struggle to overcome it. It is striking that the *exemplum* operates on a highly injunctive mode—the very reason why Plutarch relates the story is to emphasise the

17 English translation of the *Life of Brutus* by B. Perrin, LCL 1961.

18 Hallett 1989, 63.

exceptionality of Porcia's behaviour. Her action demonstrates that manly courage *can* flourish in a woman—but simultaneously, it distinguishes her from most other women.<sup>19</sup>

Porcia's speech strongly supports the structuralist contrast between 'nurture' and 'nature': she believes that innate characteristics can be changed, improved and 'cured' by social interaction. More specifically, she is arguing that since she has become fully absorbed into the symbolic order and into the patriarchal society—having been raised by the best representatives of the said order—she can renounce the inborn feminine weakness that is inscribed onto her body. In order to prove this, Porcia stabs herself, to demonstrate how completely her mind is superior to and in control of her body, how entirely the bodily drives have been suppressed. Plutarch's story is a reference to the legendary tale of Mucius Scaevola, an exemplary youth who burned his hand in the fire to demonstrate his immunity to physical pain.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it seems that the author deliberately assimilates Porcia to Cato himself, who took his own life by stabbing himself.<sup>21</sup> These allusions to the patriotic acts of admirable men reflect the ideology according to which the woman earns the highest praise when she is compared to men and depicted as (almost) as good as them. Porcia's speech does not question the mechanisms of the patriarchy: while she is clearly aware of her own worth, the tone is still submissive and pleading, and her actions do not overstep the boundaries of her traditional female role. Instead of putting on armour and heading for war, she is simply trying to show how her 'manly' qualities make her worthy of Brutus' trust. As Arrigoni states, masculine daring in a wife could be considered an ultimate manifestation of conjugal *societas*.<sup>22</sup> This is what Porcia appears to have in mind, and what she wants her husband to recognise. Her adoption of the value system of the temporal scene is so complete that it helps her overcome and silence the bodily drives to which she, as a woman, is 'naturally' more tuned in.

The important point is that this kind of an archetype—a female character who embodies male virtues—appears to work as a point of identification and emulation for the male audience, as well. In these kinds of stories, the

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19 For a comparison, see Tac. *Ger.* 18.4, where the author depicts the barbarian women as sharing *laborum periculorumque sociam*. Here, too, the behaviour of these women is depicted as courageous, devoted and admirable—but, at the same time, as something that differentiates them from most Roman women of the time.

20 Liv. 2.12; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 5.29; Plut. *Vit. Pub.* 17.

21 Plut. *Vit. Brut.* 13. For Porcia's reputation as a woman who displayed manly courage, see also Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 73.4.

22 Arrigoni 1984, 877: Arrigoni refers especially to situations where a wife is able to overcome her fear of death and pain to commit suicide together with her husband.

courage of the virtuous women helps them overcome their sex, and enables them to participate in the discourse that defines Roman masculinity and male heroism. A complete absorption into the temporal scene and a super-human control over the bodily drives, therefore, grant the woman narrative subjectivity, since they make her a character whom the male reader can look up to and relate to. Even Porcia's wounding of herself does not alienate the reader, as self-destructive violence often does, because it is an act entirely grounded in logic, not an impulsive outburst of emotion.

Plutarch's story about Porcia is of crucial importance here, because it bears strong resemblance to the virtuous matrons in war-centred epic, in terms of both structure and ideological content. In the following examples from the *Pharsalia* and the *Punica*, the women's self-confidence and their political awareness are especially striking. Like Plutarch's Porcia, the epic matrons refuse to be defined exclusively in terms of home, marriage and motherhood. Instead, they demand to be taken seriously as their husbands' allies and to be granted an access to their political affairs. At the same time, however they appear to be aware that however hard they try, the full immersion in the temporal scene will never be possible: even if applauded for their 'manly' qualities, they will inevitably be assessed as performing a role that is not 'natural' for them.

The topos is particularly recurrent in Lucan's *Pharsalia*. While virtuous female groups are rare in Lucan's epic, individual devoted matrons are not. This may have something to do with the content of the epic: the fact that the *Pharsalia* is a historical war epic offers the poet an excellent opportunity to portray some of the famous figures from the last century BCE, and to represent them as embodiments of the crumbling Roman virtue. One of the archetypal representatives of the topos is Pompey's wife Cornelia, whose exemplarity I have briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Besides being modest and restrained, Cornelia is strikingly devoted to all the men in her family—to her father, to her late first husband, to her children and, above all, to Pompey.<sup>23</sup>

Cornelia's unwavering loyalty to her husband and to everything he stands for makes her Pompey's most devoted companion not only in the domestic sphere but in political affairs, too. The poet depicts her as an unwavering supporter of

23 Cornelia's feminine virtues are emphasised in Luc. *Phar.* 8.155–158: *tanto devinxit amore/hos pudor; hos probitas castique modestia voltus,/quod summissa animis, nulli gravis hospita turbae;/stantis adhuc fati vixit quasi coniuge victo*. For her devotion to the men of her family, see, e.g., 8.410–413, 9.51–100. Plutarch, too, depicts Cornelia as a very sophisticated and well-read woman: Plut. *Pomp.* 55.2–3. On Cornelia's character as an exemplary matron, see also Finiello 2005, 165–169; Utard 2010, 181–182.

her husband's cause: he refers to Cornelia as *fida comes Magni*,<sup>24</sup> and represents her as the only one who stays by his side until the very end. When Cornelia is devastated upon hearing about the defeat at Pharsalia, Pompey consoles her:

*Nobile cur robor fortunae volnere primo,/femina tantorum titulis insignis  
avorum,/frangis? Habes aditum mansurae in saecula famae./laudis in hoc  
sexu non legum cura nec arma,/unica materia est coniunx miser.—Nunc  
sum tibi gloria maior,/a me quod fasces et quod pia turba senatus/tantaque  
discessit regum manus: incipe Magnum/sola sequi.*

LUC. *Phar.* 8.72–76, 8.78–81

Why do you let the first wound of Fortune break your strength—you, a woman distinguished by the fame of such outstanding ancestors? Here is your opportunity for fame that will last throughout ages. Neither civil government nor war is a source of glory to your sex: its only source is a wretched husband.—Now, I bring you more glory, when my lictors and the pious ranks of senators and all my kingly entourage have left me: from now on, be the sole follower of Magnus.

The episode resembles Plutarch's depiction of Porcia in many aspects. When Cornelia's courage is wavering and she feels anxious and desperate, Pompey reminds her of her noble lineage. What he appears to mean is that, having been indoctrinated into the Republican patriotic ideology all her life, Cornelia, if anyone, should have the power to overcome her feminine weakness, to suppress her emotions and to follow the path of logic and reason. However, while Pompey's speech stresses Cornelia's extraordinary potential to 'man up', it simultaneously marks her as marginal to the male world of politics and war. The woman's 'manliness' is supposed to manifest itself in her state of mind alone, not in action: Pompey claims that for a woman, the way of gaining glory is to stay by her husband's side in times of trouble. This ideal is simultaneously glorifying and restrictive; while it raises female loyalty almost to the same level as martial glory, it also confines female agency within the limits of family and marriage, depriving Cornelia of any opportunity for agency independent of her husband. The ideal woman that Cornelia should aspire to be is one completely absorbed into the logic of the symbolic order and who identifies with the male values of the Republic—yet expresses this devotion through familial relationships, home and care.

24 Luc. *Phar.* 5.804.

Apparently, Cornelia's indoctrination into the Republican, 'masculine' value system has been rather complete and successful: after a brief moment of despair, she is able to quickly compose herself and from then on, loyally follows Pompey from one hardship to another. After she has been bereaved of her husband, she herself recalls Pompey's words and takes pride in her position as his partner until the bitter end:

—*matrum sola per undas/et per castra comes nullis absterrita,fatis/victum,  
quod reges etiam timuere, recepi.*

LUC. *Phar.* 8.648–650

—I was the only matron to accompany him, by sea and in camp; I was not driven away by any fate. I accepted him when he was defeated, something even kings were afraid to do.

At first sight, *matrum sola* appears to be a strange choice of words: she is after all, Pompey's *only* wife, yet she seems to take particular pride in being the only woman to have followed him. Most probably, the notion is intended to draw attention to Cornelia's performance as a woman in a sphere of life that is otherwise entirely masculine. *Per undas et per castra* makes it evident that she followed Pompey on his military exploits, where all other participants were supposedly male. Accordingly, Cornelia is underlining the hardships 'unsuitable' for a woman that she has put up with, in order to stress her ability to overcome her innate feminine weakness. Again, the *exemplum* is of an extremely injunctive nature, since it juxtaposes Cornelia's exceptional virtue with all other women: while what she has managed to do is admirable, it is something generally unnatural for women.

The interesting point is that Cornelia appears to believe that in her bravery and loyalty, she has reached a pinnacle of virtue that is out of reach even for many men: *quod reges etiam timuere* clearly states this. At the same time, however, this claim reveals Cornelia's conviction that lasting loyalty can be found only in familial unions, not in the opportunistic political alliances. In Cornelia's eyes, the basic unit to which the individual is subordinate is the family/clan, and anything else is of secondary value and unreliable.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, while Cornelia's self-representation underlines her own worth to her husband's political affairs, it simultaneously lays bare the marginality of women in this temporal scene. With all her high-mindedness and masculine courage, she is

25 See Kristeva 1974 (1984), 90–92.

primarily motivated by personal affection, love and loyalty, to which Rome takes a second place. What she is doing, she is doing not for the Republic but for Pompey—and this reveals that after all is said and done, her absorption into the male values of the Republic remains incomplete. The implied meaning of this female moral *exemplum* appears to be that, in the end, it is impossible even for the best of women to become servants of the state comparable to men. This is simply because, as women, they are naturally more bound to family, body, and private emotions: even at their most high-minded and virtuous, these are where their motivation is rooted.

In addition to Cornelia, another prominent matron who manifests manly courage and loyalty in the *Pharsalia* is Marcia, the wife of Cato the younger. In book two, Lucan relates that Cato, after having had three children with her, divorced Marcia and gave her as wife to Quintus Hortensius, on the grounds that she was still fertile and could ally the two families with each other through maternal blood.<sup>26</sup> After the death of her second husband, Marcia, nevertheless, comes back to Cato, asking him to take her back—not as a wife in a sexual or a romantic sense, but as his ally in the civil war. The speech that she delivers echoes the arguments of Plutarch's Porcia. Marcia defines herself entirely in relation to her husband and demands to be recognised in this way:

—*Da foedera prisca/inlibata tori, da tantum nomen inane/conubii; liceat tumulo scripsisse: 'Catonis/Marcia'; nec dubium longo quaeratur in aevo,/ mutarim primas expulsa, an tradita, taedas./non me laetorum sociam rebusque secundis/accipis; in curas venio partemque laborum.*

LUC. *Phar.* 2.341–347

Let me restore the full pact of my former marriage, grant me only the hollow name of a spouse. Let it be written on my tomb: “Marcia, wife of Cato”. Let it not be disputed, after a long time has passed, whether I was first driven out or given as a wife to another man. You do not receive me as a companion to share in happiness or in fortunate affairs: I come to take my part in troubles and toils.

Unlike Cornelia, Marcia does not seem to be overwhelmed by desperation. Her speech is well-structured and calm, more rational than emotional, and

<sup>26</sup> Luc. *Phar.* 2.329–333. This action seems to echo the Stoic idea, expressed, e.g., by Musonius Rufus and Hierocles, that marriage and children were not a private choice, but something that was to be pursued for the benefit of society. Schofield 1991, 119–127.

its powerful impact is strengthened by the fact that she comes straight from Hortensius' funeral, in her mourning attire. There are, however, no signs of frantic personal grief about her. She is covered in ashes, but this is no proof of inner turmoil, but rather a sign that she has done her duty to her late husband and carried out the rites that social decorum demands. In this way, Marcia has proved her worth not only as a wife but also as a member of community who has completely absorbed its values and norms. And this does not go unnoticed by Cato, the perfect servant of the temporal order; when the narrator describes Cornelia's mourning attire, he mentions that "her husband would not want her any other way" (*non aliter placitura viro*).<sup>27</sup>

At their wedding, Cato and Marcia's Stoic high-mindedness obtains such superhuman dimensions that some readers have argued that this episode is Lucan's subtle irony vis-à-vis the Stoic ideals of his time and the picture-perfect reputation of the Republican heroes.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in the desperate reality of civil war, Cato does not really achieve anything with his absoluteness. His stern devotion to a lost cause prevents him from truly committing himself to the Pompeian faction, and casts him as the noble outsider in the conflict. In a sense, Cato and Marcia are moral dinosaurs who isolate themselves in their superiority and, as such, they appear slightly ludicrous and completely useless in the rebuilding of the society. By emphasising their *magnanimitas* to a ridiculous degree, Lucan reveals how outdated and futile this Republican identity is in the new, imperial atmosphere.

Furthermore, many scholars have argued that Marcia's sole purpose in the narrative is to strengthen Cato's reputation as the selfless champion of the Republic.<sup>29</sup> After describing the grim wedding where the couple is reunited, Lucan again turns to praising Cato's virtuousness, of which their marriage is

27 Luc. *Phar.* 2.337. On Marcia's appearance, 2.333–337. As La Penna notes, in his discussion of the *Thebaid*, plainness, austerity and severity of the outward appearance are integral parts of an epic matron's 'manly energy'; thus, *matrona virilis* can also appear as an inspiration to an archaic lifestyle (compare with Argia in Stat. *Theb.* 12.220–223). La Penna 1981, 228–229. On Argia, see also Helzle 1996, 160–174.

28 Thus, for instance, Graver 2011, 221–222. Bianchi has stressed the non-relatability of both Caesar and Cato in the *Pharsalia*, the former because of his degenerate moral decline, the latter because of his superhuman Stoicism. On these grounds, Bianchi concludes that Pompey is in fact the only hero of the epic who is relatable on a human level. Bianchi 2004, 101–102. See also Johnson 1987, 35–66. On the ambivalence of the Lucanian heroes, Utard 2010, 179–180, 185–191.

29 Dangel 2010, 91–92. This has been argued also by Graver and Armisen-Marchetti: Graver 2011; Armisen-Marchetti 2003, 251–254. Marcia's Stoic high-mindedness in relation to Cato's is discussed also in Harich 1990.

yet another example.<sup>30</sup> It is specifically underlined that Cato is above both the pains and the pleasures of the flesh:

—*nec foedera prisca/Sunt temptata tori; iusto quoque robur amoris/Restitit.—Huic epulae, vicisse famem; magnique penates,/Summovisse hiemem tecto; pretiosaque vestis,/Hirtam membra super Romani more Quiritis/Induxisse togam; Venerisque hic unicus usus,/Progenies; urbi pater est urbi-que maritus,/Iustitiae cultor, rigidi servator honesti,/In commune bonus; nullosque Catonis in actus/Subrepsit partemque tulit sibi nata voluptas.*

LUC. *Phar.* 2.378–380, 2.384–391

Nor did he try to renew the former married relations with his wife: he maintained his strength even against just love.—To him it was a feast to conquer hunger; fighting winter with any roof over his head meant a mighty house for him. To draw over his limbs the rough toga, which is the traditional Roman dress—it was a luxurious piece of clothing to him. For him, the only purpose of desire was offspring: he became a father and a husband for the benefit of the state. He worshipped justice and practised unwavering virtue; his goodness was for the whole people, and there was no act in Cato's life where pleasure crept in and claimed a share.

The dichotomy and the hierarchy between the body and the mind become evident in this passage. Cato's bodily drives have been entirely suppressed by his mind, and by his *amor patriae* that is a purer, more rational kind of love than that between human beings. All in all, he appears as a flawless servant of the temporal scene—moreover, Cato perfects the spirit of self-sacrifice that Pompey's Cornelia could only aspire to, because, in his view, the state surpasses family/clan in importance and is the main unit to which the individual is subordinate. *urbi pater est urbi-que maritus* is a particularly interesting phrasing, since, in a way, it casts Cato in a female role. Not to take personal pleasure in sex—a form of the matronal virtue of *pudicitia*—and to produce children for Rome to make use of were the moral duties of any elite woman.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, with his *magnanimitas* that overcomes both his sexual drive and his desire to secure the continuity of his own family line, Cato masters the combination

30 Luc. *Phar.* 2.350–391. On Lucan's use of Cato as a moral *exemplum*, and on his literary models in the construction of the character, see Cogitore 2010, esp. 174–177. For further analysis of the specific character of the wedding episode, see Armisen-Marchetti 2003, 253–254; Augoustakis 2010, 167–176; Ahl 1976, 247–252; Finiello 2005, 165–169.

31 For discussion, see Langlands 2006, 37–50.

of masculine and feminine virtues. He becomes an *exemplum* that *everyone* should aspire to—a flawless servant of the state, free from disturbing bodily drives and emotions, from desire as well as from despair.

Marcia is depicted as a female counterpart to Cato's high-mindedness. She is a mirror that reflects his glory, and like her husband, she too is able to overcome both the pains and the pleasures of the flesh in a way that is exceptional for a woman. It is noteworthy how the narrator appears to depict Cato and Marcia as complementing each other's moral characteristics. Whereas Cato is stern, inflexible and loyal to the collapsing Republican ideals, Marcia is selfless and blindly devoted to her husband's cause. Gender difference is almost entirely dissolved when Lucan depicts the two as representatives of the ideal—albeit extreme and outdated—Republican *Romanitas*. The episode reminds the reader of Seneca's definition of the Stoic sage as 'a uniform person', never many different persons in one.<sup>32</sup> While Seneca was clearly talking about a coherent individual character, in the *Pharsalia*, Lucan seems to recall this requirement of uniformity when he completely assimilates the characters of the husband and the wife.<sup>33</sup> The line between the subject of epic—a political citizen male—and its putative 'other' is dissolved, and the two become one. We should note that this does not mean the masculine and the feminine meeting each other half way—in the symbolic order, the ideal 'sameness' can be reached only when the woman becomes as much of a man as possible, and when the semiotic is suppressed completely.

A similar phenomenon can be observed elsewhere in the *Pharsalia*. Armi-sen-Marchetti makes an interesting point when she notes that Lucan pairs each of the male protagonists of his poem with a female counterpart who is designed to reflect and stress the moral attributes of the man. While Marcia is to be read in relation to Cato, Cornelia is to be read in relation to Pompey, and Cleopatra to Caesar.<sup>34</sup> It is crucial to notice that this relationship appears to be reciprocal and complementary: Marcia's austere character stresses Cato's Stoic high-mindedness, and *e contra*, her position as Cato's wife *per se* speaks for her own virtuousness. Cornelia's fragility and humanity reflect these attributes in Pompey, and vice versa. And, as I have argued in chapter two, it is not

32 *vero tenor permanet—praeter sapientem autem nemo unum agit*. Sen. *Luc.* 120.19, 120.22.

33 Traces of a similar ideology can be perceived in the writings of Epictetus, written slightly after the *Pharsalia* and preserved in the work of Arrian (*Discourses of Epictetus*). Epictetus asserts that the wife of the sage is a person just like him. Arr. *Epict. diss.* 3.22.68–69. This ideal regarding marital unions was obviously inspired by Aristotle's thoughts on friendship; see Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 9.1166a31.

34 Armi-sen-Marchetti 2003, 251–258; thus also Dangel 2010, *passim*; Utard 2010, 180.

only Cleopatra's moral corruption that adds to Caesar's bad reputation, but it is also the queen's falling for Caesar that further darkens her image—with this couple, the gender difference is dissolved, since both the man and the woman fall victims to their bodily drives. These pairs of male and female protagonists, therefore, continuously both reflect and boost each other's moral attributes. What is more, the ongoing friction between these couples in Lucan's civil war narrative marks them as representatives of the different aspects of *Romanitas*: the hostility between them symbolises the civil war as an event that shatters the collective self. In this way, Lucan exploits the themes of gender likeness and gender complementarity to define Roman identity and to depict its collapse.

The dissolving of gender difference in the characters of Cato and Marcia, Pompey and Cornelia, and Cleopatra and Caesar demonstrates that, in Lucan's epic, the semiotic and the symbolic modalities cannot be easily gendered—in general, women appear to be more vulnerable to the semiotic pressure and men more capable of suppressing their bodily drives, but both modalities, arguably, are present in both genders. Renouncing the semiotic—which obviously is the main goal of the Stoic hero—is a matter of intrapersonal cultivation of character. The more profoundly one can identify with the 'masculine' values of the Republic, the better a servant to the temporal scene and to the patriarchal order (s)he becomes. However, it is also important to notice that in Lucan's epic universe, reaching the level of superhuman virtue is no guarantee of narrative subjectivity—on the contrary, a complete renunciation of the body and its drives might also be something that alienates the reader. Arguably, characters such as Cato and Marcia, while they might work as positive *exempla* to strive after, are just as difficult for the reader to identify with as characters such as Virgil's Amata and Statius' Oedipus, who are overtaken by inexplicable fury. It would appear that those who are entirely absorbed into one modality of communication only—be it the semiotic or the symbolic—are hard to relate to; the reader is more likely to identify with characters whose communication consists of a dynamic interaction between logic and emotion, mind and body.

### 3 *Da mihi castra sequi*: The Female Intrusion in the World of War

The distinction between—and the overlapping of—the male and the female spheres in Roman culture and society becomes particularly evident when the Roman epic poets discuss the presence of women in a military camp. As I noted above, Lucan's Cornelia takes particular pride in having followed Pompey *per undas et per castra*—the wife's determination to follow her husband to whatever end, even war, is the ultimate expression of manly courage inspired

by wedded love.<sup>35</sup> Obviously, this romantic ideal does not really reflect the historical reality; in the days of the Roman Republic, the military camp was simply no place for a respectable woman. Because the army was often followed by *mulierculae*, prostitutes or mistresses of lower birth, any association with such a lifestyle would have been extremely damaging to the reputation of an elite matron.<sup>36</sup>

In the course of the early Principate, a slight change in attitudes and practices can be observed.<sup>37</sup> The edict forbidding the presence of wives in camp is a much disputed matter—as Wintjes notes, the evidence is scanty and it is not entirely clear if there ever was such a law in place.<sup>38</sup> Even if there was, it appears to have been gradually modified and, by Tiberius' reign, it had become a dead letter. Notable Julio-Claudian empresses are examples of the new practice in the matter. Livia is reported to have frequently joined Augustus on his military campaigns,<sup>39</sup> and Agrippina the elder was famous for her presence at Germanicus' side on campaigns far away from the Italian peninsula.<sup>40</sup> These, of course, were exceptional women and sporadic cases, certainly not proof of an abiding state of affairs. Nevertheless, in the remarks of the Roman imperial historians, one can observe a slight and gradual change in the ideas about women's presence in the camp, when compared to the stern opposition during the Republic.

In a way, Roman war epic appears to reflect this development. In Virgil's epic, the topic of women in military camp is practically non-existent.<sup>41</sup> In post-Virgilian epic, on the other hand, the phenomenon flourishes: Lucan is the starting point, whose model the Flavian poets repeatedly vary and imitate. In

35 See, e.g., Luc. *Phar.* 2.348–349; 8.155–158, 8.648–650; Sil. *Pun.* 3.114–115.

36 Arrigoni 1984, 857 (see also Serv. *Aen.* 3.519, 8.688). For the definition of *mulierculae* and for some further discussion of prostitution in Roman military camps, see Petrone 1995, 267; Arrigoni 1984, 871–873; Mattingly 2011, 114–118. It is also important to note that during the political conflicts of the late Republic, having a wife follow a general to the camp was potentially damaging to *his* reputation as well: the woman's behaviour could be utilised to reflect the morals of a man with whom she was involved. See Cic. *Cat.* 2.23, Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 18.2, Cass. Dio 59.21.2. See also Arrigoni 1984, 871.

37 Wintjes 2012, 43–44.

38 Wintjes 2012, 42–43. See also Arrigoni 1984, 872. Tacitus comments on the issue, stressing the demoralising influence that women supposedly had on soldiers: Tac. *Ann.* 3.33.

39 Tac. *Ann.* 3.33–34, 15.10.

40 On Agrippina's presence in the camp, Tac. *Ann.* 1.40–1.41, 1.69.

41 One exception is a brief mention in the *Bucolica* of a freedwoman named Volumnia or Cytheris (in the poem, she goes by the pseudonym Lycoris): “*Galle, quid insanis?*” inquit. “*tua cura Lycoris/perque nives alium perque horrida castra secuta est.*” Verg. *Ecl.* 10.22–23.

his epic, the virtuous wives' crowning achievement appears to be their determination not to be parted from their husbands, not even because of the war. In book five of the *Pharsalia*, Cornelia takes particularly hard Pompey's decision to send her away to hide at Lesbos during the battle of Pharsalia. The wife strongly protests:

—*credisne aliquid mihi tutius esse/quam tibi? non olim casu pendemus  
ab uno?/fulminibus me, saeve, iubes tantaeque ruinae/absentem praestare  
caput?*

LUC. *Phar.* 5.768–771

Do you believe that my safety is different from your safety? Have we not since forever been dependent on the same chance? Do you, cruel one, order me to present my head to thunderbolts and to such ruin, without you by my side?

Again, the strong assimilation between the husband and the wife—they are, ideally, of one fate—appears to underline Cornelia's virtuousness. On the grounds of her womanhood, she could easily avoid the dangers of war, but she chooses not to: in her mind, her chaste marital love gives her manly courage to face the adversities of the camp. And although Pharsalia is off-limits to Cornelia, there is reason to believe that on some other occasion her pleas may have been more successful; at least, this is what one could conclude on the basis of what Cato's wife Marcia has to say. In her speech to her husband, she refers to the presence of Pompey's wife in the camp:

—*Da mihi castra sequi. Cur tuta in pace relinquitur, et sit civili propior  
Cornelia bello?*

LUC. *Phar.* 2.348–349

—Let me follow the camp. Why should I be left behind in safety and in peace, and why should Cornelia be closer to the civil war than I?

Notably, besides being an exemplary model to the external audience, Cornelia becomes a model for the internal audience to emulate. Marcia does not want to stand second in virtue to anyone, since her husband certainly does not. The competitive spirit and the constant project of moral self-improvement that mark Lucan's epic demand that the elite matrons constantly strive to trump one another in their pursuit of manliness and virtue. For Marcia, being her husband's *comes* in heart and mind is not enough—she wants to be physically

present at his political and military endeavours, and considers this as a privilege that she, if any matron, should be granted.

Variants of this topos are many and frequent in Flavian epic. Statius closes the first book of the *Achilleid* with the wedding of Achilles and Deidamia before the hero's departure for Troy. Deidamia, afraid of never seeing her newly-wed husband again, appeals to him:

—*quin age, duc comitem, cur non ego Martia tecum/signa feram? tu pensa manu Baccheaque mecum/sacra, quod infelix non credit Troia, tulisti.*

STAT. *Achil.* 1.949–951

—Why not, come on—take me with you as companion. Why should I not carry Mars' banners with you? With me you carried Bacchus' sacred wands in your hand, something that unhappy Troy does not believe.

Deidamia, too, seems to believe that married love will give her power to go against her nature: she wants to leave behind the isolated feminine sphere of Scyros and to be absorbed into the temporal scene of war and politics. Apparently, her wish to be able to transgress the gender boundaries is kindled by Achilles' earlier performance in the female role. What Deidamia forgets, however, is that this performance was ultimately unsuccessful: in the end, her husband's innate male courage inevitably betrayed his 'true' sex. The *Achilleid*, therefore, plays around with the idea of the performative nature of gender, but is, in the end, uncompromisingly essentialist about sex.

Another thing that Deidamia fails to understand is that her desire to *actually* follow Achilles to the battlefield and to take part in the heat of the action would mean overstepping the social boundaries that regulate female conduct. She does not seem to understand what Lucan's Cornelia and Marcia know all too well: that being 'manly' in mind does not mean adopting the male social role—that following the husband to war does not mean *actually* riding off to battle. Whereas Lucan's Republican matrons draw heavily on the Roman historiographic tradition concerning female *virtus*, Statius' Deidamia is an elegiac lover whose wish manifests astonishing naïveté in the face of war.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the requests of Cornelia and Marcia, her plea is not in line with her personality, but is prompted by a sudden fear of the unknown. It is a wish of a child who is cast into the social role of a matron overnight and who does not know how to cope when she has to release her husband from the domestic sphere into the

42 See Bessone 2002, 189.

world of war. As a result, her dreams about transgressing the gender roles and facing the world as a united team with her husband seem naïve and unrealistic.

The topos is discussed by Silius Italicus too, although from a slightly different perspective. It is particularly intriguing that in his patriotic epic, Silius assigns the role of a manly matron to an enemy of Rome—that is, to a putative ‘other’. In book three of the *Punica*, it is Hannibal’s wife Imilce who wishes to join the Punic army on its march for Rome. As Augoustakis notes, Imilce is doubly an other, since she is foreign to the Romans and to the Carthaginians alike.<sup>43</sup> She comes from a Spanish town called Castulo,<sup>44</sup> and the poet refers to her family background as noble—we are told that “that was her homeland and from there, Imilce drew her renowned lineage” (*hinc patriam clarumque genus referebat Imilce*).<sup>45</sup> Despite this upper-class lineage, the status of an outsider is a constant defining factor in Imilce’s character. One would therefore expect this predominant otherness to weaken her textual subjectivity: the reader does not expect Imilce to be a relatable character, or one that he could easily identify with.

This would, however, be a mistaken assumption, as one finds out when Imilce opens her mouth. In her plea to her husband, she turns out to be a direct literary descendant of Lucan’s Cornelia and Marcia, the most fitting representatives of characteristically Roman, Republican virtues.<sup>46</sup> What is more, Imilce’s speech implies that she, too, is well aware of her worth and considers herself fully entitled to her demands:

*mene, oblite tua nostram pendere salutem,/abnuis inceptis comitem? sic foedera nota/primitiaeque tori, gelidos ut scandere tecum/deficiam montes coniux tua? crede vigori/femineo; castum haud superat labor ullus amorem.*

SIL. *Pun.* 3.109–115

Do you forget that my safety depends on yours? Do you refuse me as a partner in what you have started? Does our marriage pact, do the first fruits of our marriage bed, make you believe that I, your wife, would let

43 Augoustakis 2010, 208–209.

44 Sil. *Pun.* 3.97–107.

45 Sil. *Pun.* 3.106.

46 Discussed in detail in Augoustakis 2010, 205–209. Augoustakis examines Imilce’s role as the representative of characteristically Roman values also in book four of the *Punica*, where she renounces the Carthaginian habit of child sacrifice, and evaluates the war as a *nefas*.

you down when climbing with you the frozen mountains? Have faith in a woman's strength: no hardship can overcome chaste love.

As Vinchesi points out, Imilce's dignified behaviour creates a positive image of a strong, high-minded spouse of a great commander.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, her argumentation is rational and her speech well-constructed. This shows that, like Lucan's Cornelia, she is entirely absorbed in the temporal scene and in the symbolic order. By granting the role of a virtuous, brave and devoted wife to a foreigner, Silius Italicus appears to deliberately blur the line that defines subjectivity—both in terms of ethnicity and in terms of gender. Imilce's courageous character and her demand to be incorporated into the world of war not only question the sexual difference and the dichotomy between 'male' and 'female' virtues—they also call into question the very definition of 'Roman' and 'other'. Imilce's identification with values that in the universe of epic are considered not only male, but also distinctively Roman, raises questions about what constitutes *Romanitas*, about who is and who could become Roman.<sup>48</sup> This is perhaps the most evident case in Flavian war epic where the fluidity of cultural identity is seriously discussed.

Imilce's speech captures the double standard connected to the role of *matrona virilis*. While she fears that her status as Hannibal's wedded wife makes it impossible for him to regard her as his *comes* in the political sphere, she nevertheless tries to convince him that her spousal love is the very thing that enables her to overcome any obstacle. The stress that Imilce lays on her chaste love (*castum—amorem*) is meant to assure that—unlike what one might think, judging by the above-mentioned "fruits of the marriage bed"—her love is of a pure and non-corporeal kind, suitable to a virtuous matron and to an obedient servant of the state. It is this kind of unselfish and dispassionate love that makes it possible for Lucan's Republican matrons to suppress the semiotic in them—and Imilce, aspiring to do the same, does everything in her power to prove that she has what it takes. She is desperately trying to convince her husband that, despite her sex and gender, her bodily drives can be suppressed.

Accordingly, wifehood is both Imilce's source of strength *and* her greatest shortcoming: because of it, she will never be taken seriously in the world of men, although because of it, she should be. This paradox appears to confine all the matrons discussed in this chapter to the female sphere of life, their virile energy notwithstanding. Despite their spirit of self-sacrifice and their eager-

47 Vinchesi 2005, 106–107.

48 See Augoustakis 2008, 55–63, 73–74; Augoustakis 2010, 205–209.

ness to dedicate themselves to the common cause, more often than not they are not allowed to do so. And on some level, the women appear to be aware of this even as they make their pleas. Statius' Deidamia, for instance, has barely finished her request when she already gives up, asking only that her husband remains faithful and cherishes the memory of their son.<sup>49</sup> As I noted earlier, Deidamia's idea of following Achilles to war is a mere illusion, as she herself appears to understand before the husband even gets an opportunity to turn it down.

Imilce, likewise, after her bold speech about crossing the Alps, quickly falls into a timid and obedient role, stating that

*sin solo aspicimus sexu, fixumque relinqui, / cedo equidem nec fata moror—i felix—atque acies inter flagrantiaque arma relictæ / coniugis et nati curam servare memento.*<sup>50</sup>

SIL. *Pun.* 3.114–115

If you judge me by my sex alone, and are determined to leave me behind, I give in, for my part, and will not delay the inevitable.—Go and rejoice!—And in the midst of battles and flaming arms, remember to have concern for your child and your wife who was left behind.

The content of Imilce's last wish to Hannibal is almost identical to that of Deidamia's to Achilles. After courageously boasting of their resilience, these women eventually need next to no persuasion to stay behind. In a way, they appear to be painfully aware that they are, and always will be, judged by their sex alone—that even the best of women, the ones who identify with the male value system of the epic, who are in total control of their bodily drives and loyal servants of the temporal scene, will be inevitably marginalised.

This marginalisation becomes very evident, because it happens simultaneously on the ideological level of the poem (they become insignificant to its value system) and on the narrative level (they are swiftly and suddenly written off the page). It is noteworthy that in the epics of Lucan, Statius and Silius, the episodes in which the virtuous wives are left behind bear a striking similarity to

49 Stat. *Achil.* 1.952–955.

50 According to Vinchesi's interpretation, these lines express not fear, but rather Imilce's understanding that it is futile to oppose the predominant gender dynamics. Passive subordination can be perceived in Imilce's response—the use of the word *fata*, in particular, implies that she considers the prevalent situation to be unchangeable and handed down from above. Vinchesi 2005, 104–105.

each other. The crucial element in these episodes is water, a natural barrier that separates the helpless wife from her departing husband.<sup>51</sup> Statius offers a prime example of this narrative structure when he depicts Deidamia standing on the top of the wall trying to catch a glimpse of the ship that carries Achilles away:

*Turre procul summa lacrimis comitata sororum/commissumque tenens et habentem nomina Pyrrhum/pendebat coniunx oculisque in carbasa fixis/ibat et ipsa freto, et puppem iam sola videbat./ille quoque obliquos dilecta ad moenia vultus/declinat viduamque domum gemitusque relictæ/cogitat—.*

STAT. *Achil.* 2.23–29

Far away, accompanied by her sisters' tears and holding Pyrrhus (that was the child's name), the wife was hanging from the top of a tower with her eyes fixed on the sails. She followed them over the sea and now only she saw the ship. He [Achilles] too turns his sidelong gaze towards the beloved walls, and thinks of the widowed household and the groans of the one that is left behind.

Statius refers to Deidamia as *relictæ*, a word that wields strong elegiac connotations. Notably, the word appears also in Imilce's speech when she speaks of herself and her son (*relictæ/coniugis et nati*). As I pointed out in chapter three, the *relictæ* topos is typical of the Roman elegy of the early Principate, where its best representatives can be found in Ovid's *Heroides*. In the elegiac genre, *relictæ* is a deserted lover, a woman left behind waiting for a man who is not coming back.<sup>52</sup> In Roman war epic, instead, this archetype appears to be recurrently used to 'force femininity' upon women who try to transgress the traditional gender roles (Dido in the *Aeneid* is the first representative of the type). Arguably, casting the 'manly' woman into a hyper-feminine role of an elegiac mistress is to render her non-dangerous and to efficiently write her off the narrative: the episode where the woman gazes at the sea is almost always the last one hears of her.<sup>53</sup> This is a literary technique that the Roman poets make

51 The idea of water as a symbolic boundary is characteristic of Greek and Roman religious and philosophical thinking; rivers, in particular, were often considered to have symbolic significance as boundaries that separate people or spheres of life from each other—the river Styx, separating the underworld from the world of the living, is the best example. See, e.g., Taylor 2009, 38–39; Håland 2009, 117–118.

52 For the development of the *relictæ* topos in different literary genres, see above, chapter 3, footnote 26.

53 The elegiac elements in Statius' epic, in particular, are more thoroughly examined in Bessone 2002, and in Davis 2006, esp. 139.

use of in the case of the manly matrons too. Despite their best efforts to manifest masculine courage and devotion to a political cause, and despite their bold demands to be taken along to the horrors of war, the epic matrons are thrown back into the role of a woman left behind—a static, powerless bystander, juxtaposed to the dynamic, mobile, male hero.

Even though they can clearly see it coming, the wives' agony over this marginalisation is evident, and its poetic effect powerful. Part of this narrative pattern in Roman epic is that the narrator depicts the left-behind women as physically clinging to their husbands—and to the narrative from which they are being erased. In book eight of the *Pharsalia*, Lucan depicts Cornelia's anguish when she is left behind in the safety of the ship as her husband docks in Egypt:

*Haec ubi frustra/effudit, prima pendet tamen anxia puppe,/attonitoque metu nec quoquam avertere visus/nec Magnum spectare potest.*

LUC. *Phar.* 8.589–592

When she had poured out these words in vain, she still hung anxiously over the stern of the ship and, stunned by fear as she was, she could neither turn her gaze away nor look at Magnus.

Earlier in book five, when Pompey forces Cornelia to seek safety at Lesbos, instead of following him to Pharsalia, the poet utilises a very similar kind of imagery:

*Labitur infelix manibusque excepta suorum/fertur ad aequoreas, ac se prosternit, harenas,/litora que ipsa tenet, tandemque inlata carinae est.—Fida comes Magni vadit duce sola relicto/Pompeiumque fugit.*

LUC. *Phar.* 5.799–801, 5.804–805

The miserable woman sank down and, caught in the arms of her attendants, was carried to the sea-sands. She threw herself down and grabbed the very shore, until at last she was taken on board the ship.—Loyal companion of Magnus, she now goes alone, leaving the general behind and departs from Pompey.

In this second episode, the poet playfully varies the traditional *relicta* imagery: Pompey, instead of Cornelia, is the one left behind, but by the power of his own decree. The one who leaves, in turn, is carried to the ship against her will. The roles are reversed, but the power dynamics remain unaltered: the man is the

one who makes the decision to depart, the woman is the helpless victim of his decision, and the water becomes a barrier between the two. In one of these passages, Cornelia is desperately clinging to the sand of the beach; in the other, she is hanging over the railing of the ship. It would appear that, since words have ultimately failed her, she cannot resist the urge of holding on to her husband—and to the narrative—with her body, as best she can.

The return of the bodily drives is evident in Silius' Imilce too. Like Cornelia, she is separated from her husband against her will, and, like Cornelia, she is carried to the safety of a ship by force:

*dumque ea permixtis inter se fletibus orant,/confisus pelago celsa de puppe  
magister/cunctantem ciet. abripitur divulsa marito./haerent intenti vultus  
et litora servant,/donec, iter liquidum volucris rapiente carina,/consumpsit  
visus pontus, tellusque recessit.*

SIL. *Pun.* 3.152–157

While they talked thus, mixing their tears, the helmsman, feeling confident with the sea, summoned the lingering woman from his high seat on the stern. Torn from her husband, she is dragged away. Her fixed eyes cling to him and watch the shore, until the sea engulfs the sight and the land retreats, as the swift ship flies away on its water-path.

The *relicta* imagery can be particularly well observed in this passage: Imilce is depicted as following the departing ship with her gaze, for as long as she possibly can. *abripitur divulsa marito* clearly indicates that she too is physically torn away from her husband and carried away against her will. She fights back with her body and, when she can no longer do so, she clings on to the departing ship with her gaze. The Lucanian influence is strong in the way in which the unwilling wife is removed from the scene. In the end, the elaborate and carefully constructed speeches of Cornelia and Imilce—which manifest their rhetorical skills and their absorption into the logic of the symbolic order—are of little use. As words fail them and their inevitable marginalisation becomes evident, the *chôra* is re-awakened in these women, and the dramatic elegiac lover takes the place of an exemplary matron of Roman historiography. The semiotic modality of communication is evident in the way the desperate women struggle against their removal, in how they cling onto the narrative that is slowly sliding away, excluding them from its course. From the viewpoint of subjectivity, this uncontrollable bodily outburst makes the situation even worse for them. Earlier, their 'manly' spirit and their servitude to reason and logic made them plausible points of identification and objects of emulation to both the internal

and the external audiences of epic. Now, they are reduced to play the part of the frantic woman, the object and the other.<sup>54</sup>

This outburst of semiotic pressure, and the way in which it marginalises a woman, are nowhere as clear and evident as in *Punica* 6, where the poet depicts one of the most famous incidents of the first Punic War: Marcus Atilius Regulus' self-sacrifice to the Roman cause. According to the story—which already by the late Republic had become a part of the Roman patriotic imagery—Regulus, consul of 267 and 256 BCE, was taken captive in the first Punic War, and sent back to Rome to negotiate a treaty. After urging his countrymen to carry on the war instead, he honoured his oath to the enemy and returned to Carthage where he was tortured and executed. Because of this heroic deed, Regulus became the absolute *exemplum* of Roman *magnanimitas*.<sup>55</sup> In the *Punica*, his story appears in an embedded narrative told by Marus, a veteran of the war and a first-hand witness to the events related. In his story, the hero's wife—also a Marcia—has a prominent role. She makes her entrance when Regulus is about to board a ship that will take him back to Carthage and to a certain death. The wife does not value her husband's noble gesture highly, but harshly scorns him for abandoning his family—here, once again, the poet raises the question whether the individual's first loyalty should be to the family or to the political unit.<sup>56</sup> When Regulus remains unwavering in his decision, as her last bid, Marcia begs to be taken along with him. As both Ahl and Augoustakis have noticed, Marcia's willingness to share her husband's lot strongly recalls that of her Lucanian namesake:<sup>57</sup>

*tollite me, Libyes, comitem poenaeque necisque./hoc unum, coniux, uteri  
per pignora nostri/unum oro: liceat tecum quoscumque ferentem/terrarum  
pelagique pati caelique labores.—adest comes ultima fati.*

SIL. *Pun.* 6.500–502, 6.511

Take me, Carthaginians, to be his companion in punishment and death. This one thing, husband, this one thing alone I ask from you, in the name of the children that my womb bore you: allow me to suffer with you whatever hardships land and sea and sky may bring.—Here is a partner til the very end.

54 Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 154).

55 See, e.g., Hor. *Carm.* 3.5; Gell. *NA* 7.4.

56 Sil. *Pun.* 6.516–518. Augoustakis 2006, 144–168; for further discussion of the conflicted interests of family and state in the *Punica*, see Bernstein 2008.

57 Ahl 1976, 268–271; Augoustakis 2010, 175.

Besides recalling Lucan's Marcia, Silius' Marcia also appears to be a version of Cornelia: she defines herself as her husband's *comes*, just as Cornelia did in her relationship to Pompey. At first sight, her character appears to serve the same end as these Lucanian matrons: the self-sacrificing spirit of a loyal wife—an amalgam of feminine devotion and male courage—stands out in the depressing political situation and complements the husband's virtuous character.

However, there is a distinctive grimness and recklessness about Marcia's spirit of self-sacrifice that distinguishes her from her epic paragons and evokes restlessness and fear in the reader. For while she certainly does not lack devotion, energy or courage, she does lack reason. In fact, Marcia so desperately desires to share her husband's fate that she offers that she *and* their children should go with him. She states that

*accipe mecum/hanc prolem. forsitan duras Carthaginiis iras/flectemus lacrimis, aut, si praecuserit aures/urbs inimica suas, eadem tunc hora manebit/teque tuosque simul—.*

SIL. *Pun.* 6.506–510

Let me take these children with me. Perhaps we can soften the hard anger of the Carthaginians with our tears—or, if that hostile city turns a deaf ear, then the same hour will await you and your family together.

This offer, in all likelihood, would have sounded abhorrent to Silius' contemporary Roman audience, and it entirely compromises Marcia's reputation as a virtuous Republican matron. The question is no longer whether she deems the family or the state more highly, because it is clear that she is not able to put either before her own personal suffering. By offering to sacrifice her children, Marcia violates the prime directive of epic that demands that the individual be dominated, ruled by, and reduced to the structure of the family or clan.<sup>58</sup> The elegiac and the tragic elements overrule epic in Marcia's breakdown—the semiotic genotext pierces the narrative and shatters her reputation as an ideal matron absorbed into the logic of the temporal order. In an instant, she becomes the other to both the internal and the external audiences.

It is however worth noting that Marcia's otherness had been brewing long before this eventual outburst. Compared to the other virtuous wives of Roman war epic, there are considerably more threatening and disquieting elements about her, and on a closer reading it turns out that the bodily drives, in fact,

58 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 90–92.

seem to have driven her from the very beginning. When she finds out that Regulus is preparing to leave, she is described as *trepida*, and the narrator states that “she let out a terrible howl and hurried to the shore” (*tremendum/vociferans, celerem gressum referebat ad undas*).<sup>59</sup> It is difficult not to recall Virgil’s maenadic matrons, who in *Aeneid* 7 rushed through the city ululating and stirring up frenzy. Marcia’s conduct is, in fact, all about her overwhelming personal suffering, which finds an outlet in non-verbal, bodily communication. It is no wonder, therefore, that her speech does not succeed in convincing: much like the speeches of Statius’ Thetis, examined in chapter two, it is merely an imitation of symbolic communication, an attempt to disguise pain as logic.

Studied against this background, it is not in the least surprising that the way in which Marcia is removed from Silius’ narrative also strongly parallels the fate of Lucan’s Cornelia—and exceeds it in dramatic effect:

*has inter voces vinclis resoluta moveri/paulatim et ripa coepit decedere puppis./tum vero infelix, mentem furiata dolore,/exclamat, fessas tendens ad litora palmas:/en, qui se iactat Libyae populisque nefandis/atque hosti servare fidem! data foedera nobis/ac promissa fides thalamis ubi, perfide, nunc est?/ultima vox duras haec tunc penetravit ad aures;/cetera percussi vetuerunt noscere remi.*

SIL. *Pun.* 6.512–520

While she spoke, the ship was set free from the ropes and began to move little by little and depart from the shore. Then indeed the miserable wife, her mind frenzied with agony, stretched out her feeble hands towards the shore and screamed: “Look! He who boasts of keeping faith with the infamous people of Libya and with the enemy! Where is now the pact made with *me*, and the loyalty you vowed to me at our wedding, you traitor?” This, then, was the last utterance that reached the stern ear of Regulus; the thrusting of the oars prevented him from hearing the rest.

Marcia is described as *mentem furiata dolore*, “her mind frenzied with agony”. *Furor*, as noted earlier, is one of the clearest signs of the breakdown of logic and reason in an epic narrative. It is a sign of semiotic pressure penetrating the logic of the symbolic order—here, this is made explicit when Marcia’s suffering is depicted as deranging her *mind* with *furor*. Even when she attempts to insert logic into her conduct through speech, it is made clear that she is completely

59 Sil. *Pun.* 6.498–499.

driven by emotion. Marcia refers to herself as *infelix* and to her husband as *perfidus*: these elements clearly strengthen the elegiac overtones of the episode and underline the fact that hurt feelings are its driving force. What is more, the choice of words strongly recalls Virgil's Dido, the *infelix* epic woman *par excellence*. And, as the Roman reader would know, a reference to Dido always evokes fear and uncertainty about what the frantic woman might be capable of.

Perhaps it is because Marcia turns out to be only feigning the role of a manly matron that her subsequent marginalisation is more complete and more explicit than that of most epic women. After this passage, Marcia never appears again in Silius' epic. Moreover, the poet fully exploits the *relicta* topos when he depicts water, a natural barrier between the husband and the wife, gradually getting larger and larger as Marcia stands on the shore screaming. Little by little, she is faded out of the narrative, and eventually even her voice—the most crucial element constructing focalisation and subjectivity in epic—is taken away from her. As Marcia's words—the only sign of the symbolic order that remains about her—are drowned by the splashing of the oars, she vanishes and ceases to exist in the epic. In the whole of Roman war epic, there is no other episode that would so powerfully allegorise the silencing of the female voice by the unstoppable drive of war.

Marcia's marginalisation in Silius' epic is violent, and her otherness stands out clearly, but I am tempted to suggest that in this case, too, the complementary virtues and weaknesses of the husband and the wife are crucial to the story. As I have observed, Marcia's textual otherness is based on her inability to fully identify with the ideology of the epic narrative, dominated by the Law of the Father and the male values of the Republic. She fails to submit herself to the service of a greater unit (whether family or state), and her actions are entirely motivated by her personal emotion. But could it be claimed that this is precisely the weakness that marks her heroic husband, too? Is Regulus' passionate patriotism not really an expression of his hunger for glory and renown? Is his futile self-sacrifice really the best way to serve his country? As I have argued in the case of other epic matrons in this chapter, there is a fine line that distinguishes *castus amor* (pure, dispassionate, selfless devotion that serves the interests of the temporal scene) and the kind of *amor* that is motivated by the primitive bodily drives, and by selfish pleasure, anger or ambition. I would suggest that Regulus' 'heroic' spirit of self-sacrifice that leads to his futile death could, in effect, be viewed as a manifestation of the latter kind—that he, like Marcia, could merely be feigning the symbolic, pretending to be (and believing to be) absorbed into its value system.

Regulus however gets off scot-free, since his wife so grandiosely trumps him in the manifestation of these drives. Her femininity makes her a more

likely representative of the *chôra* than a political citizen male could ever be—but it would appear that the dichotomy between female/semiotic/body and male/symbolic/reason is not as clear-cut as it might seem at first sight. This episode, like the others discussed earlier in this chapter, shows how the moral and the psychological qualities of the husband and the wife clearly complement each other in the tradition of Roman war epic. Regulus and Marcia, Cato and Marcia, Pompey and Cornelia, and even Hannibal and Imilce all appear as halves of a whole—the *exemplum* that each of them delivers can be understood only in terms of his or her partner. While the impossibility of epic women's completely entering and being accepted in the temporal scene is made clear by their marginalisation, the gender complementarity in the depictions of these couples also implies that the semiotic and the symbolic modalities are anything but polar opposites: rather, it is the patriarchal power structures that define one modality as the domain of women, and the other as 'masculine'.

## Means of Production or Weapons of Destruction? Gender and Violence in Roman War Epic

As the previous chapters have shown, the relationship between heroism, justice and violence is a constant topic of interest—and a cause of trouble—to the Roman epic poets. Roman epic is a moralistic genre, and the criticism of uncontrollable *furor* and reckless destruction is constantly present in the tradition from Virgil to the Flavians.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, violence is indisputably an integral part of the epic narrative; as Masterson points out, it emerges as “a glorious and seemingly irresistible telos” in epic poetry.<sup>2</sup> When regulated by reason, violence both manifests and strengthens the *virtus* of a warrior.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, *virtus*—aggressive, masculine, warlike courage—is also a virtue that can come dangerously close to *furor*.<sup>4</sup> The warrior’s failure to control his bloodlust may lead to excessive use of violence or to violence inflicted in ways that are not socially regulated—in such a case, violence changes from a glorious matter into something that undermines the warrior’s heroism.<sup>5</sup> In short, there is no epic heroism without violence, but violence alone does not a hero make. It is reason and restraint—a control of the mind over impulse—that distinguishes a man from a beast, and a true hero from a fallen one.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, the problematic relationship between violence, manliness and heroism forms the background against which I examine the relationship

1 See e.g. Gill 1997; Fantham 1997; Hershkowitz 1998 (on war epic, esp. 68–124 and 197–300); Ganiban 2007, 1–24, 207–232.

2 Masterson 2005, 300.

3 See e.g. McDonnell 2006, 44–49, 59–71, 242–247.

4 The inherent connection between *virtus*, *furor*, *crudelitas* and *feritas* is discussed in detail in Alston & Spentzou 2011, 44–55; Masterson 2005, 298–307; Ripoll 1998, 327–332. For further discussion of the danger that warlike heroism posed to social and political harmony in the Roman Republic, see McDonnell 2006, 195–206.

5 The best example of this kind of situation is the episode in *Thebaid* 8 where Tydeus brutally devours Melanippus’ brain. The act repulses Tydeus’ protective goddess Minerva, who revokes her decision to reward the hero with immortality. The episode discerningly depicts the downfall of Tydeus’ martial heroism—his characteristic feature that has been built up from the beginning of the epic. Stat. *Theb.* 8.751–766.

6 On the definition and transgression of the categories of beast/man/hero/god in Roman epic, see Heslin 2005, 157–192.

between gender and violence—a matter that is, if possible, even more complicated. Feminist studies of ancient literature have often argued that the discomfort caused by the connection between women and violence is one of the defining elements of patriarchal culture.<sup>7</sup> The anxiety that violent women evoke is rooted in the binary opposition of genders, especially in matters of birth and death—patriarchy is largely based on the idea of two genders, one that gives birth and the other one that kills.<sup>8</sup> The male body is a weapon of destruction, whereas the female body is a means of production. When these roles get mixed up or are challenged, it arouses culturally deep-rooted fear and restlessness that can be observed in many foundational myths of the Western civilisation. The most obvious examples are the stories of infanticidal mothers like Medea and Procne, whose maternal life-giving power is turned into a life-taking destructive power. In these mythical building blocks of the symbolic order, the violent woman appears as the Absolute Other: irrational, emotion-driven and destructive for the temporal scene.

This pattern of thought does not apply to mythological tales alone, but can be observed in almost all the Greek and Roman literary genres, from drama to epic and to lyric poetry.<sup>9</sup> It is particularly strong in Roman historiography, where the attitudes towards the combination of women and violence are usually simultaneously condemning and fetishising. One of the authors who consistently express their reprehension of the phenomenon, yet obsessively talk about it, is Tacitus. In the *Annales*, he harshly scorns Agrippina the younger for her assumed military interests.<sup>10</sup> Besides Agrippina, a certain Triaria, wife of Lucius Vitellius, gets her share of the blame.<sup>11</sup> Tacitus calls her *ultra feminam ferox*,<sup>12</sup> and relates that in 69 CE,

7 For discussion, see e.g. O’Gorman 2006 (*passim*).

8 The symbolic significance of these two events, and the hierarchy between them, is discussed by Cavarero, who (building on Arendt’s thinking) argues for the patriarchy’s systematic devaluation of birth, for “the ancient matricide”, and for an obsession about death as a basis of its worldview. Cavarero 1995, 6–7.

9 Arrigoni argues that, with some exceptions, there was an irreconcilable incompatibility between women and arms in Roman thinking. Arrigoni 1984, 876–877. For some exceptions, see, e.g., the role of *flaminica* as *sacrificatrix* in a ritual context, as well as the *gladiatrices* (see Tac. *Ann.* 15.32; Suet. *Dom.* 4, 1; Cass. Dio 76.16.1; Petr. 45.7). The most notable exception to the rule is, however, suicide—as Arrigoni notes, committing suicide by sword was an act that often aroused admiration for the manly courage of the woman in question. Arrigoni 1984, 876–877.

10 Tac. *Ann.* 12.37, 14.11; on Agrippina’s abuse of power in general, see 12.7, 13.2.

11 The issue is further discussed in Arrigoni 1984, 874–875.

12 Tac. *Hist.* 2.63.

*Fuere qui uxorem L. Vitellii Triariam incesserent, tamquam gladio militari cincta inter luctum cladisque expugnatae Tarracinae superbe saeveque egisset.*

TAC. *Hist.* 3.77

Some accused Triaria, wife of Lucius Vitellius, with girding on a soldier's sword and behaving haughtily and cruelly in the horrible massacre that followed the capture of Tarracina.<sup>13</sup>

Reflections of Tacitus' rhetoric can be observed in another, more famous example of Roman reprehension of female military leadership. In the early third century, Cassius Dio frowned on the exploits of Fulvia, wife of Mark Antony, at the Perusian war. After mentioning that Fulvia acted as a military commander and occupied Praeneste, Dio adds:

καὶ τὶ ταῦτα θαυμάσειεν ἂν τις, ὅποτε καὶ ξίφος παρεζώννυτο καὶ συνθήματα τοῖς στρατιώταις ἐδίδου, ἐδημηγόρει τε ἐν αὐτοῖς πολλάκις; ὥστε καὶ ἐκεῖνα τῷ Καίσαρι προσίστασθαι.

DIO CASS. 48.10.4–11.1

And why should anyone be surprised at this, when she would gird herself with a sword, give out the watchword to the soldiers, and in many instances harangue them, all of which gave additional offence to Caesar?<sup>14</sup>

Fulvia's prominent role in the Perusian war is reported by Velleius Paterculus, Plutarch, and Appian too.<sup>15</sup> Although Lucius Antonius was consul of the year and the primary leader of the Antonian wing in the conflict, in many of the literary accounts of the episode, Lucius is mentioned only briefly, and the war is described as a conflict started and devised by a bloodthirsty woman.<sup>16</sup> It would

13 Tacitus discusses Triaria's nature and behaviour also in Tac. *Hist.* 2.64. English translation of the *Histories* by J. Jackson, *LCL* 1962.

14 English translation by E. Cary, *LCL* 1917. See also Dio's remarks on Agrippina's military interests: Cass. Dio 61.33.1; 61.3.2–4.

15 See App. *B Cōv.* 4.29 and Vell. Pat. 2.74.

16 Fulvia's bloodthirsty and vengeful nature is stressed further in the Roman authors' depictions of the proscriptions of 42 BCE; Dio, for instance, relates that after Cicero's murder, Fulvia brutally abused the body. Cass. Dio 47.8.4. In the *Philippics*, Cicero accuses Fulvia of cruelty, and claims that she enjoyed watching the executions. Cic. *Phil.* 3.4 (*fortissimos viros optimosque civis iugulari iusserit; quorum ante pedes eius morientium san-*

appear that the culturally deep-rooted resentment of female military leadership made the Roman authors underline and exaggerate Fulvia's participation, in order to construct a negative *exemplum* of subversive female conduct. A point of comparison can be found in Augustan poetry, where Cleopatra's military ambition and activity are often exaggerated, in order to represent the queen as a dangerous enemy to Rome, and the civil war itself as a crisis in foreign politics.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting that, in Roman imperial literature, it is precisely the *military* leadership of a woman that appears to shake the foundations of patriarchal society. It is worth remembering that at least in the private sphere of life, Romans were used to putting up with women's political meddling, and from the late Republic onwards, men of the political elite generally and openly exploited it.<sup>18</sup> However, military leadership appears to have been a different matter—this was where female power was rolled out into the public sphere, and women were immersed into the political affairs as plenipotentiary subjects. This meant that a female military commander signified a complete distortion of the gender hierarchy: besides combining the concepts of women and violence, she combined women and the public use of power.

When we examine Roman war epic in light of this cultural and literary background, it is not surprising that the most common female role is that of a passive, suffering victim (discussed in chapter three), and there are considerably fewer women who take up arms.<sup>19</sup> There are some, however: in Virgil's,

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*guine os uxoris respersum esse constabat*), 5.22 (*domum ad se venire iussit centuriones quos bene sentire de re publica cognoverat eosque ante pedes suos uxorisque suae, quam secum gravis imperator ad exercitum duxerat, iugulari coegit*), 13.18 (*Brundisi in sinu non modo avarissimae sed etiam crudelissimae uxoris delectos Martiae legionis centuriones trucidavit*).

- 17 Verg. *Aen.* 8.685–713; Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.6–10, 12–17; Prop. 3.11.39–43, 57–58, 49–51. Compare with Dio 50.6; Suet. *Aug.* 17. The matter is discussed further in Hughes-Hallett 1990, 36–68; Pelling 2001, 292–293; De Bruyn & Delcourt 2003, 372–375. In *Aen.* 8.696, Virgil depicts Cleopatra at the battle of Actium, rallying her fleet. As Smith points out, Servius, in his commentary on the *Aeneid*, refers to this episode when he writes that *et Augustus in commemoratione uitae suae refert Antonium iussisse ut legiones suae apud Cleopatram excubarent eiusque nutu et iussu parerent* (Ser. *Aen.* 8.696). This is an interesting notion, since it conveys the idea that Cleopatra's reputation not only as war-monger, but also as military leader, might have been an established part of the literary discourse during the Principate. For further analysis, see Smith 2009, 10; Powell 2009, 182.
- 18 Hemelrijk 1987, 225. For more detailed discussion of the topic, see especially Hallett 2006, Hallett 2015.
- 19 See O'Gorman 2006, 190–192.

Stattius' and Silius Italicus' epics, one can find examples of violent women whose actions are crucial to the narrative. Undoubtedly, many of these women serve as negative *exempla* that manifest the destructive results of transgressing the 'natural' (that is, socially regulated) female role. Nevertheless, the modern reader might also be tempted to read their stories as rebellious acts of desperation: by turning their 'stolen' weapons either against themselves or against others, these women turn them against the marginalising practices of society and culture. In this chapter, I reread these episodes with Kristevan subjectivity theory in mind, and discuss whether the violent women of war epic should be considered as textbook examples of the feminised abject driven by the impulses of the *chôra*<sup>20</sup>—and if not, in what other way one might understand and interpret the significance of the phenomenon in the genre.

## 1 Manly Men versus Effeminate Others: Armed Violence in the Construction of *Romanitas*

In a genre as full of violence as Roman war-centred epic, it is not surprising that the idea of the male body as a weapon of destruction strongly defines the concepts of heroism and masculinity. This can be most clearly observed in the many episodes where men's inclination and enthusiasm towards war are emphasised and naturalised. One of the best examples can be found in Stattius' *Achilleid*. In book one, Odysseus and his men stop at Scyros on their way to the Trojan war, with an ulterior agenda of finding Achilles and persuading him to join them. At the banquet, young Achilles (disguised as a girl) accidentally reveals his 'true sex' when he cannot help getting excited at the talk of the war. In the king's daughters, instead, the discussion evokes fear, and they are more interested in the ritual properties and ornaments for cult practice that Odysseus has brought as gifts. "Their timid sex and nature guide them" (*sexus iners naturaue ducit*), the narrator states as a natural explanation of the matter.<sup>21</sup> This episode marks a dramatic turning point in the epic: suddenly, the narrative forsakes the performative idea of gender and reveals its underlying essential-

20 See e.g. Keith 2000, 97; Augoustakis 2010, 49.

21 When they all are given an opportunity to choose from the gifts brought by the guests, Achilles is depicted as immediately going for the weapons that the princesses neglect. Finally, his unprompted excitement at the sound of a war trumpet reveals his 'real' sex. Stat. *Achil.* 1.794–796, 1.848–857, 1.874–884. See Barchiesi's perceptive analysis of this episode, in his study of the complex gender dynamics in the *Achilleid*. Barchiesi 2005, 62–66.

ism. Moreover, the passage explicitly demonstrates how, in Roman war epic, the naturalised sexual differences are often expressed in terms of armed violence. Achilles has an ‘inner calling’ to arms that his year-long performance in a female role cannot quell. As soon as he encounters a male role model worthy of imitating—the identifiable Other—he eagerly calls for arms and burns for heroic deeds.<sup>22</sup>

The idea that men’s passion for armed violence is both innate *and* to be encouraged with an appropriate education can be observed in all the other Roman war epics too. What is extremely interesting is the conflation of ‘the categories of otherness’—gender and ethnicity—in this matter. On one hand, Roman war epic consistently promotes the idea that bellicosity is something innate and essential to the male sex in general. On the other, it would appear that ethnic or cultural otherness—that is, being ‘barbaric’ or non-Roman—might in some cases weaken this natural, intrinsic drive. In other words, ethnic or cultural otherness makes one more vulnerable to gendered otherness as well, and the ‘barbarians’ often appear to have more of a woman about them. There is nothing essentially new about this observation; as many studies have demonstrated, in all genres of Roman literature, gendered and ethnic otherness often find their most powerful articulations through one another.<sup>23</sup> In Roman war epic, this pattern is repetitive and easy to point out: the works of Virgil, Lucan, Statius, Silius Italicus and Valerius Flaccus are all rich in episodes where the idea of female nature as averse to war is exploited in order to construct the hero’s or the reader’s masculine identity in contrast to the effeminate foreigners.

One of the most famous episodes where this kind of agenda can be perceived is in book nine of the *Aeneid* where the Latin warrior Numanus scorns the Trojans:

*omne aevum ferro teritur, versaque iuencum/terga fatigamus hasta, nec tarda senectus/debilitat viris animi mutatque vigorem:/canitiam galea premimus, semperque recentis/comportare iuvat praedas et vivere raptō./vobis picta croco et fulgenti murice vestis,/desidiaē cordi, iuvat indulgere choreis,/ et tunicae manicas et habent redimicula mitrae./o vere Phrygiae, neque enim Phryges, ite per alta/Dindyma, ubi adsuetis biforem dat tibia can-*

22 Here, I agree with Heslin’s reading: he identifies the underlying reason for Achilles’ identity issues in the epic as his lack of a paternal metaphor, Name-of-the-Father, and that these issues are finally resolved at Odysseus’ arrival. Heslin 2005, 286–294.

23 See, e.g., Syed 2005, esp. 143–162, 194–219; Keith 2009, esp. 18–20; Augoustakis 2008; Augoustakis 2010, esp. 196–237; Gruen 2011; Mattingly 2011.

*tum./tympana vos buxusque vocat Berecynthia Matris/Idaeae; sinite arma  
viris et cedite ferro.*

VERG. *Aen.* 9.609–620

All our life is worn away with sword's work; we provoke our youths with the back end of the spear, and sluggish old age does not weaken the strength of our minds or change our vigour. We press the helmet on our white hair, and we are always happy to collect new spoils and to live on plunder. But your clothes are of embellished saffron and shiny purple; idleness is close to your hearts, and you rejoice to indulge in dancing. And your tunics have long sleeves and your turbans ribbons. Phrygian women, indeed!—for you are no Phrygian *men*—go to the heights of Dindymus, where the double-pipe offers music to your accustomed ears. The tambourines are calling you, and the Berecynthian boxwood of the Mother of Mount Ida: leave arms to men, and give up the sword.

The episode plays with the comparative categories of otherness, associating effeminate feebleness firmly with the Orient.<sup>24</sup> Echoes of a similar way of thinking are evident in book twelve, where Turnus wishes to

*—sternere corpus/loricamque manu valida lacerare revulsam/semiviri  
Phrygis et foedare in pulvere crinis/vibratos calido ferro murraque maden-  
tis.*

VERG. *Aen.* 12.97–100

—strike down and prostrate the body of the Phrygian half-man, and with a strong hand tear off his breastplate, and defile in dust his hair, curled with hot iron and dripping with myrrh.<sup>25</sup>

It is particularly noteworthy that in these episodes, sexist and orientalist prejudice is targeted against Aeneas and his Trojan warriors, whereas the Italians consider themselves the true representatives of manly bellicosity.<sup>26</sup> Much as in

24 Keith 2000, 18–22. The passage reflects the idea, expressed, e.g., by Polybios, that war upholds the *virtus* of the people, whereas long periods of peace might weaken and emasculate them. Polyb. 32.13.2.

25 For a comparison, see also Verg. *Aen.* 4.215–217, where the Nubian king Iarbas characterises Aeneas as *ille Paris cum semiviro comitatu/Maeonia mentum mitra crinemque madentem subnexus*.

26 Syed and Evans have examined Aeneas' Trojan-ness as a complication and a hindrance to the formation of the future *Romanitas*. Evans 2003, 52–59; Syed 2005, 194–199.

the episode depicting the Laurentian matrons' patriotism (discussed in chapter three), replacing Aeneas' viewpoint with that of his enemies helps the poet to communicate his idea about *Romanitas* as a unity born from diversity. When the hero of the epic becomes 'the effeminate other' and his adversaries are represented as the mouthpieces of 'Roman' values, Virgil emphasises the nature of the Latin war as a conflict between people who *all* consider themselves to be the subjects of the story. Hence, the culturally deep-rooted idea about warlike masculinity as a matter that equals subjectivity comes to the poet's help in his construction of Roman identity.

This rhetoric is equally strong in Silius Italicus' *Punica*—however, its ideological use clearly differs from Virgil's way of dealing with the theme. In order to emphasise the difference between the Romans and their enemies, Silius goes for the oldest trick in the book, describing the latter as unwarlike and womanish. In the episode concerning the siege of Leontini in Sicily, Silius exploits the idea of female nature as averse to war in order to underline the insurmountable power of Marcellus and his troops:

*instabat ductor, cui tarde vincere Graias/par erat ac vinci turmas. ruit  
aequore toto/(femineum credas maribus concurrere vulgum)/et Cereri placitos  
fecundat sanguine campos.*

SIL. *Pun.* 14.127–130

The general pressed on: to him, being slow to conquer the Greek troops was equivalent to a defeat. He stormed all over the plain (it was like an encounter between women and men) and fertilised with blood the fields that are dear to Ceres.

In this passage, the feminine lack of strength and courage is utilised to underscore the effeminate weakness of the Greeks, in relation to Roman, masculine, military prowess. This, of course, is a recurrent topos in other genres of Roman literature too—ever since the 'cultural wars' of the mid-second century BCE, it became a crucial part of Roman cultural identity.<sup>27</sup> The drawing of a line between male and female, Roman and foreign, and warlike and feeble behaviour appears stern and inflexible. The difference from Virgil's way of dealing with the topic is clear: Silius already has a clearly defined idea of 'Roman' with

27 Mustakallio & Pyy 2015: 159–161. For further examples, see, e.g., Sil. *Pun.* 15.761–764. This episode is parallel to the one in the *Thebaid*, where Ismenos is scorned for his inexperience in war and blamed for being familiar only with 'womanly blood-letting' at the Bacchanalia. Stat. *Theb.* 9.576–580.

which to compare foreign effeminacy—Virgil’s reader, on the other hand, is witnessing its coming into being. Where Silius utilises the stereotype of alien effeminacy to stress the difference between two ethnic groups, Virgil utilises it to blur it.

The particularly interesting element in the use of this topos in the *Punica* is that the poet consistently avoids using it against Rome’s greatest enemy, Carthage. The Carthaginians’ reputation as a hard and warlike people is typical of Roman literary tradition in general, and in a sense, it does have a narrative purpose: the more dangerous the enemy, the more heroic the victory. Conquering an army that is famous for its manliness and bellicosity obviously means that Romans are even more manly. As I have noted above, Hannibal, in particular, is the ambiguous anti-hero of Silius’ epic, and the unquestionable protagonist of many of the books in the *Punica*. He is a tireless super-warrior, completely in control of his body and completely deaf to its needs—as such, he embodies many of the characteristically Roman ideals regarding masculinity. Despite that, his ‘barbaric’ otherness is constantly present in his character and weakens the moral stance of his heroism. The same, in fact, could be said about the entire Carthaginian army. They are cruel and treacherous, as barbarians are wont, but unlike the Greeks, they are not effeminate or weak.

That is, not until they come into contact with the Greek luxuries of Capua, a city that famously deserted Rome and allied itself with Carthage. In book eleven of the *Punica*, Hannibal’s army winters in Capua and falls victim to the enfeebling pleasures of music, wine and easy living, which decay the soldiers’ warlike spirit.<sup>28</sup> This proves a turning point in the war and in the narrative—after the winter, they are never again the same, since their *virtus* has been routed by pleasure and they inevitably lose the upper hand in war. The narrator relates that the warriors’ hearts are enfeebled by luxury, and that they are now unable to conquer even the Greek cities of Neapolis, Cumae, and Puteoli:<sup>29</sup>

*Sed non ille vigor, qui ruptis Alpibus arma/intulerat dederatque vias Trebi-  
aque potitus/Maeonios Italo sceleravit sanguine fluctus,/tunc inerat: molli  
luxu madefacta meroque,/illecebris somni torpentia membra fluebant./quis  
gelidas suetum noctes thorace gravatis/sub Iove non aequo trahere et ten-  
toria saepe/spernere, ubi hiberna ruerent cum grandine nimbi,/ac ne nocte  
quidem clipeive ensesve reposti,/non pharetrae aut iacula, et pro membris*

28 Sil. *Pun.* 11.269–492.

29 Sil. *Pun.* 12.41–44, 12.68–70, 12.83–84.

*arma fuere:/tum grave cassis onus maioraque pondera visa/parmarum, ac nullis fusae stridoribus hastae.*

SIL. *Pun.* 12.15–26

But that vigour, which had burst through the Alps, clearing a path and bringing war, and which, after capturing Trebia had defiled the Etruscan waves with Italian blood, was gone. Their limbs were soaked in wine and luxury, numbed by the enticements of sleep. They had been accustomed to spend freezing nights under a stormy sky, weighed down by their breastplates, and had often despised tents when the rain was pouring down with hailstorms of winter. And even at night, they had not put down their shields and swords, nor quivers and lances, but their weapons were parts of their bodies. But now the helmet was a heavy burden, and the shield seemed like a heavier still, and their hurled spears made no whishing sound.

Notably, the decay of Hannibal's army is depicted in extremely physical, bodily terms: after being exposed to too many pleasures, the soldiers are no longer able to turn a deaf ear to their bodies' demands—they can no longer suppress the bodily drives as a man should. Before Capua, their bodies had been inseparable from their weapons, constituting an almost non-organic, mechanic and unstoppable killing machine. So completely had the bodily drives been negated that the very 'nature' had escaped the warrior's bodies, making them perfect servants of the temporal scene and the political organism. During the winter in Capua, a quasi-Ovidian transformation takes place, as the Carthaginians become aware of the nature in them: they hear the call of the body and remember that it has needs of its own, not only the needs of the *patria*. This awakening of the *chôra*, unsurprisingly, is represented as the direct reason for the weakening of their manliness. The juxtaposition between civilisation and nature therefore appears stern and inflexible, and it is aligned with the juxtaposition between the male and the female. Because of the patriotic ideology of the poem that prioritises community and system over an individual, that which is extremely natural is depicted as a failure of masculinity.

It is, however, interesting that in this episode, gender and ethnicity as categories of otherness do not self-evidently reflect or complement each other. The routing of the Carthaginians' manly spirit is not exactly their own fault, nor is it something to which they, as barbarians and as enemies of Rome, would be particularly prone. Instead—as is so often the case in epic—the dramatic change that takes place in them is a result of divine intervention. In this case,

it is Venus, the Romans' great ancestress, who meddles with the situation. The narrator relates that she could not resist the opportunity to destroy the discipline of the Carthaginians by "the weapon of pleasure", and to tame their hearts by luxury.<sup>30</sup> As she instructs her cupids for the task, she states:

*amplexu multoque mero somnoque virorum/profliganda acies, quam non  
perfregerit ensis,/non ignes, non immissis Gradivus habenis./combibat il-  
lapsos ductor per viscera luxus,/nec pudeat picto fultum iacuisse cubili,/nec  
crinem Assyrio perfundere pugnet amomo./ille, sub hiberno somnos edu-  
cere caelo/iactator, tectis malit consumere noctes;/ac ponat ritus vescendi  
saepe citato/dum residet sub casside equo, discatque Lyaeo/imbellem don-  
are diem. tum deinde madenti/post epulas sit grata chelys, segnisque sopo-  
ras/aut nostro vigiles ducat sub numine noctes.*

SIL. *Pun.* 11.397–409

With an embrace, along with much wine and sleep, you must rout the battlelines of men that sword could not break, nor fire, nor Mars himself unbridled. May the general drink in the luxury; may it slip through his innermost parts. And may he not be embarrassed to recline on an embellished couch, nor object to bathe his hair in the fragrant balm of Assyria. He used to boast of sleeping under the winter sky; let him prefer to spend his nights under a roof. He had a habit of often eating on the horseback, at full speed and with his helmet on; let him learn to dedicate the warless day to Bacchus. And then, when he is overflowing with wine, may he enjoy the lyre after the feast, and may he either spend his nights in lazy sleep or else stay up in my service.

The Virgilian overtones in the passage are obvious and explicit: *crinem Assyrio perfundere pugnet amomo* is a reference to Aeneas' *crinis/vibratos calido ferro murraque madentis*—the luxuries of the Orient are thus set up as an antithesis to warlike masculinity. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the immediate effect of Venus' intervention strongly resembles the impact of Allecto's attack on both Amata and Turnus in *Aeneid* 7. We read that

*sentit flammiferas pubes Maurusia pennas,/et pariter fuis tepuerunt pec-  
tora telis./Bacchi dona volunt epulasque et carmina rursus/Pieria liquefacta*

30 *Nec Venerem interea fugit exoptabile tempus/Poenorum mentes caeco per laeta premendi/  
exitio et luxu corda importuna domandi.* Sil. *Pun.* 11.385–387.

*lyra. non acer aperto/desudat campo sonipes, non ulla per auras/lancea nudatos exercet torta lacertos./mollitae flammis lymphae languentia somno/membra foveant, miserisque bonis perit horrida virtus./ipse etiam, afflatus fallente Cupidine, ductor/instaurat mensas dapibus repetitque volentum/hospitia et patrias paulatim decolor artes/exiit, occulta mentem vitiantem sagitta.*

SIL. *Pun.* 11.412–423

The Mauri could hear the downy, fire-bringing wings and, hit by the shower of darts, their hearts grew warm with desire. They want gifts of Bacchus, and food, and again, songs that melt on the Pierian lyre. No keen horse works up a sweat on the open plain; no lance, hurled through the air, keeps the bare arm busy. They bathe their limbs, softened by sleep, in water heated over the fire; and their rough manliness is stolen away by the blights of luxury. Even the general himself, inspired by deceitful Cupid, again and again starts afresh with the festal boards and time and again indulges in the hospitality of his willing hosts. And, little by little, he becomes depraved and shakes off the ways of his homeland; for his mind is tainted by a secret arrow.

Following the Virgilian model, Silius describes the divine intervention as an extremely physical experience: Hannibal is ‘drinking in’ the luxury, and his soldiers’ hearts are ‘struck’ and ‘melted’ by a shower of arrows. Later on, Hannibal is depicted as *afflatus fallente Cupidine*, and his mind is referred to as ‘poisoned’. Much as in Amata’s case, the body is invaded by something that comes from outside, without the victim even realising what is happening. In chapter two, I discussed whether Amata’s womanhood made her a particularly vulnerable victim to this kind of intervention, where the body works as a porthole to the mind. Here, one could ask the same question, considering the ethnic and cultural otherness of Hannibal’s army: are the Carthaginians, as barbarian others, a fertile ground for the invasion of the semiotic drives?

Intriguingly, the passages quoted above seem almost explicitly to imply that they are not. On the contrary, Hannibal’s troops are described as an army that neither sword nor fire could break (*acies, quam non perfrerit ensis, / non ignes*), and he himself is depicted as discarding the virtues of his race (*patrias paulatim decolor artes/exiit*). This creates a strong impression of an army whose excellence in belligerent masculinity actually *derives* from the ways and habits of their country, and who are peerless in this respect. It is in fact precisely the Carthaginians’ efficiency at silencing their bodies and their excellence at turning them into weapons of destruction that worries Venus and forces her to

intervene in the first place. All in all, it would seem that the only weakness of which Hannibal and his warriors are guilty is that they are, after all, human and therefore not immune to the call of the body. Thus, the episode in fact appears to blur the line that distinguishes Romans from others in terms of manly bellicosity. 'Masculine' control over one's body is not, it seems, the prerogative of the Roman people, nor is the loss of control something from which they could count on being safe. The gods' ways are mysterious, and it is implied that what happened to Hannibal could in principle happen to Romans as well.

This message is strengthened further when the narrator describes the *real* weak and effeminate slugs of the epic, the Capuans themselves. They apparently—being of Greek descent—have no need for divine interference in order to fall victims to their bodily drives: they have managed this all on their own, with too much money and too many pleasures around. We read that

*luxus et insanis nutrita ignavia lustris/consumptusque pudor paccando  
unisque relictus/divitiis probrosus honor lacerabat hiantem/desidia popu-  
lum ac resolutam legibus urbem./insuper exitio truculenta superbia  
agebat./nec vitiis deerant vires: non largior ulli/Ausoniae populo (sic tum  
Fortuna fovebat)/aurique argentique modus; madefacta veneno/Assyrio  
maribus vestis medioque dierum/regales epulae atque ortu convivia solis/  
depressa et nulla macula non illita vita./tum populo saevi patres, plebesque  
senatus/invidia laeta, et collidens dissona corda/seditio. sed enim interea  
temeraria pubis/delicta augebat, pollutior ipsa, senectus./nec, quos vile ge-  
nus despectaque lucis origo/foedabat, sperare sibi et deposcere primi/deer-  
ant imperia ac patriae pereuntis habenas.*

SIL. *Pun.* 11.33–50

Luxury and idleness, fuelled by senseless debauchery, and the lack of shame in vices, and disgraceful esteem for riches alone—those tore at the sluggish and languid people and the city that was let loose from laws. Furthermore, their savage arrogance took them to their ruin. Nor did they lack the means to practice their vices. No other people in Italy possessed a greater amount of gold and silver—so much did Fortune favour the Capuans then. Even men's clothes were dyed with Assyrian purple; their regal banquets began in the middle of the day, and when the sun rose, it found them revelling still; their life was tarnished by every stain. At the time, the senators oppressed the people, the plebs rejoiced in the unpopularity of the senate, and the minds were clashing in discord. But meanwhile, the old men outdid the reckless failings of the youngsters, since they themselves were more depraved. Those who were made foul by their worthless

family line and obscure origin made claims, hoping and demanding to be the first to hold office, and to hold the reins of their perishing country.

This sort of rhetoric is familiar to the reader from Roman historiography, where the influx of wealth from the eastern provinces and the decaying effect of oriental luxuries appeared as causes of concern as early as in the Republican period.<sup>31</sup> All things considered—the wealth, the luxury, the political discord—it is difficult *not* to read this passage as a disguised depiction of the struggling Roman Republic.<sup>32</sup> The vocabulary that is used to describe Capua's decay supports this reading: the city is referred to as *urbs* and as *patria*, both words that most likely would evoke an immediate idea of Rome in the mind of the Roman reader.

Carthaginians, therefore, seem a curious exception in the *Punica*—an epic that otherwise is very predictable in its construction of Roman-ness in contrast to the effeminate others. They are strong, manly and warlike *because* of their ethnic and cultural background, not despite it, and the ultimate decay of their virtue is a result of divine intervention, not a sign of their innate 'barbaric' weakness. The Capua episode strengthens this impression, since it hints at the future decay of the Romans themselves: ironically, Rome's victory at the Punic Wars would make them the masters of the Mediterranean, drown them in luxury and open the door to the future decay of their manly spirit. Therefore, while the *Punica* clearly maintains the juxtaposition between the effeminate slavery to the body and masculine control over it, *ethnic* otherness does not seem to play any considerable role in this equation.<sup>33</sup> In the moral universe of Silius' epic, the most important duty of any man—Roman or other—is to fight against the bodily drives, to suppress them completely and to dedicate himself to the service of the temporal scene. Nevertheless, it is also implied that this struggle does not come naturally, and that the battle against the body can easily be lost. The bodily drives clearly reside in the male subject of epic too, and they can be constantly felt as a looming threat and as a pressure on the heroic drive of the narrative.

31 See Liv. *praef.* 11, 34.2.1–2. For discussion of Sallust's potential influence on Livy in this matter, see Woodman 1988, 128–135 and Levene 2007, 183–186. The same phenomenon can be observed in Republican poetry as well; see Cat. 64.397–408; Lucr. 3.1057–1067.

32 Pyy & van der Keur 2019, 262–267.

33 This message is reinforced in book fifteen, where Virtus and Voluptas are fighting over Scipio's soul: it is implied that *any* great city might be easily struck down, if the pleasures of the flesh are allowed to penetrate the mind. Sil. *Pun.* 15.92–97.

## 2 Women in Arms: The Absolute Other?

Whereas Virgil and Silius discuss the theme of gender and violence by representing effeminacy and aversion to war as signs of weakness in men, Lucan approaches the topic from a different perspective, discussing women in arms—more specifically, female military leadership. His representation of Cleopatra in book ten of the *Pharsalia* clearly depicts the queen as the cause and the reason for the Roman civil war and, more importantly, hints at Cleopatra's role as military leader at Actium. According to Lucan, the battle was a question of “whether the world should be ruled by a woman who was not even one of ours” (*Leucadioque fuit dubius sub gurgite casus, / An mundum ne nostra quidem matrona teneret*).<sup>34</sup> This episode was most likely inspired by Virgil's depiction of Actium on Aeneas' shield in *Aeneid* 8, an embedded narrative where Cleopatra is not only a warmonger but also a military leader: he writes that “the queen in the middle summons her troops with her native rattle” (*regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro*).<sup>35</sup>

Notably, in both passages—Virgil's and Lucan's—Cleopatra's role as a military leader is connected to her ethnic and cultural otherness. In Virgil's case, Cleopatra is rattling the sistrum, the sign of her Egyptian-ness, and evoking “all kinds of monstrous gods” (*omnigenumque deum monstra*) to attack the civilised Olympic order.<sup>36</sup> In Lucan's version, she is explicitly called *ne nostra quidem matrona*: “a woman, not one of our own”. These carefully chosen words are enough to mark the whole concept of female leadership as alien to Roman society and culture. As Keith points out, Lucan makes it clear that Cleopatra's political and military activity poses a threat to the culturally validated protocols of sexual and military decorum in Rome.<sup>37</sup>

This matter is emphasised further less than thirty lines later, where Cleopatra begs for Caesar's support in her pursuit of the crown. “I shall not be the first woman to reign over the Nile”, she declares, “with no distinction of gender, Egypt is accustomed to having a queen” (*Non urbes prima tenebo / Femina Niliacas: nullo discrimine sexus / Reginam scit ferre Pharos*).<sup>38</sup> What Cleopatra con-

34 Luc. *Phar.* 10.66–67.

35 Verg. *Aen.* 8.696.

36 Verg. *Aen.* 8.698–700.

37 Keith 2000, 89.

38 Luc. *Phar.* 10.90–92. Compare Tacitus' remark on Boudicca and the Britons in the *Agricola*: *neque enim sexum in imperiis discernunt*—. Tac. *Agr.* 16. Compare also Tac. *Germ.* 46, where the poet states of Fenni that *idemque venatus viros pariter ac feminas alit; passim enim comitantur partemque praedae petunt*.

siders to be her asset and her pride, the narrator portrays as exotic and strange, a sign of accentuated otherness.<sup>39</sup> Admittedly, this passage does not explicitly state that military leadership forms part of the queen's duties; nevertheless, when read in comparison with the Actium episode, it seems quite clear that *nullo discrimine sexus* refers to all the duties of the monarch, including warfare. Moreover, to Lucan's contemporary Roman reader, these passages would probably bring to mind many other Hellenistic queens, famous for their military exploits. In the Roman historiographic tradition, queens active in warfare, such as Olympias, Arsinoë II, Cleopatra Thea and Cleopatra III, often appear as textbook examples of the Absolute Other—an Oriental female monarch, drunk with power and unable to control her animalistic drives of sex and death.<sup>40</sup> Arguably, this is the literary tradition with which the reader is invited to align Cleopatra, when the queen describes female leadership as something characteristic of her people.<sup>41</sup>

Lucan's way of discussing Cleopatra's military leadership reflects literary traditions of Roman historiographic writing, where the willingness to submit to female rule is used to emphasise the moral inferiority of barbaric peoples.<sup>42</sup> In his account of the Boudiccan revolt, Tacitus relates that "with Boudicca as their leader, a woman of royal descent (for they make no distinction of sex in the succession of power), they all rose to pursue war", and adds that "in their anger and their victory, they did not omit any form of barbaric cruelty".<sup>43</sup> The

39 Keith 2000, 89. For a thorough analysis of Lucan's use of Egypt in his epic, see Manolaraki 2013, 45–79.

40 Penrose 2016, 184–222.

41 In fact, Lucan makes a reference to one of the Hellenistic warrior queens when he very briefly mentions the military exploits of Arsinoe, Cleopatra's sister, after Caesar had taken Egypt: *Nec non subrepta paratis/a famulo Ganymede dolis pervenit ad hostes/Caesaris Arsinoe; quae castra carentia rege/ut proles Lagea tenet, famulumque tyranni/terribilem iusto transegit Achillea ferro* (Luc. *Phar.* 10.519–523). This short passage can be read as a parallel to the poet's depiction of Cleopatra, since it strongly associates the concept of female rule and military leadership with the Ptolemies.

42 See e.g. Tacitus and Dio on Boudicca; Tac. *Agr.* 16; Cass. Dio 62.1–2. Arrigoni points out that for Tacitus, only barbaric women could be thought of as leading an army—for a Roman woman, the very idea was utterly impossible. Arrigoni 1984, 874–875.

43 "*Boudicca generis regii femina duce (neque enim sexum in imperiis discernunt) sumpserunt universi bellum*"; "*nec ullum in barbaris saevitiae genus omisit ira et victoria*". Tac. *Agr.* 16. Later on, in book fourteen of the *Annales*, the Roman general Suetonius scorns the empty threats of the barbarians, stating that "in the opposing ranks, one sees more women than young men. Unwarlike and defenseless, they would withdraw at once, when, so often smelted by defeat, they recognised the swords and the courage of their conquerors" ("*plus illic feminarum quam iuventutis aspici. Inbellis inermis cessuros statim, ubi ferrum virtutemque vincuntium totiens fusi agnovissent*"). Tac. *Agr.* 36 (translations are my own).

passage firmly links female leadership to barbaric savagery, and gives the reader the impression that, since women cannot be counted on to control their bodily drives when entering the temporal scene, it is the moral duty of men to control those drives for them and to keep them out of political and military affairs. In its very core, therefore, female military leadership is a sign of weakness in *men*. The attempt to define *Romanitas* by refusing an association with barbaric habits such as female leadership thus becomes an important part of the discourse concerning gender, violence and Roman identity.<sup>44</sup> This is the basic idea that one can observe in Lucan's representation of Cleopatra in the *Pharsalia* too—and it suggests the fear that, because of her influence over Caesar, the queen might contaminate Roman society, by introducing to it the concept of barbaric female leadership.

However, as is typical of Lucan's epic, where civil strife constantly rattles the cornerstones of Roman identity, in this case too, the distinction between Romans and others is less clear-cut than it seems at first sight. The very last episode in book ten—and in the entire epic—tells the story of a palace mutiny, devised by Ptolemy's slave and advisor Plotinus. The particularly intriguing element in this episode is Caesar's behaviour and his state of mind. Besieged in the royal quarters of Cleopatra's palace, the Roman general suddenly loses entirely his self-control and is taken by mind-numbing panic:

*At Caesar moenibus urbis/Diffisus foribus clausae se protegit aulae/Degeneres passus latebras. Nec tota vacabat/Regia compresso: minima collegerat arma/Parte domus. Tangunt animos iraeque metusque,/Et timet incursus indignaturque timere./Sic fremit in parvis fera nobilis abdita claustris/Et frangit rabidos praemorso carcere dentes,/Nec secus in Siculis fureret tua flamma cavernis,/Obstrueret summam si quis tibi, Mulciber, Aetnam.— Hic, cui Romani spatium non sufficit orbis,/Parvaeque regna putet Tyriis cum Gadibus Indos,/Ceum puer inbellis, ceu captis femina muris,/Quaerit tuta domus; spem vitae in limine clauso/Ponit, et incerto lustrat vagus atria cursu—.*

LUC. *Phar.* 10.439–448, 10.456–460

But Caesar did not trust the city walls; he defends himself by closing the gates of the palace, submitting to a shameful hiding place. He is besieged, so the whole palace is not at his disposal: he had gathered his puny forces in one part of the house. His mind is touched by anger and fear: he fears

44 For further discussion of the relationship between these concepts, see, e.g., Keith 2009.

an attack, and he resents his own fear. Thus a noble beast, penned in a tiny cage, growls and bites the bars until he breaks his furious teeth; and no differently would your flames rage in the caverns of Sicily, O Vulcan, if someone were to block the summit of Etna.—He, for whom the whole Roman world is not spacious enough, who would deem it too small to rule over both Tyre and India, seeks safety of a house, just like a child not accustomed to war, or like a woman when the walls of her city are taken. He places his hopes of survival in a closed door; and he runs around uncertainly, wandering from hall to hall.

The narrator elaborately depicts Caesar's confusion in the face of his uncontrollable bodily drives: *Tangunt animos iraeque metusque, / Et timet incursus indignaturque timere*. The general's anger, *ira*, is still regulated by the logic of the symbolic order: it is awakened by his realisation that he is losing control of himself. But his fear derives from deep within the body: it is the primitive self-preservation instinct, the 'fight-or-flight' reaction, that terrifies the general—and, instead of staying and fighting, he takes flight.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the anti-hero of the epic is stripped of his textual subjectivity, as he—the political, rational Roman male—is reduced to a slave to his bodily drives, like a wild animal, or like an out-of-control woman. The simile that compares Caesar to a raging volcano makes explicit the inner turmoil that conflicts with his social role as a military man. Without a plan or a course of action, he wanders from room to room—an expression of his disordered state of mind. All in all, the episode paints a vivid picture of Caesar losing touch with the logic of the symbolic order—and this effectively alienates the reader from him.

It is particularly intriguing that at this very moment—after the similes that compare Caesar to a wild beast, to a boiling volcano, to a helpless woman and to

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45 Bianchi, who has studied the vocabulary of fear in the *Pharsalia*, notes that among the variety of verbs expressing fear—*metuo*, *terreo*, *timeo*, *paveo*, *horreo*, *trepido*, *tremo*—*timeo* is the most recurrently used. Bianchi considers *timeo* a relatively neutral verb that can be applied to all sorts of situations, and to both men and women. Bianchi 2004, 81, 94, 104. However, it is applied with striking frequency to Cornelia, the principal character of fear in the epic, particularly in her speech in book five when she worries about the future on which she herself makes no impact. In this passage in book ten, the verb's 'effeminate' connotations appear to be emphasised further, when Lucan depicts Caesar as wild with fear and locked in his tower 'like a defenseless woman'. It would seem that there is a particular sort of fear in the *Pharsalia* that can be characterised as feminine, and that is defined by one's inability to act and make a difference.

a child—the narrator makes another comparison that explicitly calls to mind the theme of threatening female violence. We read that

*Non sine rege tamen, quem ducit in omnia secum,/Sumpturus poenas et  
grata piacula morti/Missurusque tuum, si non sint tela nec ignes,/In fam-  
ulos, Ptolemaee, caput. Sic barbara Colchis/Creditur ultorem metuens reg-  
nique fugaeque/Ense suo fratrisque simul cervice parata/Expectasse pa-  
trem.*

LUC. *Phar.* 10.461–467

He still has the king, however, whom he takes everywhere with him. He plans to execute him as a pleasing sacrifice, if he himself must die. Should there be neither swords nor fire available, he would throw your head, O Ptolemy, to the slaves. Thus it is said that the barbarian woman from Colchis, afraid of the avenger of her crime against the kingdom and of her flight, waited for her father, all prepared and with her sword in one hand, her brother's neck in the other.

Suddenly, it is not just *any* panic-struck woman driven into a corner that Caesar resembles, but the ultimate representative of barbaric female violence—Medea herself. *Barbara Colchis* clearly underlines Medea's traditional role as the Absolute Other, and the reference to her killing of her brother brings up the theme of family violence, the most distinguishing element of her literary persona. Medea is a barbaric witch-woman whose 'unnatural' use of weapons—targeting them against her own flesh and blood—is the most renowned example of a woman completely driven by her bodily drives. She is an antithesis to everything that the symbolic order and the temporal scene stand for, and a worst-case example of what women wielding weapons might mean. The way in which the *Pharsalia* draws an apparently uncomfortable connection between the ultimate other of the Greco-Roman tradition and the Roman general seems to underline Caesar's loss of the epic male subject position. Instead of arranging his men and taking up defence—something that a servant of the temporal scene would do—he is holding a defenseless child a hostage, prepared to slaughter him for dramatic effect.

This means that Lucan's last note on the topic of gender, violence and identity seems to raise more questions than it answers. On the one hand, by demonising female violence, and by locating it in foreign, 'barbaric' women, the *Pharsalia* as a whole appears to support the view that women's violence has a reckless element about it, and that submitting to a female military leadership is a sign of weakness in men. The combination of women and armed

violence is depicted as something typical of non-Roman cultures and societies. On the other hand, by representing the Roman military man and the protagonist of the epic as losing control of himself, the poet appears to question the idea that vulnerability to one's bodily drives is a characteristically feminine *or* barbaric weakness. Earlier, in chapter three, I suggested that Lucan deliberately depicts Caesar's army as a representative of the barbaric violence that threatens to destroy Rome and *Romanitas*. Here, in book ten, the poet seems to repeat and reinforce this message through the portrait of the general himself. Along with Pompey and Cato, Caesar is one of the construction blocks of the Roman self in the *Pharsalia*; however, in his greed and ambition, he is also the enemy who turns against his *patria*. As a result, he gradually turns into an Absolute Other, a character impossible for the reader to identify with.

Arguably, the way Caesar is associated with wreckless, barbaric female violence in book ten underlines how far estranged he has become from *Romanitas*. The constant assimilation of Caesar and Cleopatra, and the explicit comparison between Caesar and Medea, emphasise his increasing otherness, his alienation from the Roman values of *patria* and clan. The last episode of the *Pharsalia*, therefore, manifests the danger that underlies the patriarchal attempt to escape the 'strangers within us' by simply locating the abject in the other sex. In this case, it is the stranger within Caesar that drags the entire people into a devastating civil war, dissolving the collective Roman self. Much like Silius Italicus in the *Punica*—although with different emphases—Lucan therefore utilises the theme of gender and violence to reveal the fragility of *Romanitas*. True to his civil war rhetoric, the Neronian poet suggests that the threatening bodily drives that the barbaric female violence manifests are not something alien to Roman society. In a civil war, the Romans become each other's enemies, and barbarism becomes a defining quality of *Romanitas*.

Despite the ideological significance of the theme to Lucan's epic, it is noteworthy that there is actually very little violence done by women in the *Pharsalia*. This is not the case in Statius' *Thebaid* and in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, where one can find perhaps the most elaborate depictions of out-of-control female violence in the entire genre. Despite the different subject matters of their epics, both Statius and Valerius Flaccus choose to relate the story of the Lemnian massacre. In the *Argonautica*, the story appears as an embedded narrative that the poet relates as a background to the Argonauts' sojourn at Lemnos. In the *Thebaid*, Hypsipyle becomes an internal secondary narrator, when she tells the Argive army the story of her life—this happens at a later stage, when she is already in exile in Nemea. Both versions were clearly inspired by

Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, the first epic retelling of the mythical tale of a topsy-turvy dystopian society ruled by violent women.<sup>46</sup>

In both Flavian epics, the narrative structure of the Lemnian episode is relatively similar. The story begins when the women of Lemnos, troubled by their menfolk's long absence on a military campaign, begin to fear that their husbands might replace them with Thracian concubines, the spoils of war.<sup>47</sup> Gradually, the insecure women are driven to *furor*, a violent frenzy kindled by Venus. As a result, they eventually decide to kill all the men of the island upon their return from the war. In the end, the only survivor is Thoas, Hypsipyle's aged father, whom his daughter secretly sends away.<sup>48</sup> In the morally corrupt and perverted society, Hypsipyle has to conceal her pious deed when she becomes the ruler of the now all-female city.<sup>49</sup>

In both epic versions, the women's deeds are condemned harshly. The narratives are rich in vocabulary denoting an unnatural and unforgivable crime: nouns such as *nefas*, *scelus* and *furor*, and adjectives such as *impius*, *saevus* and *crudelis* are recurrent.<sup>50</sup> I have already discussed in the previous chapters the nature of *furor* as something that discharges the semiotic pressure into an epic narrative. *Nefas* and *scelus*, when used in the context of war, almost invariably imply an overthrowing of the social norms that regulate the use of violence—often, they point to a perverted social hierarchy, to fratri- or patricide, or to uncontrollable cruelty. Zarker has aptly defined *scelus* as “the external result of internal *furor*”:<sup>51</sup> it is the implementation and execution of the bodily drives that endanger the harmony of the temporal scene. *Nefas*, in turn, explicitly denotes a violation of the divine law, *fas*.<sup>52</sup> It stands for the impugning of the

46 For further discussion of the Flavian poets' use of their literary models, see Aricò 1991, esp. 195–210; Boner 2006, 149–155.

47 Stat. *Theb.* 5.48–128; Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.107–174.

48 Stat. *Theb.* 5.236–295; Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.243–305. For discussion of the apparent virtuousness of Hypsipyle's behaviour in a morally corrupt society, see Ganiban 2007, 71–85; Casali 2003, 65–68; Boner 2006, 160.

49 Stat. *Theb.* 5.313–325; Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.306–310.

50 For *nefas*, see Stat. *Theb.* 5.32, 5.54, 5.162, 5.202, 5.328, Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.101, 2.210. For *furor*, *furia*, or *furens*, see Stat. *Theb.* 5.30, 5.34, 5.91, 5.148, 5.246, 5.281, 5.298, Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.102, 2.239, 2.314. For *scelus*, Stat. *Theb.* 5.103, 5.206, 5.201, 5.215, 5.245, 5.360, Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.214. For *fera*, Stat. *Theb.* 5.201. For *impia*, Stat. *Theb.* 5.190, 5.300. For *saevus*, Stat. *Theb.* 5.229, 5.261, Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.175, 2.230–2.315. For *crudelis*, Stat. *Theb.* 5.250. For *ardens*, Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.175. For *furibunda*, Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.200, For *monstrum*, Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.217.

51 Zarker 1978, 18. For a deeper analysis of *furor* in Statius' poetry, see Venini 1964.

52 For further discussion of the conflict of *nefas* and *pietas* in the episode, see Ganiban 2007, 71–95.

'natural' order of things, for the breaking of the eternal law that the human laws and social norms emulate. In effect, *nefas* is an attack against the logic of the symbolic order, against the reason that defines how things 'are meant to be' or what they 'mean'.<sup>53</sup>

Accordingly, the very vocabulary used in Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' versions of the Lemnian story characterises the event as a powerful discharge of the bodily drives, as a *chôra*-driven attack on the symbolic order. The nature of the incident as a 'semiotic rebellion' is underlined by the fact that the slaughter is depicted as a result of divinely inspired mass hysteria of women—the references to Virgil's Amata in *Aeneid* 7, Virgil's Iris in *Aeneid* 5, and to Silius Italicus' Tiburna in *Punica* 2 are strikingly clear. In the *Argonautica*, Venus first spreads bloodlust using Fama as an instrument, *scelerisque dolique ministram*: then, she takes the form of one mortal woman after another, moving from house to house and pleading to the matrons individually. It is crucial to note that the women are already in a vulnerable state, "worn by anxious fear" (*occupat exesam curis*)<sup>54</sup> and prone to the goddess' meddling—as I have pointed out above, this is a common feature in epic women who fall victims to divine interventions. Since the Lemnians' minds are already vulnerable to the attacks of *furor*, it is easy for Venus to arouse their anger and to bring them together to vent their drives of destruction collectively. We read that

—*totam inde per urbem/personat, ut cunctas agitent expellere Lemno, ipsi urbem Thressaeque regant. dolor iraque surgit./obvia quaeque eadem traditque auditque, neque ulli/vana fides. tum voce deos, tum questibus implent—prosilunt nec tecta virum thalamosque revisunt/amplius; adglomerant sese nudisque sub astris/condensae flectus acuunt ac dira precantur/coniugia et Stygia infanda ad foedera taedas.*

VAL. FLACC. *Arg.* 2.163–167, 2.170–173

—next, she cries out through the entire city that the men are going to banish them all from Lemnos, so that they and their Thracian women may rule together. Pain and anger begin to rise. Each one, when they meet each other, tells and hears the same story, and everyone is believed. Then they call for the gods, then they fill the air with complaints. They spring forth, and do not even revisit the homes of their husbands or their mar-

53 On the immediate connection between *nefas* and *furor* in the *Thebaid*, Hershkowitz 1998, 271–282; Putnam 1995, 112–117. See also Verg. *Aen.* 7.386 (*maius adorta nefas maioremque orsa furorem*).

54 Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.137.

riage chambers; they flock together and, in a dense mass, under the naked stars intensify their wails, uttering curses on those marriages and calling for Stygian wedding torches on those abominable unions.

The way in which Statius depicts the spreading of *furor* in the *Thebaid* is very similar. In his version, Venus addresses an elderly matron, Polyxo, in a dream—the allusion to the encounter between Turnus and Allecto *Aeneid* 7 is obvious. Hypsipyle relates that

*subito horrendas aevi matura Polyxo/tollitur in furias thalamisque insueta relictis/evolat. insano veluti Teumesia Thyias/rapta deo, cum sacra vocant Idaeaeque suadet/buxus et a summis auditus montibus Euhans:/sic, erecta genas aciemque offusa trementi/sanguine, desertam rabidis clamoribus urbem/exagitat clausasque domos et limina pulsans/concilium vocat;— atque illae non segnus omnes/erumpunt tectis, summasque ad Pallados arces/impetus: huc propere stipamur et ordine nullo/congestae—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 2.90–102

Suddenly, old Polyxo rises in a horrible frenzy, leaves her chamber (which is not her habit) and rushes out. Just like a Teumesian maenad seized by the senseless god, when the sacred rituals call and Mount Ida's boxwood urges and the Bacchants' ritual cry is heard from the mountaintops. Thus, with eyes wide open and pupils suffused with quivering blood, she stirs up the abandoned city with her maddened shrieks; beating on closed doors and thresholds, she calls for an assembly. And they all burst out of their houses without delay, and make for the high citadel of Pallas. There we hastily rally, flocking together with no order or discipline.

The Virgilian elements are extremely strong in both epics; they serve the purpose of stressing the maenadic nature of the women's frenzy, and depict its motivation as something that derives from the body and outweighs the mind. The Lemnians' complete rejection of the symbolic order can be observed in their averbal communication (*rabidis clamoribus, condensae flectus acuunt*). Moreover, the way in which the women storm through the city, like an unstoppable force of nature (*totam inde per urbem*), clearly recalls Amata's aimless rush "through the midst of cities and fierce peoples" (*non cursu segnior illo/per medias urbes agitur*).<sup>55</sup> It is telling that, just as with Virgil's Amata, the motiva-

55 Verg. *Aen.* 7.383–384. Nugent discusses the collective rage of the women in this episode:

tion for the women's outburst can be found in their marginalised position. The Lemnians fear that their position in the family and society is under threat from the Thracian concubines: much like Amata, they get anxious as they begin to believe that the little power and respect they wield within the patriarchal system might be taken away. Once again, even though the women's *furor* is kindled by a deity, it is their deep-rooted anxiety over their marginalised position that makes them vulnerable to their bodily drives and eager to overthrow the entire social order.

Arguably, the Lemnians' decision to take up arms, and to reverse the traditional active and passive roles within the universe of war epic, is a direct reaction to this anxiety. In a world of victims and warriors, the use of violence is what empowers a character, and makes him or her a plenipotentiary participant in the war-centred narrative—not necessarily a positive moral *exemplum*, or one that the reader could identify with, but an acknowledged and central agent nonetheless. Accordingly, the role reversal that the Lemnian episode depicts plays with the reader's expectations concerning male action and female victimisation as the defining characteristics of epic. Although the Lemnians' violence is a *nefas*, it does, however, make them the active protagonists of the story, and their agency the driving force of the narrative—Statius even makes Hypsipyle a secondary narrator, who has the power to depict the events from her own viewpoint. The Lemnian men, on the other hand, are depicted as objects who do not speak or act, but are only spoken about and acted upon. The episode thus demonstrates how violence, agency and power are strongly interrelated in the epic tradition, and connected to the construction of textual subjectivity. Although it might be impossible for the reader to understand or to relate to the women's *furor*-induced state of mind—Hypsipyle does not seem able to do so herself—in a sense, the awakening of their bodily drives gives them the power to seize hold of the narrative and to rebel against the marginalisation that both the patriarchal society and the epic narrative impose upon them.

The act of killing itself—depicted in gruesome detail by both Statius and Valerius Flaccus—is consistently represented as 'unnatural', most probably for two reasons: first of all, because it shows women wielding swords and secondly, because they are turning those swords against their own flesh and blood. In her speech, Statius' Polyxo alludes to the famous myths concerning female violence, thereby seeking to justify the proposed deed:

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Nugent 1992, 267–268. The Greek and Roman concepts of female mass folly are further analysed in Guidorizzi 1995.

*Rem summam instinctu superum meritique doloris,/o viduae (firmate animos et pellite sexum!)/Lemniades, sancire paro;—heu segnes! potuitne ultricia Graius/virginibus dare tela pater laetusque dolorum/sanguine secures iuvenum perfundere somnos:/at nos vulgus iners? quod si propioribus actis/est opus, ecce animos doceat Rhodopeia coniunx,/ulta manu thalamus pariterque epulata marito./nec vos immunis scelerum securave cogo./plena mihi domus atque ingens, en cernite, sudor./quattuor hos una, decus et solacia patris,/in gremio, licet amplexu lacrimisque morentur,/transadigam ferro saniemque et vulnera fratrum/miscebo patremque super spirantibus addam./ ecqua tot in caedes animum promittit?*

STAT. *Theb.* 5.104–106, 5.117–129

O, widows of Lemnos—inspired by the gods and just agony, I purpose to decree a great matter (steel your hearts and expel your sex!). O, you slackers! Was the Greek father not able to give blades of vengeance to virgins and, rejoicing in the pain inflicted, bathe the young men in blood in their careless sleep? Whereas we are a bunch of indolent slobs? Because, if an example closer to home is needed, then see: may the wife of Rhodope teach us courage, she who with her own hands avenged her marriage and feasted together with her husband. Nor am I who urge you free from crimes or carefree. My house is full [of children], and I have greatly sweated in labour—see for yourselves! These four in my embrace, their father's pride and comfort (may they stay with me in tears and embraces!), I will all at once pierce with a sword, mixing the pus and blood of brothers, and, while they still breathe, add their father on top of the pile. Is there anybody amongst you who can promise to have the courage for so many murders?

*Firmate animos et pellite sexum* implies that in order to do what they plan to do, the women would have to abandon their female sex: since women and armed violence is an impossible equation, the Lemnians must take a leave from their womanhood in order to carry out their horrible task. However, since the abhorrent violence is a result of their raging bodily drives, and since women in Roman epic are notoriously unsuccessful at controlling those drives, this claim appears to be somewhat contradictory. Would it not be useful, in their attempt to reach the furious state of mind, if the Lemnians embraced their *sexus* instead of banishing it? As I read this passage, *sexus* does not in fact refer to the women's 'innate femininity', but rather to their female role regulated by social norms—in a sense, not to their sex, but to their gender. We should note that in Roman war epic, the timidity and the modesty that are naturalised as the defining

characteristics of women are actually markers of the female *role* within the patriarchy. The ‘innate’, biological womanhood—if there is such a thing—instead, seems to be of an exceedingly aggressive nature and eagerly tuned in to the animalistic drives of sex and death. Thus, when the mask of culture and civilisation falls off, women and armed violence no longer seems like an impossible equation—only a terrible one. Because society does not grant epic women an opportunity to channel their death drive into a kind of killing that is legitimised by the social order and dedicated to the service of the temporal scene, this drive is discharged through violence that is a *scelus* and a *nefas*.

In her speech, Polyxo mentions the Danaides and Procne (*Rhodopeia coniunx*) as examples of women who have managed to renounce their socially regulated female roles and to rebel against their marginalisation. The examples are aptly chosen, since both stories depict female violence within and against the family. In the myth about the Danaides, the women slaughter their newly wed husbands on the wedding night; in Procne’s story, the protagonist avenges her sister’s rape and abuse by killing her own son and serving him to her husband as a meal.<sup>56</sup> These tales are complemented by Polyxo’s elaborate description of the planned murder of her own children and husband. We should note that these lines clearly resemble Seneca’s depiction of Medea; they thus reinforce the archetype of a murderous mother, the Absolute Other.<sup>57</sup> The female bodies, means of production, become weapons of destruction as the mother annuls her most crucial job and achievement by killing her own children.

The triumph of nature over civilisation is underlined further when the Lemnians are compared to bloody wolves and lionesses, and their rage is represented as ‘bestial’.<sup>58</sup> The threatening world of animals and animalism is clearly present in these similes; the women are represented as having lost touch with that which makes them human: the logic of the symbolic order. The reader is reminded of Lucan’s Caesar, who, in a similar state of turmoil, in a lack of words and incapable of acting in a manner that his social role required, was compared to a caged beast.

The story about the Lemnian massacre, therefore, reminds the reader of the socially constructed nature of ‘reality’. It demonstrates how the truths and the naturalised categories—such as ‘women’ as defined by patriarchal logic—are actually produced by repeated performative acts and language, and how, by

56 These episodes were related in Roman literature before Statius in *Ov. Met.* 4; *Ov. Met.* 6; *Ov. Her.* 14; *Hor. Carm.* 3.11; *Tib.* 1.3.

57 See McAuley’s elaborate analysis in McAuley 2015, 220–227.

58 *Stat. Theb.* 5.165–166, 5.203–205, 5.231–235.

different kinds of acts, they can also be torn apart.<sup>59</sup> To the projected reader of Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' epics, this message most likely would be an uncomfortable one, since it destabilises the building blocks of their Roman identity and of the entire social order. Fortunately, from this viewpoint, the story does have an ostensibly 'happy' ending, whereby the order is restored: above all, because the *furor* in the hearts of the Lemnians' burns only for as long as their society remains all-female. At the arrival of the Argonauts—male, military heroes and political creatures—they swiftly and suddenly return to their socially regulated female roles, defined only in relation to men. In Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, the Lemnians perceive the approaching ship from afar, but deliberately abstain from preparing a defence. The reason for this, the narrator relates, is that Vulcan soothes the fury that Venus had stirred in their hearts.<sup>60</sup> The Lemnians realise that the war game is over and prepare to return to their predetermined social positions. As Polyxo states:

*'portum demus' ait, 'fatis haec, credite, puppis/advenit et melior Lemno deus  
aequore flexit/huc Minyas; Venus ipsa volens dat corpora iungi,/dum vires  
utero maternaque sufficit aetas.'*

VAL. FLACC. *Arg.* 2.322–325

“Let us offer them a harbor”, she says. “Believe me, this ship comes by a decree of fate, and the god who is good to Lemnos has urged the Minyae here across the sea. Venus herself willingly grants us to join our bodies to theirs, while our wombs are strong and we are still of a child-bearing age.”

The women's transformation from cold-blooded murderers into modest matrons is baffling. *dum vires utero* explicitly denotes this change: whereas a few lines earlier, the women's physical strength was channeled into armed violence, now it is in their wombs that all of this strength dwells. Swiftly, at the first sighting of a ship in the horizon, they turn from those who kill into those who give birth. The naturalised patriarchal order and the logic of the temporal scene are restored.

Statius' version delivers the same message but with a little more detail. In the *Thebaid*, the Lemnians actually do take up arms and prepare for defense as they see Argo approaching. The attempt, however, is futile, since the war-

59 An argument developed by Butler based on Foucault's genealogy: Butler 1990, 41, 55.

60 Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.312–315.

like fury has already left their hearts. In effect, this is something that happens immediately after they complete the slaughter of their menfolk: like the Euripidean Bacchantes, the women are awakened from their trance, and their fury is replaced by instant regret.<sup>61</sup> Only a while ago, they were compared to wolves and lionesses. Now, they are described as maimed and confused like a herd of heifers without an alpha male.<sup>62</sup> There could be no clearer sign of the sudden return of the normative patriarchal order. As the divine *furor* deserts the Lemnians, the beasts are turned back into domesticated creatures.

This is why their efforts to defend the city prove futile and pathetic. The Lemnian women, no longer driven by their physical urges, once again accept the naturalised ‘truth’ that they have been indoctrinated into: that women and weapons are an incompatible pair, and that in war, the woman’s lot is to fear and to suffer. Hypsipyle relates that at the sight of the Argo,

—*nos, Thracia visu/bella ratae, vario tecta incursare tumultu,/densarum pecudum aut fugientum more volucrum./heu ubi nunc Furiae?—huc saxa sudesque/armaque maesta virum atque infectos caedibus enses/subvectant trepidae; quin et squalentia texta/thoracum et vultu galeas intrare solute/non pudet; audaces rubuit mirata catervas/Pallas, et averso risit Gradivus in Haemo./tunc primum ex animis praeceps amentia cessit—*

STAT. *Theb.* 5.347–350, 5.352–358

—we thought what we saw was Thracian warfare, and ran home in a confused bustle, like a herd of cattle packed together, or like birds in flight. Alas, where now the Furies?—Trembling, they haul here rocks and stakes and their husbands’ miserable armour and the gore-tainted swords. They are not even ashamed to wear stiff woven ring-mails or to press helmets on their inert faces. Pallas blushed, amazed by these foolhardy troops, and Mars laughed on the hostile mount Haemus. Then for the first time the headlong madness left their minds.

The last line, in particular, appears to represent female violence as a phenomenon that is entirely dependent on the bodily drives and on the collapse of reason and logic. *Amentia* is the source of the power that not only marks the violent deeds of women, but also makes them possible. When possessed by this irrational and bodily force, the Lemnians are able to slaughter defenseless vic-

61 Stat. *Theb.* 5.302–312. Compare Eur. *Bacch.* 1419–1613.

62 Stat. *Theb.* 5.330–334.

tims in a gruesome manner—but once it leaves them, once the connection to the *chôra* is lost and they are faced with ‘real’ war (that is, killing legitimised by the society and dedicated to its service), they are helpless. With “feeble arms” they hurl “wobbling missiles” against the war-hardened warriors.<sup>63</sup> Their bodies can tell them how to kill but, being raised as women, they have no idea how to fight.

The women’s desperate attempts to play the part of a military male come to an end when the ultimate male agent, Jupiter himself, shows them the baffling difference between their opponents and themselves. As he hurls down his thunderbolt to shed light on the fearful form of the Argonauts,

—*deriguere animi, manibusque horrore remissis/arma aliena cadunt, rediit in pectora sexus—quinquaginta illi, trabibus de more revinctis/eminius abrupto quatiunt nova litora saltu,/magnorum decora alta patrum, iam fronte sereni/noscendique habitu, postquam tumor iraque cessit/vultibus.—Ergo iterum Venus, et tacitis corda aspera flammis/Lemniadum pertemptat Amor. tunc regia Iuno/arma habitusque virum pulchraeque insignia gentis/mentibus insinuat, certatimque ordine cunctae/hospitibus patuere fores; tunc primus in aris/ignis, et infandis venere oblivia curis.*

STAT. *Theb.* 5.396–397, 5.422–426, 5.445–450

—hearts freeze, the strange weapons fall from their terror-relaxed hands, and their sex returns to their hearts.—Fifty men, once their ship is properly anchored, jump down from on high and shake the new shore—a high pride of great fathers, now with calm countenance and recognisable looks, once the swelling anger has left their faces.—Hence, Venus is back, and love with silent flames tests the harsh hearts of the Lemnians. Then Juno the Queen reminds them of the weapons and the good looks of these men, the signs of noble lineage. And one after another, all doors eagerly open to the strangers. Then for the first time there is fire on the altars and the unspeakable troubles are forgotten.

*Arma aliena* highlights the irreconcilable incompatibility between women and arms; and *rediit in pectora sexus* expresses the inevitable restoration of natural

63 “—*dum labor ille viris fretaque indignantur et Austros,/desuper invalidis fluitantia tela lacertis/(quid non ausa manus?) Telamona et Pelea contra/spargimus, et nostro petitur Tiryntius arcu*”; “*illi (quippe simul bello pelagoque laborant)—*”. Stat. *Theb.* 5.377–380, 5.381.

gender dynamics. At first sight, it would seem that the narrator depicts the Lemnians' domestication as a return to their innate female nature. Judging by the rest of the passage, however, it actually seems more like a suppression of nature and a triumph of civilisation. Since the Lemnians are no longer in touch with their bodily drives, they start to perceive themselves through the lens of society. Instead of war, they are now thinking about marriage and childbearing—the situation is very similar to that in the *Argonautica*, where the attention was turned from their strong weapon-bearing arms to their strong child-bearing wombs. What is more, at Juno's urging, the Lemnians begin to pay attention to the signs of social status in the Argonauts: in their eyes, these men change from intruders to be killed into potential husbands who could offer protection and comfort.

I would therefore suggest that the Lemnian episode, as depicted both in the *Thebaid* and in the *Argonautica*, can—and perhaps should—be read as a story about the challenging of the naturalised 'truths' of the temporal scene. By engaging in such 'unwomanly' bloodshed, and by destroying what entirely defines them (their male relatives), the Lemnians claim for themselves an identity independent of the patriarchal norms and structures. In this way, they manage to temporarily take the matters of the city into their own hands and to create a utopian—or, from the narrator's viewpoint, dystopian—society with no male control over them.<sup>64</sup> This point has been made before by many readers of Flavian epic: Keith has interpreted the Lemnian episode as an accentuated conflict between the genders, a conflict that is comparable to a civil war.<sup>65</sup> Augoustakis, too, states that "the Lemnian identity is split between male and female, and when one of the two components is erased, there is the need for regression and self-obliteration of the whole population in general".<sup>66</sup> While I entirely agree with these readings, I would also suggest that the episode as a whole is about more than just a 'war of the sexes'—when Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' versions are read alongside each other, the epic version of the Lemnian myth grows into a story that, for a fleeting moment, reveals the artificial and performative nature of social reality. By representing the women's warfare as an offense against the 'natural' order of things,<sup>67</sup> it shows that this natural order is little else than a construction based on the logic of the symbolic order, controlled and enforced by the patriarchal worldview. And this logic is forever

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64 Augoustakis 2010, 49.

65 Keith 2000, 97.

66 Augoustakis 2010, 49.

67 Stat. *Theb.* 5,377–381.

vulnerable to the rise of the bodily drives, to the semiotic pressure that evades easy gender polarities and demonstrates that ‘truths’ and ‘categories’ are in fact creations of the mind.

This applies not only to gender, but also to the categories of race and culture. As Augoustakis points out, the juxtaposition between the Lemnian and the Thracian identities, and the discourse of ‘barbarism’ versus civilisation, are significant themes in the episode.<sup>68</sup> It is in fact the question of ethnic and cultural otherness that triggers the conflict in the first place. The Thracians are imagined as uncivilised others, and the Lemnian women are horrified by the idea that *barbarian* concubines might step into their place as honourable matrons. In the *Argonautica*, Venus, disguised as one of the Lemnian matrons, stirs up this fear with a speech that is rich in cultural stereotypes and prejudice. She begins by implying that the Lemnians’ children from lawful wedlock would not be safe, should Thracian concubines enter their households. Then, she continues by stating that

*scis simile ut flammis simus genus; adde cruentis/quod patrium saevire  
dahis. Iam lacte ferino,/iam veniet durata gelu. sed me quoque pulsam/  
fama viro, nostrosque toros virgata tenebit/et plaustro derepta nurus.*

VAL. FLACC. *Arg.* 2.156–169

You know how our race is like fire; even more, a thirst for blood is typical of the Thracian women. Soon, she will come—a woman nursed on the wild beasts’ milk and hardened by the freezing cold. But rumour has it that I too will be kicked out by my husband, and that some stripe-patterned wife snatched from her wagon will have my bed.

These stereotypes about the barbaric habits of strange peoples are aimed at constructing the Thracian women as Absolute Others in all senses of the expression. The gendered and ethnic otherness seem to complement each other, since Venus implies that the Lemnian and the Thracian women share an inclination to *flammae*, potentially because of their womanhood. However, this weakness is even stronger in the Thracians, because their barbarism complements their femininity. In particular, the mention of their nursing on the milk of wild beasts—a repetitive topos in Roman epic—creates an impression of Thracians occupying a liminal space between humanity and bestiality. The

68 Augoustakis 2010, 47–49.

Thracian women are represented as straying on the territories of animalism, as estranged as possible from civilisation. The purpose of this, of course, is to construct the Lemnian cultural identity in contrast to ‘the other’. However, the instability and fluidity of these polarities are made evident very soon afterwards, when the Lemnians *themselves* become instruments of barbaric violence and uncivilised conduct: they themselves become the child-murderers that they suspect the Thracians of being. The line that distinguishes the barbaric from the civilised, and that appears to be distinct and inflexible at the beginning of the story, is gradually blurred. This reflects and complements the blurring of the gender polarities.

How does Roman identity, then, relate to these dynamics of otherness? Arguably, although the story takes place in a mythological setting, both Statius and Valerius Flaccus utilise the combination of women and armed violence as means of constructing Roman identity. The Lemnian massacre is a horror story about a perverted dystopian society and about the eventual restoration of a normative patriarchal order. By offering a prime example of destruction caused by out-of-control bodily drives and female violence, it offers to the contemporary Roman audience an opportunity to think of their own environment as drastically different: ‘nothing like this could ever happen in Rome’. However, this is not the whole story. First of all, the Lemnian episode’s ‘happy ending’ is merely an illusion: as a reader familiar with the canon of Greek mythology would know, the ‘unnatural’ female violence does not stop with the wedding torches. In the *Thebaid*, the reader is actually reminded of this: when Hypsipyle relates her marriage to Jason, and her subsequent abandonment by him, for a moment she suddenly appears to address Medea, who, in the future, will be abandoned by the same man. ‘*alio, Colchi, generatis amores*’, she states.<sup>69</sup> Here, Statius seems to benefit from a so-called prequel technique—the meaning of Hypsipyle’s words is based on the presumption that the audience is familiar with the subsequent events.<sup>70</sup> The reader is subtly reminded that Jason, who puts an end to the Lemnians’ fury, will eventually himself suffer from the death drive of a marginalised, cast-aside woman.<sup>71</sup> In Statius’ poem, the barbaric peri-

69 Stat. *Theb.* 5.458.

70 De Jong 2007, 514.

71 This threatening foreshadowing of female violence is also reinforced by the repetitive associations made between Hypsipyle and Virgil’s Dido. As Dietrich has demonstrated, Valerius deliberately recalls Dido throughout his depiction of Hypsipyle. Dido’s lurking in the background calls to mind the epic archetype of a foreign, warlike queen and the threat she poses to the hero of the epic. Dietrich 2004, 7–9, see also Ganiban 2007, 86–87; Casali 2003.

phery continuously penetrates the civilised centre and, likewise, female violence disturbs the patriarchal social order.

In addition to this intriguing allusion to Medea's story, the Lemnian episode clearly anticipates the forthcoming destruction and impiety of the Theban war. As Venini, Augoustakis and Ganiban have argued, the violence and immorality of Lemnos penetrates the main storyline of Statius' epic and exposes the *nefas* that marks it.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the *Thebaid* seems to imply that the Lemnian *nefas* is not confined to the margins of the narrative, but spreads its influence to the centre of the epic, becoming the driving force of the narrative. This notion seems significant with regard to the fragile identities in Roman war-centred epic. In a sense, the internal and the external audiences of Statius' epic would like to denounce the crime of the Lemnians as something barbaric and unimaginable. Nevertheless, by the way the poet exploits the aftermath of the Lemnian massacre, it is evident that the episode comes to define and determine the whole of the epic, not only by the contrast between barbaric and civilised, but also by the frightening possibility of an underlying sameness between them. This kind of blurring of the line between 'civilised' and 'barbaric' is typical of the Flavian poets in their construction of Roman identity. In the mythological settings of the *Thebaid* and the *Argonautica*, there lurks in the background the possibility that the periphery intrudes into the centre, and the 'barbaric' into civilisation—and, instead of adapting to it, changes it. It might be impossible to adopt and assimilate to the concept of *Romanitas*; nevertheless, its impact on this concept cannot be fully controlled or denied.

The idea of Roman identity as being constructed only *against* and *in contrast* to the 'unnatural' female violence is tricky also—and especially—because of the central role of Venus in the Lemnian story. In both Statius' and Valerius' versions of the story, Venus is the original instigator of violence and, although the Lemnian women are vulnerable to her interference, her role in the igniting of *furor* cannot be underestimated. In the *Argonautica*, Valerius Flaccus depicts the goddess as single-handedly forcing the swords into the hands of the women,<sup>73</sup> and Statius states that "Venus is mingling everywhere unseen, Venus wields their weapons, Venus stirs their anger" (*fallit ubique/mixta Venus, Venus arma tenet, Venus admovet iras*).<sup>74</sup> A little later, he wonders: "what was the source of this violent power, from where did the belligerent heart of the goddess appear?" (*unde manus, unde haec Mavortia divae/pectora?*).<sup>75</sup> The question

72 Stat. *Theb.* 5.499–556. Ganiban 2007, 71–95; Augoustakis 2010, 46–47; Venini 1964, *passim*.

73 Val. Flac. *Arg.* 2.214–215.

74 Stat. *Theb.* 5.157–158.

75 Stat. *Theb.* 5.282–283.

seems justified, since it is arguable that this kind of direct action and armed violence is not something most characteristic of Venus in the canon of classical mythology. In the *Iliad*, for instance, the fiery and violent side of the goddess is completely absent. Homer's Aphrodite is described as weak and fragile. She is wounded by the mortal Diomedes, who drives her away from the battlefield in an offensive manner.<sup>76</sup> Zeus himself comforts his daughter by reminding her of her place:

οὐ τοι, τέκνον ἐμόν, δέδοται πολεμήϊα ἔργα, ἀλλὰ σὺ γ' ἱμερόεντα μετέρχεο ἔργα  
γάμοιο, ταῦτα δ' Ἄρηϊ θεῶν καὶ Ἀθήνῃ πάντα μελήσει.

HOM. *Il.* 5.428–430

Not to you, my child, are given works of war; no, follow you after the lovely works of marriage, and all these things shall be the business of swift Ares and Athene.<sup>77</sup>

In Homeric epic, therefore, Aphrodite's strong connection to the female sphere of life makes her involvement with war utterly unthinkable. In Roman epic, the situation is quite different. The Lemnian episodes in the *Thebaid* and in the *Argonautica* are not the only ones where Venus takes up arms or meddles with military matters. In the *Aeneid*, she contributes to the Latin war by providing Aeneas with new armour that is supposed not only to protect, but also to drive him on in battle.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, in the shield that she donates to her son, Venus herself is shown as taking part in the battle of Actium on Octavian's side: we read that "barking Anubis, and all kinds of monstrous gods take arms against Neptune, Venus and Minerva" (*omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis/contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam/tela tenent*).<sup>79</sup>

Venus' warlike nature can therefore be observed as a feature characteristic of Roman epic tradition. It is absent from the *Pharsalia*, where the role of divine agents is altogether negligible, but in Flavian war epic, the Virgilian model can be clearly noticed. In addition to Statius and Valerius, whose Venus is strikingly violent, Silius Italicus, too, depicts the goddess as meddling with military matters when he shows her enfeebling the Punic army during their sojourn in Capua.<sup>80</sup> In this story (discussed in more detail earlier in this chapter), Silius

76 Hom. *Il.* 5.330–352.

77 English translation of the *Iliad* by A.T. Murray, *LCL*1971.

78 Verg. *Aen.* 8.608–616.

79 Verg. *Aen.* 8.698–700.

80 Sil. *Pun.* 11.385–426.

elaborately combines the two aspects of the *Roman Venus*. On the one hand, she is the mistress of the beguiling pleasures that rout the warlike spirit of men; on the other, she has explicit military interests that guide her actions: namely, the desire to turn the fortunes of war on Rome's side. In a way, Silius' Venus can therefore be considered to represent a perfect—if rare—union of the semiotic and the symbolic; the bodily drives harnessed in the service of the temporal scene and the political organism.

In many other manifestations of Venus in Roman culture and society, this marriage between the bodily drives and symbolic logic is not so harmonious; one or the other is usually emphasised over the other. Whereas in love elegy, Venus unsurprisingly appears as the goddess of the pleasures of the flesh, in the public and political sphere, she is usually a devoted servant of the state and the social order—and, what is more, a strikingly militant one. The warlike aspects of Venus in Roman war epic were not in fact a novel innovation, but seem to reflect the depiction of the goddess in the public sphere of Roman society from the late Republic onwards.<sup>81</sup> In 55 BCE, Pompey dedicated a temple to Venus Victrix as part of his theatre complex in Campus Martius—along with shrines to Honos, Virtus, Victoria and Felicitas.<sup>82</sup> Pompey's choice of the deities indicates that the spirit of the act was clearly martial and designed to strengthen his own position as the ultimate representative of military courage and *virtus Romana*. The specific role of Venus as 'Venus the Victorious' appears to have fitted this purpose seamlessly.

Pompey's example did not remain isolated in Roman history, but appears to have inaugurated a tradition that, in the course of the late Republic, further reinforced Venus' military reputation. After Pompey's defeat in the civil war, Julius Caesar dedicated a temple to Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium, openly presenting himself as a direct descendant of the goddess.<sup>83</sup> The intriguing point

81 As Flemberg has shown, the military aspects of Venus were not a purely Roman invention, but derived from the Greek archetype of the armed Aphrodite. Flemberg 1991, 26–42.

82 Suet. *Claud.* 21.1; CIL 1(2) 324; Flemberg 1991, 27; Schilling 1982, 296–300; McDonnell 2006, 295. On Sulla's relationship to Venus, see Plut. *Vit. Sull.* 34.2, 19.5; Schilling 1982, 272–295.

83 Weinstock 1971, 83; Merriam 2006, 21. For Caesar's self-definition as a descendant of Venus, see Suet. *Iul.* 6.1; Cass. Dio 43.43.3, 41.34.1; Cic. *Fam.* 8.15.2; Vell. Pat. 2.41.1; Schilling 1982, 301–315. Weinstock argues that the veneration of 'Venus of the Aeneadae' was established in Italy as early as in the sixth century BCE Weinstock 1971, 15–18; Merriam 2006, 19–21. According to Smith, the Iulii had been emphasising their familial connection to Venus consistently from the second century BCE onwards, but already in the second century BCE, the Corneli Sullae and the Memmii, too, claimed descent from Venus. Smith argues that "the genealogical games" were "a necessary concomitant of the patrician style, rather than a reason for success". Smith 2010, 253–254.

is that Caesar appears to have thought of Venus not merely as his ancestress, but also as his protective deity in the military sphere. According to Cassius Dio, he wore a ring depicting a carved image of *Venus armata*, the goddess in full military armour, and made her name his watchword in times of trouble.<sup>84</sup> Octavian, in turn, carried on this relationship. Before the battle of Actium, he minted a coin with a legend *Caesar divi filius*, depicting Venus holding the weapons of Mars—as Merriam proposes, the connection was presumably intended to underline not only Octavian's own kinship to Venus, but also the origin of the Romans as descendants of both Venus and Mars.<sup>85</sup> The same idea is evident in the tradition of worshipping Venus Genetrix in the temple of Mars Ultor during the reign of Augustus.<sup>86</sup> It therefore seems that during the Augustan period, the maternal side of the goddess did not exclude associations with the military sphere too.<sup>87</sup>

It is worth emphasising, with regard to the construction of Roman identity, that in the course of the Principate, *Venus armata* became particularly closely associated with the goddess Roma. The temple of Venus and Roma on the Velian hill, dedicated by Hadrian in 135 CE, is an apt demonstration of the symbolic significance of Venus as the ancestor and protector of the people. The images of *Roma armata*—a character that bears a striking resemblance to both *Venus armata* and the goddess Virtus—in numismatic evidence and in house adornments further strengthen the association between the goddesses.<sup>88</sup> Venus' role as a military patroness of the people was therefore strongly established as part of the Romans' self-fashioning from the Republican era onwards, and was consolidated in the course of the Principate. It is important to note that in this role—simultaneously both matronal and military—the Roman Venus appears to be completely immersed into the logic of the patri-

84 Cass. Dio 43.43.3; see Flemberg 1991, 35; Merriam 2006, 21. For further analysis of Caesar's way of utilising the examples of Pompey and Sulla in his worship of Venus, see McDonnell 2006, 315.

85 Merriam 2006, 24. For the cultic connection between Venus and Mars and, in the Greek context, between Aphrodite and Ares, see Flemberg 1991, 23–28.

86 Schilling 1982, 315; also Merriam 2006, 30; Huskinson 2000, 102.

87 Weinstock also mentions the temple of Venus Victrix on the Capitoline, which Augustus either dedicated or provided with a cult statue. For further discussion, see Weinstock 1971, 84–85.

88 Arrighi 1987; McDonnell 2006, 147–148; Huskinson 2000, 17–18. See, for instance, an image of Virtus in a denarius dating to 100 CE—the coin portrays a standing Amazon figure, in a short chiton and boots, holding a spear (RRC 329). A similar imagery can be found on an earlier denarius, dating to 67/71 (RRC 401). Since the armed Amazon was a character used as a personification of both Virtus and Roma, these two often appear iconographically indistinguishable. McDonnell 2006, 149.

archal order. She is not the goddess of reckless pleasures familiar to us from the elegiac tradition, but a matron, a mother and a military leader—a utopian character who transgresses the role prescribed to women in Roman society, but whose conduct is completely regulated by the logic of the symbolic order and free from threatening semiotic overtones.

Why, then, is this dual role of Venus important for one's understanding of functions of gender in Roman war epic? I would suggest that, when studied against this background, the depiction of the goddess in the Flavian epic seems particularly interesting and somewhat out-of-place. In the works of Statius and Valerius Flaccus, Venus is a distinctly violent and warlike goddess—but in these epic depictions, she is not free from her strong association with bodily drives. The post-Virgilian epic Venus never quite becomes the calm, dispassionate servant of the patriarchal order that is perfectly exemplified (for example) by the epic Minerva. Instead, the Flavian poets seem to strongly stress the threatening, chthonic sides of her character, and to depict the armed violence that she initiates as a rebellion against the symbolic order—the Lemnian episode is a good example of this. When explaining the background to the conflict, Statius' Hypsipyle claims that already before the Colchian war, Venus had fraternised with the underworld in order to cool down the passion between the Lemnians and their husbands. She states that

*illa Paphon veterem centumque altaria linquens,/nec vultu nec crine prior,  
sobvisse iugalem/ceston et Idalias procul ablegasse volucres/fertur. erant  
certe media quae noctis in umbra/divam alios ignes maioraque tela geren-  
tem/Tartareas inter thalamis volitasse Sorores/vulgarent, utque implicitis  
arcana domorum/anguibus et saeva formidine nupta replessset/limina—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 5.61–69

She leaves her ancient Paphos and its hundred altars, and neither her face nor her hair is like before: she is said to have loosened her girdle and banished her Idalian birds far away. Certainly there were some who reported that, amidst the shadows of the night and accompanied by the Tartarean sisters, the goddess had hovered through bedchambers carrying other fires and mightier weapons, and that she had filled the secret places in the homes with snakes and the wedding thresholds with savage terror.

Here, the reader can see Venus explicitly shaking off her role as the goddess of love and taking on the attributes of an epic Fury reminiscent of Virgil's Allecto. *alios ignes* implies that the defining characteristic of Venus' character,

the sex drive, is being replaced by the death drive—both, however, are bodily drives belonging in the threatening world of animals and animalism, and in this episode, they clearly place Venus within the semiotic sphere. This is not Venus Victrix, the loyal servant of the temporal scene that Pompey, Caesar and Octavian worshipped; this is a chthonic goddess spreading disorder and havoc through the armed violence of women.

Venus' chthonic appearance is stressed even further when, excited by her spells, the Lemnians gather round to call out all the goddesses of the underworld. To the reader's astonishment, the women carry out a human sacrifice, slaughtering one of the male children of the city. The ritual is a complete distortion of the purifying ritual act. Instead of purging the society of the threatening death drive, it unleashes it and forces the reader to witness the most unthinkable inhumanity: a mother killing her child, masking this as an act of religious *pietas*. We should note that, on this occasion, the military Venus is prominently present; as Hysipyle relates, "Venus is mingling everywhere unseen, Venus wields their weapons, Venus stirs their anger" (*fallit ubique/mixta Venus, Venus arma tenet, Venus admovet iras*).<sup>89</sup> It is also intriguing that Venus' subversive, chaotic, uncontrollable femininity is clearly juxtaposed with another kind of femininity, entirely absorbed into the service of the patriarchal order. The poet makes sure to point out that the abhorrent act takes place right next to the mountain sacred to Minerva (*late iuga celsa Minervae*)—by mentioning this detail, he stresses the Lemnians' insult to the symbolic order of reason and logic, the order that is represented *par excellence* by Minerva.

Valerius Flaccus' depiction of Venus' military aspects is very much in line with that of Statius. The Venus Victrix of the late Republic is absent from the *Argonautica* too, and the goddess appears more as a Fury plucked up straight from Athenian tragedy. The narrator depicts Venus as emitting an averbal frantic cry (*nam—vocem furibunda—congeminat*) and describes how she releases Pavor, Discordia, Ira, Dolus, Rabies and Leto into the city.<sup>90</sup> It is clear that she is now completely out of touch with both the celestial Olympic sphere and the symbolic order. The *Mavortia coniunx* runs from house to house, presenting a cut-off head dripping with blood and exciting the women to violent deeds.<sup>91</sup> In effect, the narrator explicitly compares the goddess to a Fury, and explains:

89 Stat. *Theb.* 5.157–158.

90 Stat. *Theb.* 5.200–208.

91 Val. Flac. *Argon.* 2.200–215.

—*neque enim alma videri/tantum ea cum tereti crinem subnectitur auro/  
sidereos diffusa sinus, eadem effera et ingens/et maculis suffecta genas pin-  
umque sonantem/virginibus Stygiis nigramque simillima pallam.*

VAL. FLACC. *Arg.* 2.102–106

—for she did not only have that gentle appearance, when her hair is bound with a golden pin and her shining robes are spread around her bosom. No, it is the same goddess who, savage and huge, her cheeks red and blotched, resembles a Stygian Fury with her crackling pinewood torch and her black mantle.

Both Flavian poets therefore clearly depict Venus as changing register: she forsakes her role as the goddess of love in order to become the goddess of death and destruction. In both roles, however, she is first and foremost a *semiotic* deity who finds her motivation in the bodily drives and imposes the pressure of the *chôra* onto the logic of the narrative and onto the patriarchal social order. Arguably, this depiction complicates the strong association between the military Venus and the concept of *Romanitas*. As I noted above, in Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' Lemnian episodes, the women's 'unnatural' violence and the dystopian society that they build are, in a sense, symbolic of the 'otherness' against which Roman-ness can be defined. On the other hand, however, the prominent role of *Venus armata* in these episodes evokes instant associations with *Romanitas* and, indeed, with the origins of the Roman people. The Flavian poets appear to exploit the well-known cultural meanings of the military Venus in order to confuse and challenge the definitions of Roman identity. Since *Venus armata* was known to be a crucial component in the construction of Roman-ness, the act of associating her so strongly with the bodily drives and the 'barbaric' and 'feminine' violence immediately calls into question the differentiation between Roman and barbarian—and the stability of the categories that define identity as a whole.

This means that the definition of *Romanitas* on the grounds of female violence does not seem simple or even consistent, when we examine the epics of the early Principate side by side. It appears that all the Roman war epics discussed in this chapter exploit the cultural prejudices concerning gender and violence for their narrative purposes, but they all have strikingly different motives for doing so. Virgil surprises the reader by associating 'effeminate otherness' with Aeneas and the Trojans, and by providing the Italian side with a voice and viewpoint of their own. In this manner, the poet stresses the nature of Roman-ness as a sum of many 'others' that become Roman only when united. Lucan paints a vivid picture of female military leadership as an epi-

thet of exotic foreignness—and then reverses this image entirely by associating the concept of uncontrollable female violence with the Roman protagonist of his epic. The Neronian poet's depiction of the civil war as a collapse of the collective self therefore gains perspective from the theme of gendered violence.

As for the Flavian poets, in their works the complex relationship between civilisation and barbarism is discussed even more elaborately than in the epics of Virgil and Lucan. On the one hand, the differences between the two are made clear. On the other, concerns about the interaction between the two are repeatedly raised. While Silius Italicus utilises the age-old theme of effeminate otherness to show how the bodily drives prey on the self and the other alike, in the works of Statius and Valerius Flaccus, the fear that the 'barbarian' might intrude into the 'civilised' world and transform it is repeatedly expressed. All in all, the Roman poets' ways of dealing with the theme of gender and violence demonstrate the flexibility of the concept, and the many ways in which it can be exploited to construct *Romanitas*—or even to question its defining characteristics.

### 3 *Bellatrix virgo: An Outsider or an Insider?*

If we are to understand how complex and multifaceted the question of gender and violence in Roman war epic is, no other case is probably as illuminating as the paradox of the genre: the character of warrior maiden. This character seems to challenge the norms and conventions of talking about the armed violence of women: she is an Amazonic super-warrior who kills mercilessly but, instead of wreaking uncontrollable havoc, she devotes her violent deeds to the service of the temporal scene, in the same way as male warriors.

In Roman war epic, the unquestionable paragon of this archetype is Camilla in the *Aeneid*. She first appears at the end of book seven, in a catalogue of Italian warriors, where the very manner of her entrance anticipates her significance in the poem. As Horsfall points out, the concluding lines of an epic catalogue are traditionally reserved for the most valiant of the warriors.<sup>92</sup> In the *Aeneid*, after a wide range of Latin heroes, Virgil depicts Turnus in a magnificent manner for nineteen lines, emphasising his valour over everyone else—and this is where the reader expects the book to close. It does not: instead, the poet adds fifteen lines that completely overshadow what had come before. The last member of

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92 Horsfall 2000, 519–520; see also Boyd 1992, 214; Courtney 1988, 5–8; Becker 1997, 2.

the catalogue is Camilla, a Volscian warrior maiden, leader of her cavalry, as fast as the wind and magnificent to look at.<sup>93</sup> We read that

*Hos super advenit Volsca de gente Camilla/agmen agens equitum et florentis aere catervas,/bellatrix, non illa colo calathisve Minervae/femineas adsueta manus, sed proelia virgo/dura pati, cursuque pedum praevertere ventos.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.803–807

Beyond these, comes Camilla of the Volsci, leading her cavalry and troops shining with bronze. She is a warrior-woman, her hands not accustomed to Minerva's distaff or wool-basket—but a maiden who is used to endure a rough battle, and with feet to outrun the winds.

Camilla completely steals Turnus' thunder, in the eyes of both the internal and the external audience. The narrator closes the book with a description of how “all the youth, flooding from houses and fields, as well as the crowds of matrons, marvelled at her and gazed as she went by” (*illam omnis tectis agrisque effusa iuventus/turbaque miratur matrum et prospectat euntem*).<sup>94</sup> Time seems to stand still as Camilla steals attention from the war itself. Her appearance momentarily disrupts the narrative, and the gaze of the civilians is fixed only on her.

The rest of the warrior maiden's story is firmly in keeping with this first impression. Until she finally falls in battle in the end of book eleven, Camilla is able to perform masculinity in a way unlike any other woman in Roman war epic, avoiding marginalisation and becoming a plenipotentiary agent on the temporal scene. She fights valiantly, commands her troops in a rational manner, dies heroically and—most important of all—is effortlessly enrolled into the male military hierarchy. It is notable that, in addition to her own band of warrior women, Camilla is introduced as the leader of the Volscian cavalry. The first time she appears, we are told that *Hos super advenit Volsca de gente Cam-*

93 Verg. *Aen.* 7.803–817.

94 Verg. *Aen.* 7.812–813. *Miratur* is a word that carries strong implications of something marvellous and supernatural. Accordingly, both Becker and Quinn argue that the internal audience considers Camilla to be crucially different from mortal women. Becker 1997, 3–4; Quinn 1968, 188. Horsfall, likewise, states that “the choice of verb—is expressive both of C.'s character as a θαύμα in the ethnographic—sense and of the beholder/reader's reaction to the spectacle/ecphrasis”. Horsfall 2000, 527. *OLD* (1997) defines the object of the verb as “cause of wonder, marvelous, remarkable, extraordinary”.

*illa/agmen agens equitum et florentis aere catervas.*<sup>95</sup> Book eleven, where Camilla's troops appear for the second time, underlines that this does not refer to her own warrior maidens alone. Virgil describes the encounter between Camilla and Turnus as follows:

*Obvia cui Volscorum acie comitante Camilla/occurrit portisque ab equo  
regina sub ipsis/desiluit, quam tota cohors imitata relictis/ad terram  
defluxit equis—.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.498–501

Accompanied by the Volscian army, Camilla rushes to meet him. By the gates, the queen leaps down from her horse; following her example, the whole troop dismount their horses and slide to the ground.

The masculine plural genitive *Volscorum* makes it clear that the troop Camilla leads is larger than her own group of warrior women; it includes the knights of her own people. Moreover, her position as the sole leader of the troops is indisputable; the cavalry is depicted as showing due respect to their commander. Thus, not only is she absorbed into the male world of war, but she also has an acknowledged standing in its internal hierarchy.

Camilla's self-confidence is overwhelming, perhaps because of the recognition and validation that she receives from the male warrior community. Not for a moment does she question her right to lead or command. In her speech to Turnus, Camilla proposes that the Rutulian chief should stay to keep watch and guard the walls, while *she* should be the first to ride to meet the Etruscans and Aeneas' cavalry in battle.<sup>96</sup> Turnus, his eyes firmly fixed on the *horrenda virgo*, is stunned by Camilla's outrageous nerve. His next reaction, nevertheless, creates an impression that rather than being offended, he is overwhelmed with admiration for the girl.<sup>97</sup> While Turnus reserves to himself the right to ambush Aeneas' troops, he places the other battle front in the hands of the warrior maiden. "*O decus Italiae virgo*", Turnus replies,

*quas dicere grates/quasve referre parem? sed nunc, est omnia quando/iste  
animus supra, mecum partire laborem.—tu Tyrrhenum equitem conlatis  
excipe signis;/tecum acer Messapus erit turmaeque Latinae/Tiburtique  
manus, ducis et tu concipe curam.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.508–510, 11.517–519

95 Verg. *Aen.* 7.803–804.

96 Verg. *Aen.* 11.502–506.

97 For the positive connotations of *horrenda* in this context, see Horsfall 2003, 301.

What thanks can I utter or repay in kind? But now, since that spirit of yours surpasses all, share the effort with me. You with your troops gathered must await the Etruscan cavalry; the savvy Messapus will be with you, as well as the Latin squadrons and Tiburtus' troop. You too shall take the duty of a captain.

Turnus, therefore, not only approves of Camilla's military leadership; in addition, he accepts the warrior virgin among his *duces*. And Camilla, of course, complies and obeys—like any good warrior, she is hungry for military glory, but in the end, she is there to serve the common cause, not to rebel against it. Camilla's complete absorption into the temporal scene can be observed in how, on the one hand, she hungers for recognition and for the normative insignia of male valour, but, on the other, is able to put the war first, and herself second.

We should note that the way in which Turnus addresses Camilla denotes her significance to the whole Italian mission: *decus Italiae virgo* emphasises Camilla's identification with the whole of pre-Roman Italy, and stresses her representative position within this heterogeneous ethnic group. Furthermore, this very expression characterises Camilla as a legitimate member of the male-dominated world of war. *Decus* is an attribute typically used in war epic to glorify a particularly valiant warrior.<sup>98</sup> When attached to an ethnic or a social group, it does more than simply emphasise the valour and prowess of the warrior: it characterises him as an outstanding representative of his ethnic or cultural group. This means that Virgil's choice of words is of the essence. When Turnus addresses Camilla as *decus Italiae virgo*, the poet makes her part of a long sequence of heroes in the epic tradition: it is a unique example of how a woman in an epic narrative can become 'de-marginalised', thanks to her successful performance in a male role.

Moreover, the strong connection between the maiden and her *patria*—notably, not the Volscian homeland, but *Italia*—represents Camilla as the embodiment of a pre-Roman patriotic spirit. She is not only a courageous warrior, but also a moral exemplum of *amor patriae*: the purest, non-bodily form of love, entirely generated within and by the symbolic order. In this episode, Camilla achieves the highest pinnacle of subjectivity that any woman ever does in

98 For the use of this attribute in the *Aeneid*, see Verg. *Aen.* 4.150, 5.262, 6.546, 7.472, 8.301, 9.18, 9.405, 10.135, 10.507, 10.858, 11.155, 11.657 (where it is applied to Camilla's group of warrior women), 12.58, 12.83, 12.142 (applied to Iuturna). For the Greek paragon, see μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν in Hom. *Od.* 12.184.

Roman war epic: as the reader sees her through Turnus' eyes, she becomes a mirror and an object of emulation to both the internal and the external male audiences.

This kind of complete and successful absorption into the temporal scene and the patriarchal society is so rare in Roman war epic that it is noteworthy. In effect, one can argue with good reason that Camilla is the only mortal woman in the genre who can reach this level of success at 'playing the man' without being conquered by her bodily drives. In her actions, there is no sign of recklessness or bodily motivation. She kills brutally, like any other warrior, but does not seem to take particular pleasure in it—at most, pride and hubris at getting to show off her skills. Camilla thus differs from all other violent women in Roman war epic, in that her violence is not about *her*—it has nothing to do with her personal pain or pleasure.

In order to understand this exceptional female character and her function in Virgil's war epic, it is necessary to examine somewhat more closely the literary models and the potential inspiration for the character. On the one hand, Virgil's warrior maiden clearly recalls the exotic Amazons of the Graeco-Roman tradition; on the other, she seems to be built on a continuous tension and juxtaposition between the two armed virgin goddesses, Diana and Minerva.<sup>99</sup> When describing her background and her upbringing, the poet particularly emphasises Camilla's close relationship to Diana and stresses her connection to nature and to the woods.<sup>100</sup> The reader is told that the girl was offered as a devotee to Diana as a baby and spent her childhood in the wilderness practicing skills of the hunt.<sup>101</sup> Diana herself, in her role as a secondary narrator, characterises Camilla as "dear to me beyond all others" (*cara mihi ante alias*).<sup>102</sup> Thus, there is a great deal of pastoral romanticism, typical of Virgil's poetry, that appears to be embodied in Camilla's relationship with Diana.<sup>103</sup>

This relationship, however, is abruptly damaged when Camilla forsakes the life in the wilderness and decides to join the Italian forces in the war. Diana herself expresses her disappointment over this:

99 See, e.g., Horsfall 1988, *passim*; Horsfall 2000, 510–520; Horsfall 2003, 314; Arrighoni 1982, 65–115; Köves-Zulauf 1978, 182–191.

100 Arrighoni discusses Camilla's relationship with Diana at length, characterising her as a sort of semi-priestess of a rustic cult. See Arrighoni 1982, 77–104.

101 Verg. *Aen.* 11.539–566.

102 Verg. *Aen.* 11.537.

103 Camilla's close relationship to nature and the woods is emphasised by her weaponry: *Lyciam ut gerat ipsa pharetram/et pastorem praefixa cuspide myrtum* clearly stresses her rustic background. Verg. *Aen.* 7.816–817.

*graditur bellum ad crudele Camilla, /o virgo, et nostris nequiquam cingitur  
armis,—vellem haud correpta fuisset/militia tali conata lacessere Teucros:  
cara mihi comitumque foret nunc una mearum.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.535–536, 11.584–586

Camilla is marching to a cruel war, O maiden, and in vain girds on my arms.—I wish she had not been seized by this kind of warfare, or tried to challenge the Trojans. I wish she still was my dear girl and one of my companions.

It would appear that with her decision to forsake her rustic lifestyle for the sake of war, Camilla rejects Diana and betrays her position as her devotee.<sup>104</sup> She now bears far more resemblance to Minerva, another virginal goddess who *does* take sides in armed conflicts. Especially in Roman epic, Minerva's warlike nature is generally emphasized, while the domestic and the civic features of her character are less visible: she is *bellica virgo*, *bellatrix*, *bellipotens* and *diva ferox*.<sup>105</sup> Minerva's martial heart—and her self-evident presence on the battlefield—derive from the Homeric models, since Homer's Athene, too, is fully entitled to operate in the masculine world of war.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the poet plays with the reader's expectations and with his awareness of the epic tradition, when he depicts Diana's devoted huntress as suddenly becoming associated with warlike Minerva. In Diana's eyes, above all, this transformation appears as Camilla's betrayal of her loyalty.<sup>107</sup>

Arrigoni has argued that Camilla's departure for war denotes a new phase in her life, symbolising her rejection of the private, pastoral past and her adaptation to the public, political field.<sup>108</sup> I would read this change as her entry into the temporal scene: by taking on the male role of a military commander, and by dedicating her weapons to the service of a political cause, Camilla becomes one of the epic women who, in Kristeva's words, 'play supermen'. She is absorbed into the logic of the symbolic order and into the value system of the patriarchal society. The change can be observed in Camilla's outward appear-

104 See Arrigoni 1982, 102; Horsfall 2003, 340.

105 *Sil. Pun.* 7.459–463, 3.322–324, *Stat. Theb.* 2.716, 2.715, *Sil. Pun.* 9.457. On Minerva's warlike character in general, see also *Sil. Pun.* 9.460–465. See, e.g., Vinchesi 2005, 108–122; McNelis 2007, 25–40. Dominik defines her as more a "terrifying war-goddess" than a goddess of wisdom. Dominik 1994b, 50.

106 On Athene's warlike character, *Hom. Il.* 5.332, 5.733–766, 5.875.

107 For Virgil, Diana is a somewhat non-political deity associated with the wilderness. See, e.g., Arrigoni 1982, 77–104.

108 Arrigoni 1982, 19–20.

ance too. In her youth, she is depicted as dressed in nothing but a tiger skin; we read that “in place of a golden hair pin, in place of long trailing robes, a tiger pelt hung over her head and down her back” (*pro crinali auro, pro longae tegmine pallae/tigridis exuviae per dorsum a vertice pendent*).<sup>109</sup> But now, upon her entrance in book seven, Camilla’s outfit is regal: “the splendour of royal purple enfolds her smooth shoulders”, and “a brooch twines her hair with gold” (*regius ostro/velet honos levis umeros, ut fibula crinem/auro internectat*).<sup>110</sup> In a very tangible manner, nature is conquered by civilisation, and the animalistic aspects of her simple lifestyle are replaced by the normative signs of the symbolic order that communicate status, power and inclusion. When read against this background, the mention of Camilla never having trained her hands to Minerva’s distaff appears in a different light.<sup>111</sup> For now, the time has come for Camilla to practice Minerva’s works—only, they do not involve a spindle and a shuttle, but a spear and a bow. Virgil therefore exploits the tension between Diana and Minerva (a characteristically two-dimensional deity), to shift the mode from pastoral to political, from bucolic to epic.

Camilla’s rejection of Diana and her transformation into an *alter ego* of the epic Minerva thus appears to be the very reason why she is able to avoid the marginalisation that war epic tends to impose on women. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the armed violence of women, whenever it appears in the epic genre, is almost without exception represented as ‘inhuman’ and ‘unnatural’, as a threat to the social order, and as driven and motivated by the bodily drives. In this group, Camilla stands out as the exception that confirms the rule. She is a woman who is able to completely suppress her bodily drives and who therefore *can* become a trustworthy servant of the patriarchal order in a military role. She can be allowed to wield weapons, and men do not need to fear that she will turn those weapons against her family, against herself or against the social hierarchy. This certainty, I would suggest, is entirely due to her association with Minerva, the best and the absolute servant of the patriarchal order, the motherless ‘daddy’s girl’ who by her very example confirms and manifests the inadequacy of other women and their inability to take part in the temporal scene.

To elaborate further, I will examine more closely two particular aspects of Camilla’s character. Arguably, the two main things that define the warrior maiden throughout her story are, on the one hand, her unusual childhood

109 Verg. *Aen.* 11.576–577.

110 Verg. *Aen.* 7.814–816; see also Verg. *Aen.* 11.576–577.

111 Verg. *Aen.* 7.805–807.

and, on the other, her constant virginity. In *Aeneid* 11, we are told that Camilla is daughter to the Volscian tyrant Metabus who, after being exiled, raised his daughter alone in the woodlands. Diana relates that

*hic natam in dumis interque horrentia lustra/armentalis equae mammis et lacte ferino/nutribat teneris immulgens ubera labris./Utque pedum primis infans vestigia plantis/institerat, iaculo palmas armavit acuto/spiculaque ex umero parvae suspendit et arcum.—tela manu iam tum tenera puerilia torsit/et fundam tereti circum caput egit habena/Strymoniamque gruem aut album deiecit olorem.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.570–575, 11.578–580

Here in the midst of woods and rough morass he nourished his daughter at the breast of cattle and on the milk of a wild horse, squeezing the teats into her tender lips. And when the child began to try her first steps, he armed her hands with a sharp spear, and hung a bow and arrows from the little girl's shoulder.—Already then she hurled her childish weapons with her tender hands, and swung round her head the smooth-thonged sling, and slew a Styrmonian crane or a white swan.

This means not only that Camilla was raised in the wilderness, out of touch with society's expectations concerning the appropriate female behavior, but also—and more importantly—that she appears to have grown up motherless. Her mother is only briefly mentioned once—we read that Metabus named his daughter after her—and there is every reason to presume that she died soon after giving birth to the daughter. It is arguable that the weakened, or inexistent, connection to the mother is crucial to Camilla's adoption of a warrior identity. Lacking other human contacts, and lacking a bodily connection to the object of primal abjection, she identifies with the father from an early age on, and goes through a growing-up process that the patriarchal society normally prescribes for male children—suppressing the semiotic and the *chôra* in her, she learns to embrace the temporal scene.

We should note that this clearly marks Camilla as Minerva's *alter ego* from the beginning. As has often been pointed out, the Athene-Minerva figure is perhaps the best expression of patrilineal misogyny typical of the ancient Graeco-Roman culture. There is nothing of the feminine about her, as she performs successfully in a male role and renounces her womanhood altogether. Even Minerva's origin is not 'stained' by the mother, since she is born directly out of Zeus-Jupiter's forehead. The mother's womb—in Kristevan terms, the source of all bodily drives—is unfamiliar to her, and she is therefore 'more manly

than men', defined by ice-cold calculation and by a complete lack of bodily motivation. It is notable that Virgil's Camilla is marked by a similar lack of a mother-child bond, to the extent that this is possible for humans. In this sense, it would appear that there is more of Minerva than Diana in her from the very beginning: whereas Diana is a devoted daughter who uses armed violence to avenge her wronged mother, Camilla, instead, in a very Minervaesque manner, dedicates her weapons only to the service of the temporal scene.

Another specific quality that defines Virgil's epic warrior maiden is, of course, her maidenhood. Camilla's virginity is emphasised as soon as she enters the scene: *proelia virgo dura pati* is among the first things that the reader learns about her.<sup>112</sup> Later, in book eleven, when Diana relates her protégée's past, the goddess states that

*multae illam frustra Tyrrhena per oppida matres/optavere nurum; sola contenta Diana/aeternum telorum et virginitatis amorem/intemerata colit.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.581–584

Many mothers throughout the Etruscan towns in vain desired her as a daughter-in-law; content with Diana alone, she, untouched, cherishes an undying love for weapons and virginity.

There is a twisted hint of irony in Virgil's depiction of the Etruscan mothers as Camilla's potential mothers-in-law. This line looks forward to the battle scene a hundred lines later, where the Etruscan troops are depicted as the main military opponent of the Volsci. By mentioning the mothers' unfulfilled dream, the poet draws attention to Camilla's reversal of gender roles and expectations: instead of surrendering to an Etruscan husband in the marriage chamber, the maiden slaughters their youths on the battlefield.

Furthermore, *aeternum telorum et virginitatis amorem* makes it clear that Camilla's virginity is of a peculiar kind, in the sense that it is permanent. Contrary to the idea of maidenhood as a stage preceding matrimony, Camilla's

<sup>112</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 7.806–807. There appears to be a crafty double meaning in this line, since *pati* is an expression that is often used in Roman literature to refer to those who are penetrated sexually (*muliebria pati* can be used to shame a man who allows this sort of a thing happen to him). See, e.g., Sall. *Cat.* 13.3; Tac. *Ann.* 11.36; Ulp. *Dig.* 3.1.1.6. As Walters states, the expression could be translated as “having a woman's experience”, “to be the object of some event”, or “to suffer”. Walters 1997, 30. In Camilla's case, the double meaning of the word could be considered to be a deliberate wordplay on the poet's part. The contradiction is evident, since Camilla's defining characteristic is precisely her virginity.

virginity is constant.<sup>113</sup> This kind of religion-based lifelong celibacy obviously means a rejection of the normative life course prescribed for a woman in Roman society.<sup>114</sup> However, I would like to examine the possibility that it has an even deeper symbolic meaning in the *Aeneid*: by renouncing marriage and motherhood, Camilla renounces not only the social role of a woman, but her female body altogether. By refusing to use her body for its 'biologically destined' purpose, and by dedicating it to armed violence instead, she erases what makes her a woman in the eyes of the community. In other words, when Camilla's body is turned from a means of production into a weapon of destruction, it stops being a female body in the signifying practice of the symbolic order. This can be observed in the language in which the warrior maiden's fighting and moving about are described: until Camilla's final fall, there is no fetishising or eroticising element about the way she is depicted. Instead, the episodes where she appears are all about her agency and action. Undeniably, she often appears as an object of the gaze—for both the internal and the external audience—but that gaze is not fixed on her female body, but rather on its absence. At Camilla's first appearance, the narrator states that

*Illa vel intactae segetis per summa volaret/gramina nec teneras cursu lae-  
sisset aristas,/vel mare per medium fluctu suspensa tumentis/ferret iter cel-  
eris nec tingeret aequore plantas.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.808–811

She would fly over the tallest crop fields without touching them, without damaging the tender spikes in her course; or set her course over the open sea, poised above a swelling wave, without dipping her swift feet in the water.

Camilla thus becomes ethereal, free from the limitations of the body. She is weightless, untouchable, and defies the laws of nature by her very existence. Arguably, it is because of this rejection of her physical femininity that Camilla is able to finally and completely suppress the bodily drives, the drives connected to the preverbal connection to the mother. And because the bodily drives have been successfully repressed, she is able to wield a sword like a man, take up arms, and dedicate them to a political cause, not to the venting of her personal pain or agony. Thus, in the whole of Roman epic tradition, Virgil's Camilla

113 See Becker 1997, 3–5.

114 Pyy 2019, 160–163.

is a curious exception, a woman who manages to ‘pass’ as a man and who even becomes a point of identification and emulation for the male audience—both the internal and the external one. However, it is crucial to notice that at the same time, this exceptional *exemplum* is of an extremely injunctive nature, since it demonstrates that in order to fully enter the temporal scene, the woman must suppress her womanhood: for all other women, this is impossible, and therefore, all others are ultimately doomed to marginality.

Only one variation on the warrior maiden theme can be found among Virgil’s epic successors. In the *Punica*, Silius Italicus grants a small part to Asbythe, a Numidian princess who fights and falls on Hannibal’s side in the battle of Saguntum. Asbythe’s entrance to the war clearly recalls Virgil’s first remarks about Camilla.<sup>115</sup> While Camilla is described as *proelia virgo/dura pati*, Asbythe is *audax in bella*.<sup>116</sup> And while Virgil depicts Camilla as *bellatrix, non illa colo calathisve Minervae/femineas adsueta manus*, Silius characterises Asbythe as *non calathis mollita manus operatave fuso* (“never did the wool-basket soften her hand, or the spindle keep her busy”).<sup>117</sup> Moreover, echoing Camilla’s celebrated speed, Asbythe, too, “urged on her smoking chariot at furious speed” (*fumantem rapidis quatiebat cursibus axem*).<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, a closer look at these two women reveals that the apparent similarities are only skin-deep. The otherising, fetishising tendencies that are largely absent from Virgil’s depiction of Camilla mark Asbythe in the *Punica* throughout. Silius’ warrior maiden appears first and foremost as an exotic breeze from faraway lands, and as a perfect representative of the Graeco-Roman Amazon tradition. The narrator first introduces her by stating that she comes from “among the peoples of Libya”, with “troops from Marmarica”.<sup>119</sup> As Uccellini points out, the Romans associated female military activity not only with the Orient, but with Northern Africa too.<sup>120</sup> Accordingly, the emphasis on Asbythe’s origin is a deliberate attempt to guide the reader towards thinking of the Libyan Amazons, the Absolute Others.

115 Vinchesi 2005, 108–111; Uccellini 2006, 229–230; Van Nortwick 2013, 146, 149.

116 Verg. *Aen.* 7.806–807; Sil. *Pun.* 2.57.

117 Verg. *Aen.* 7.805–808; Sil. *Pun.* 2.70.

118 Sil. *Pun.* 2.81. Even the looks and appearances of the virgin warriors are very similar. While Camilla’s hair is pinned with a golden clasp, Asbythe’s long hair is tied with ‘a gift of the Hesperides’:—*ut fibula crinem/auro internectat* (Verg. *Aen.* 7.815–816); *relegata flutem/Hesperidum crinem dono* (Sil. *Pun.* 2.77–78).

119 *Discinctos inter Libyas populosque bilingues/Marmaricis audax in bella Oenotria signis/venerat Asbythe*. Sil. *Pun.* 2.56–58.

120 For the African Amazons, see Diod. Sic. 3.52–55, 3.66.5–6. For further discussion of the tradition, see Uccellini 2006, 232; Vinchesi 2005, 116–117.

Consequently, an explicit reference to the Thracian Amazons comes immediately after Silius has related Asbyte's fondness for the hunt. The poet states that

—*quales Threiciae Rhodopen Pangaeaque lustrant/saxosis nemora alta  
iugis cursuque fatigant/Hebrum innupta manus*—.

SIL. *Pun.* 2.73–75

—Such are a group of unmarried Thracian women, when they trek across the Rhodope mountains and the tall forests on the rocky ridges of Mount Pangaeus, and exhaust the Hebrus river with their sprint—.

The Thracian Amazons were well known to the Roman audience from references in Greek literature ever since Homer: they were legendary warrior women who inhabited the Thracian mountains, Rhodope and Pangaeus.<sup>121</sup> Silius' decision to compare Asbyte with this mythical folk immediately aligns the Numidian warrior princess with the Greek tradition, and—more importantly—makes her an amalgam of the African and the oriental Amazon imagery. Unlike Camilla, who appears as a symbol of pre-Roman, pastoral Italy, Asbyte is marked as the other from the moment she enters the narrative. Because of the way in which she is introduced, both the internal and the external audience are inclined to judge her 'female violence' from this viewpoint—as the expression of the animalistic drives that dwell in the abject other.

The differing functions of Camilla and Asbyte in the epic narrative are further underlined by the remarkable difference in the description of their military leadership. It is noteworthy that while Camilla is the leader of the Volscian cavalry, and is granted a status of *dux* by Turnus, Asbyte only commands a small and independent troop of her own warrior women—because of this, she does not fully blend into the male world of war, but remains an outsider within it. Asbyte and her warrior-women live in their own, isolated all-female community outside the civilised world, and on the battlefield, they are a strikingly exclusive group that keeps itself to itself, rarely interacting with their allies. They are not entirely integrated into Hannibal's army *nor* into Silius' war narrative, and they remain on the margins of the story, fascinating and exotic objects of the male gaze.

121 See, e.g., Hom. *Il.* 3.189, 6.186; Pind. *Ol.* 13.87–90; Her. 4.110–118. For further discussion of ethnographic writing about the Amazons, see Uccellini 2006, 238–243; Hardwick 1990, 17–20.

The nature of the gaze also strongly differs from that in Virgil's Camilla episodes, because it stresses Asbyte's role as the Absolute Other. Whereas in the *Aeneid*, the external narrator depicts Camilla to the internal audience as ethereal and non-corporeal, a semi-divine apparition, the narrator's gaze in the *Punica* is voyeuristic and fetishising. As Uccellini notes, Silius' warrior maiden appears as a desirable object, where the concepts of sex and violence come together.<sup>122</sup> Because of this, there is an omnipresent overtone in the narrative that implies the possibility of disempowering the warrior woman by submitting her sexually and socially to male control. This becomes evident when the narrator points out that Asbyte's virginity is not a matter of principle, like Camilla's, but instead appears to be circumstantial. When referring to her band of warrior women, the poet mentions that "some of the queen's companions had already submitted to marriage, but the cavalry of the virgins was larger in numbers" (*nec non Veneris iam foedera passae/reginam cingunt, sed virgine densior ala est*).<sup>123</sup> Hence, Asbyte's followers are not all virgins, and it is never stated that she herself could not one day marry, as some of the others have already done. This implication of a future marriage immediately hints at male control and domination over the warrior princess, and restores the normative patriarchal social hierarchy that her participation in the war has momentarily challenged.<sup>124</sup> The situation resembles that of the Lemnian episode, where the normative social hierarchy was ultimately restored by the Lemnians' marriage to the Argonauts.

Of course, this idea is by no means unprecedented—it is firmly built on the Amazonomachy tradition in Graeco-Roman literature.<sup>125</sup> As Arrigoni points out, the eroticising of the Amazons is particularly typical of the Roman elegiac poetry of the Principate, where the exotic and the erotic come together, and sex and war appear metaphorically interchangeable.<sup>126</sup> The Flavian epic

122 Uccellini 2006, 235–236.

123 Sil. *Pun.* 2.83–84.

124 Hardwick 1990, 20–33; Tyrrell 1984, 3–9; 52–54. As Augoustakis points out, this is where gender and ethnicity truly interrelate as complementary categories of otherness: the implication of male control over the female simultaneously becomes symbolic of the Roman imperial dominion over uncivilised and barbaric peoples. Augoustakis 2010, 22–23.

125 The Amazonomachy tradition can be divided in three main categories: The Trojan, the Heracleian and the Athenian Amazonomachies, where the hero is, respectively, Achilles, Heracles or Theseus. See Hardwick 1990, 30.

126 Arrigoni has studied the rhetoric of "guerra d'amore" in Roman literature, and argues that the Roman attempt to transform the Trojan Amazonomachy into an erotic fantasy was an attempt to resist the idea of empowered warrior women by making the matter a private object of fantasy. Arrigoni 1984, 891–894, 899.

poets, in particular, appear to borrow from this literary tradition when they deal with the theme. In addition to Silius' depiction of Asbyte, another episode from the last book of Statius' *Thebaid* participates in this discourse, and uses eroticising aspects as a literary tool to put violent women in their place. In the aftermath of the Theban war, the poet brings in Theseus, the ultimate civilising hero whose task it will be to restore order to the curse-ridden and war-wrecked Thebes. Statius stresses Theseus' position as the representative of patriarchy and civilisation by referring to his victory at the Athenian Amazonomachy.<sup>127</sup> As the hero is starting for Thebes, he leaves behind the conquered Amazons, now stripped of their warlike strength by marriage and motherhood.<sup>128</sup> Statius mentions Hippolyte, in particular, stating that:

*isset et Arctoeas Cadmea ad moenia ducens/Hippolyte turmas: retinet iam  
certa tumentis/spes uteri, coniunxque rogat dimittere curas/Martis et emer-  
itas thalamo sacrare pharetras.*

STAT. *Theb.* 12.635–638

Hippolyte would have gone, leading her northern squadrons against the walls of Thebes, but the hope of her swelling womb, which now is certain, holds her back, and her husband asks her to let go of the thoughts of war and to sacrifice her quiver, its service done, for the sake of the marriage bed.

The episode is a prime example of the way in which epic narratives tend to alleviate the threat of female violence by implying sexual dominion as the normative form of male control over the female body.<sup>129</sup> The bodies of the Amazons are turned from weapons of destruction back into means of production, and their life-taking power is replaced by a life-giving power. This is again the same idea that is dominant in the Lemnian episodes of both Statius and Valerius Flaccus: as the Argonauts arrive and reveal their 'true manliness' (either in terms of war or in terms of sex), the violent women return to their 'natural' roles, turned from wild beasts into domesticated heifers. This is the idea that the reader is inclined to associate with Silius' Asbyte, too, when she is indirectly represented as a potential wife and mother.

127 In addition to appearing in the *Thebaid*, this story features in Plutarch: *Plut. Vit. Thes.* 16–28.

128 *Stat. Theb.* 12.533–539.

129 See Augoustakis 2010, 23; Davis 2006, 140–141.

To generalise a little, the understanding of gender in Flavian epic, therefore, appears to be of a more essentialist and positivist nature than in Virgil's *Aeneid*, for example. Whereas Camilla is able to renounce her womanhood to such a point that she seems like a man in a female body, Silius' Asbyte appears more like a woman in drag—her performance fails to 'convince' the external narrator and the omnipotent male gaze of the reader, who views her primarily as a woman mimicking the male deeds of war. Patriarchal power relations, evident in the eroticising Amazon imagery, undermine Asbyte's adoption of a male social role and reinforce the idea of her different status from that of male warriors. There is an omnipresent, looming implication that, as a woman, she is inseparable from her body, and will sooner or later inevitably fall victim to its drives—either to the sex drive or to the death drive.

Domesticating the violent woman by means of sexual violence is one way of rendering her harmless and of restoring the normative power relations in the epic universe. Another way is to do the same in a less metaphorical way: to actually have a male civilising hero kill her off. The victory of a civilising hero over a dangerous woman is a classical topos most perfectly crystallised in the story of Perseus and Medusa, and many times repeated, for instance, in the above-mentioned Amazonomachy tales. In these stories, gender and ethnicity as categories of otherness are clearly articulated by means of each other, as the stories simultaneously depict both the conquest of civilisation over nature and the imposing of male control on dangerous women. Unsurprisingly, this ideology is clearly present in the episode of Asbyte's death. Only a few hundred lines after her first appearance, she is killed by a Saguntine named Theron, a priest of Hercules—as Augoustakis points out, the man is himself a mirror image of the Amazon-conquering god.<sup>130</sup> Silius depicts the death of the warrior maiden as particularly gory:

*tum saltu Asbyten conantem linquere pugnas/occupant, incussa gemina  
inter tempora clava,/ferventesque rotas turbataque frena pavore/disiecto  
spargit collisa per ossa cerebro;/ac rapta properans caedem ostentare  
bipenni,/amputat e curru revolutae virginis ora./necdum irae positae; celsa  
nam figitur hasta/spectandum caput; id gestent ante agmina Poenum,  
imperat, et propere currus ad moenia vertant.*

SIL. *Pun.* 2.197–205

<sup>130</sup> Sil. *Pun.* 2.148–159. Augoustakis 2010, 121–123. Further discussion of Hercules as the hero *par excellence* in the *Punica*, see Augoustakis 2003, 235; Bassett 1966, 258–259; Tipping 2009; Tipping 2010; Asso 2009, 189.

When Asbyte tried to flee from the battle, he leaped to seize her and struck her between her two temples with a club. He sprinkled the brain that poured from the shattered skull on the burning-hot wheels and on the bridle, disordered by the terror-stricken horses. And, eager to flaunt his killing of her, he snatched her double-edged axe and cut off the girl's head as she rolled out of the chariot. Nor was his anger yet abated: for he fixed the head on a tall spear for all to see, and ordered it to be carried in front of the Punic army and for the chariot to be promptly driven to the city walls.

Theron's slaughter of the warrior maiden and his possession of and mastery over her body are strikingly violent and humiliating: Asbyte, who throughout the narrative is an object of the male, fetishising gaze is now diminished into nothing but that. Her cut-off head—an allusion to Perseus' victory over Medusa—is paraded around as an unmistakable sign of the restoration of the naturalised dynamics of power. The message comes across loud and clear: the exotic, foreign violent woman—the Absolute Other—must be erased, either by domesticating her by means of sex and marriage, or by violently wiping her off the pages of the epic.

Silius' Asbyte, therefore, differs from Virgil's Camilla on a fundamental level: while Camilla is able to become an object of emulation to the male internal and external audiences, Asbyte, on the contrary, appears to be an archetypal other against whom Silius' Roman audience can define themselves. The fascination of the character is of a distinctly voyeuristic and objectifying kind, and gender and ethnicity work together, marking the warrior maiden as different from the reader in all respects. She is nothing but her female, foreign, animalistic body, and there is no way she can escape its drives—this is why she needs to be tamed by civilisation, either by submitting her sex drive to male control or by quelling the death drive by killing her off. The emphasis on Asbyte's radical difference simultaneously aims at distancing these uncontrollable corporeal drives from the internal and the external audiences: the warrior maiden is an abject, who embodies the uncomfortable aspects of the human psyche and whose death ostensibly 'purifies' the reader of these aspects.

At least partially, this difference between Virgil's and Silius' warrior women might be due to the different approaches to the issue of Roman-ness and foreignness in the Augustan and the Flavian periods, and in the Augustan and the Flavian war epics, in particular. As has often been noted, the fascination of the unknown and the unconventional delighted in the literary tastes of the Flavian era, which is unsurprising, given the multicultural nature of the Empire at this time. The constant discussion of the nature of Roman-ness and of who

is or who could become Roman marks Flavian literature—both poetry and prose—throughout, and often, gender is utilised as a complementary category of otherness in this discourse. Doubtless Asbytte, too, is in a sense a part of this tradition. Her distant homeland and wondrous birth increase the fascination of the character—Vinchesi rightly considers the warrior maiden as an amalgam of the epic tradition, ethnographic interest, moralism and the fascination of the marvellous.<sup>131</sup> Whereas Statius' Hippolyte represents the Absolute Other who is tamed and absorbed into the male ideology of the temporal scene, Silius' Asbytte, instead, represents the other who cannot be assimilated into the value system of the Roman society—or into the temporal scene in general—and who must, therefore, be erased in a showy manner from the narrative. Both episodes from Flavian war epic appear as extreme expressions of insecurity in the face of what is strange and unknown, and of the desire to control and oppress 'the other'. The morale of these stories seems to be that women, because of the innate gender difference, cannot become part of the male world of war, any more than foreigners can become 'real' Romans. The hierarchy of Flavian war epic is strict and essentialist: it is implied that women *can* serve the patriarchy, but only in the life-producing role assigned to them by men. One gets the impression that, in the same way, the inclusion and assimilation of the ethnic and cultural other to the Roman empire require domestication, subjugation and clearly defined roles in relation to the 'real' Romans. Arguably, these kinds of obsessive and anxious efforts to protect the collective self from the contaminating conflation with the other is a repetition of the primal abjection—an attempt to draw a clear line between the self and the other and to deny their underlying sameness.

For Virgil, the dynamics between the self and the other are very different, since they reflect the immediate aftermath of the civil war. The red thread of the *Aeneid* is the question of the unity and diversity of the Roman people—and, in particular, the relationship between Rome and Italy. As I have argued earlier, there is no clear-cut distinction between 'Roman' and 'other' in the Latin war, because the war itself is a process of forming Roman-ness—all sides of the conflict are potential others, and together they will constitute the Roman self. The character of the warrior maiden, I would suggest, contributes to this theme, and this also explains Camilla's exceptional role in the epic. As has often been pointed out, she appears to be an embodiment of the pre-Roman, primitive Italy. Camilla's entry into the temporal scene, therefore, is

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131 Vinchesi 2005, 109, 122. It has been suggested that the popularity of the Amazon theme in Flavian poetry derives from the romanticising and paradoxical nature of the phenomenon. See Vinchesi 2005, 116.

also symbolic of this kind of change on a societal level. Her transformation from a *venatrix* into a *bellatrix* implies and anticipates the irrevocable politicisation that sweeps over Italy. Just as civilisation sweeps over nature, so will *Romanitas* sweep over separate, distinct Italian identities and mold them into one.

However, it is remarkably clear that this is Camilla's choice, a decision actively made and executed by herself (and against the wishes of her protective goddess Diana). Camilla is not a female body that would constitute a *locus* for male imperial agency<sup>132</sup>—she, like the Italy that she stands for, is a plenipotentary agent in the union and in the assimilation. This is why Camilla's agency, action and subjectivity are significant for the ideological message of the poem. She cannot be examined as a female object of a male imperial conquest, for the simple reason that the latter part of the *Aeneid* is not a story about Roman imperial establishment, but about the emergence of a new identity based on diversity.

The narrative significance of Camilla's death strengthens this impression. Whereas Silius' Asbyte is violently written out of the narrative and never mentioned again, Camilla's death has a powerful narrative impact in terms of Italian identity. As I discussed in chapter three, the Laurentian matrons are inspired by her death to pursue heroic activity. They are taken by *amor patriae, ut videtur Camillam* and, imitating the warrior maiden's heroism, they rush to defend the walls of the city. Moreover, it is notable that Camilla's death closes the second-last book of the epic, and starts the collapse of the Italian resistance.<sup>133</sup> After her fall, the troops are disordered and scattered, easy pickings for the Trojan army. Accordingly, Virgil utilises Camilla's death as a fuse that triggers the collapse of the Italian side and thus enables the union of the peoples. She herself will not be part of the eventual union, but it is her death that makes possible the forming of a common identity. This is a new identity, the future *Romanitas*, into which her own people too will in time be absorbed.

Camilla, therefore, is simultaneously a symbol of the pre-Roman Italy and the symbol of the future Roman-ness. Her subjectivity and agency are important for the narrative as a whole, since they emphasise that she—like the culture that she stands for—is not the abject other, but a recognised, accepted and willing part of the collective Roman self. The significance of the Camilla episode for

132 Boyd, for example, represents this way of reading when she considers “alien effeminacy” to be a crucial theme in Camilla's story. Boyd 1992, 221, see also 214–215. See also West, who considers Camilla to be unheroic from the outset, on the basis of her putative feminine weakness. West 1985, 24.

133 Verg. *Aen.* 11.832–835, 11.868–915.

the narrative structure and the ideological content of Virgil's epic, therefore, is much greater than one might expect on the basis of the small number of lines where the warrior maiden appears.

It is therefore obvious that the different approaches by Virgil and Silius Italicus to the character of the warrior maiden reflect their different approaches to Roman identity. Although the association between the woman and her geographical home territory is part of both narratives, the poets exploit this connection for very different ends. While the Augustan poet strives to form a conception of 'us' by combining various groups of 'others', the Flavian poet, instead, defines 'us' by distinguishing it from the Absolute Other. For both purposes, the complex topic of women in arms provides a contextual framework against which the issue of cultural identity can be discussed.

#### 4 Fragile Warriors and the Questioning of the Male Subject Position

In the course of the present chapter, I have examined the gender dynamics in Roman war epic through the lens of an ideology that characterises female bodies as means of production and male bodies as weapons of destruction. In particular, I have given examples from the genre where this ideology is under examination: passages and storylines where it appears to be challenged, attacked or defended. If the armed violence of women is one side of this coin, the other side is the vulnerability of men: the failure to measure up to the epic standards of heroism and masculinity.

One way of thinking about gender performances in Roman epic is a line, where in the middle there are the normative gender performances naturalised by the patriarchal value system: manly men who kill in the name of the state, and feminine women who give birth for the same purpose. At one end of the line, there are women like the warrior maiden: 'abnormal' reversals of the normative gender system, who represent a clash between 'natural' sex and 'performative' gender. And at the other end of the line, we have those who are 'biologically' male and are supposed to grow into a role of an epic hero, but who get dragged from their male subject position and turned into penetrated and violated objects of the gaze: just as in the case of the warrior maiden, the body and the performance clash and disturb the clear-cut dichotomy between the genders. What makes the situation truly interesting, however, is that the opposite ends of this line actually appear to have a lot in common—so much, in fact, that instead of a linear image, it might be more appropriate to think of the epic gender system as a circle or a spectrum: the warrior women and the vulnerable men represent the different artic-

ulations of one and the same phenomenon. To make this argument more tangible, I will examine more closely a few young warriors from Flavian war epic.

The vagueness of gender identity and the anxieties of male adolescence are most elaborately discussed by Statius, who is drawn to the theme both in the *Thebaid* and in the *Achilleid*. In these epics, the poet examines the male process of growing up and becoming a hero through the characters of the young Achilles and Parthenopaeus. The particularly intriguing fact is that Statius deliberately appears to construct these characters as versions of Virgil's Camilla. In particular, Achilles' childhood—which I have already discussed in chapter three—almost exactly parallels that of Camilla. Camilla is motherless and was brought up in the wilderness by her father; Achilles is fatherless and was left to the care of Chiron the centaur by his mother. Isolation and alienation from the surrounding civilisation is a feature that marks the childhood of both: while Camilla was nursed on the milk of wild horses, Achilles boasts of having been fed only the flesh of wild beasts.<sup>134</sup> The animalistic aspects of their upbringing and the blurring of the line between man and beast are, therefore, strongly present in both stories.

Moreover, Achilles' military training in his childhood appears to strongly parallel that of Camilla. Virgil states about Camilla that

*Utque pedum primis infans vestigia plantis/institierat, iaculo palmas  
armavit acuto/spiculaque ex umero parvae suspendit et arcum.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.573–575

[a]nd when the child began to try her first steps, he armed her hands with a sharp spear, and hung a bow and arrows from the little girl's shoulder.

while Statius' Achilles claims that

*iam tunc arma manu, iam tunc cervice pharetrae,/et ferri properatus amor  
durataque multo/sole geluque cutis;—vix mihi bisse nos annorum torserat  
orbis/vita rudis, volucris cum iam praevertere cervos/et Lapithas cogebat  
equos praemissaque cursu/tela sequi—.*

STAT. *Achil.* 2.106–108, 2.110–113

<sup>134</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 11.570–573; Stat. *Achil.* 2.96–102. Statius' depiction of Achilles' youth has been examined from the viewpoint of masculinity in Barchiesi 2005, 55–58.

Already then I held weapons in my hand and carried a quiver around my neck; already then I felt the early love of war and had a skin hardened by much sun and cold weather. Barely was the twelfth year of my rough life full, when he already had me outrun swift deer and Lapith horses and follow on foot the spears I hurled.

The flinging of darts, the speed of his running—everything in this passage recalls Camilla. Moreover, *ferri properatus amor* seems like a deliberate parallel to Camilla's *amor telorum*.<sup>135</sup> It seems that both Camilla and Achilles are living in a strange in-between stage where they are out of touch with civilisation, yet spend their time preparing for their entry into the temporal scene (that is, warfare).<sup>136</sup> The nonexistent connection to the mother and the identification with the brutal, violent military males in their lives lead these children to dedicate their lives to the kind of violence that oscillates between civilised and barbaric, institutionalised and uncontrolled.

As is typical of his epic, Statius strengthens this message by repetition, when he depicts another explicit parallel to Camilla's childhood. In *Thebaid* 9, the Amazon Atalanta (whose maternal grief was discussed in chapter three) relates her memories of her son Parthenopaeus' childhood. Parthenopaeus too, having been raised in the wilderness by a warlike parent, was accustomed to the use of weapons from a young age. Atalanta states that

—*nec degener ille/sanguinis inque meos reptavit protinus arcus,/tela puer lacrimis et prima voce poposcit*—.

STAT. *Theb.* 9.619–621

—nor was he unworthy of my blood: immediately the boy crawled to my bow and with his first words begged me for arms, crying.

Unlike the mothers of Camilla and Achilles, Parthenopaeus' mother *has* been part of his life and his upbringing; however, since she is an Amazonic warrior woman, she has been present in a role that is more fathering than mothering. In effect, Parthenopaeus very much appears as an extension of his mother's warrior identity—as someone who carries on her heroic legacy in a very patrilineal manner.

<sup>135</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 11.583.

<sup>136</sup> Notice the model of Euripides' Hippolytus, a youth who forsakes society and sexual encounters, and withdraws into the woods. Hippolytus' situation is briefly discussed in Foley 1981, 147.

In all three cases—Camilla's, Achilles', and Parthenopaeus'—their exceptional upbringing takes place on the extreme periphery and on the margins of the narrative. Be that as it may, their childhood and youth are marked by a constant rehearsal for war, anticipating their eventual entry into society. The contradiction that Statius appears to treasure is that, although the upbringing of the young Achilles and Parthenopaeus is very similar to that of Camilla's, its results are very different. While Camilla is able to actively refuse her biologically predestined social role because of her exceptional upbringing, Statius' warrior boys instead struggle to fulfill theirs. Despite doing their very best to grow into the roles that the epic narrative expects of them, they end up being cast into a feminised narrative position, as marginalised objects of the reader's gaze. Achilles' mother kidnaps him and forces him to live in a female community disguised as a girl,<sup>137</sup> and Parthenopaeus suffers a *tristis mors* before he has time for heroic deeds: he falls in his first actual battle, penetrated by an enemy spear. In both episodes, the boys are gazed at and acted upon, deprived of all agency and narrative power.

It is also crucial to notice that, unlike in the case of Virgil's Camilla, the gender ambiguity of Statius' fragile youngsters clearly marks them as objects of sexual desire. As Sanna points out, one can perceive a strong voyeuristic and eroticising tendency in the way Statius depicts these youths—they are objects of desire to both the internal and external audience.<sup>138</sup> The poet describes their appearances with highly feminine overtones, stressing the silky glow of their skin, the softness of their bodies and the shine of their wavy hair.<sup>139</sup> In this sense, these characters bear a strong resemblance to the desirable *puer delicatus* archetype often discussed in the studies of ancient sexuality.<sup>140</sup> Their gender ambiguity understates their masculinity and positions them in the in-between state in respect to gender roles: although 'biologically' male, they non-

137 Stat. *Achil.* 1.198–396.

138 Sanna 2008, 199–205; see also Sanna 2004.

139 See e.g. Stat. *Achil.* 1.158–166; *Theb.* 9.879–883. For further discussion on certain physical features that were considered 'feminine' in Roman thinking, see Williams 2001, 139–144.

140 Sanna 2008, 197–198. While Sanna uses this expression freely, it is important to note that it is not completely unproblematic. As Skinner states, *puer delicatus* is an older man's 'boy-favourite', often of foreign origin and usually a slave or an ex-slave. Skinner 1997, 135. Obviously, the term cannot be applied in this sense to the young warriors of Roman epic—save for Silius' Cinyphs, who is explicitly described as 'Hannibal's favourite'. When discussing Achilles, Parthenopaeus and Euryalus, I use the term mainly to draw attention to the eroticised and feminised aspects of these youngsters, not to imply their alleged sexual relations with other men (or women, for that matter).

etheless fall into the category of non-*viri*, the penetrable others, whose gender performance fails to convince.

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that Camilla's successful performance in the male role and her ability to completely renounce her female body are due to her lack of a mother-child-bond and to the fact that she only ever had her father as 'the identifiable other'. In the case of Staius' young warriors, paradoxically, the overbearing presence of the mother suddenly emerges as the boys reach early adulthood, and from that moment on, this is actually what hinders them from growing into their male social roles. Thetis, who appears to have been absent for most of Achilles' childhood, suddenly kindles a strong interest in his life upon the arrival of the Trojan war. As Heslin has convincingly argued, the mother's obsessive effort to prevent Achilles' entry into the temporal scene appears as a desperate attempt to construct the son in her own image.<sup>141</sup> By dressing Achilles up as a girl and by confining him in the isolated all-female community at Scyros, Thetis is—metaphorically speaking—trying to keep Achilles in her womb, preventing him from breaking free and identifying with the Law of the Father. The case of Atalanta and Parthenopaeus is somewhat similar: while in Parthenopaeus' childhood, Atalanta appears to have performed as the identifiable other herself, preparing her son for hunt and war, when the war actually arrives, she suddenly falls into the 'feminine' role of a fearful mother, desperately clinging to her son.

Intriguingly, these dynamics are very similar to those between Camilla and her protective goddess Diana, who bitterly resents the girl's decision to ride to war. However, since Camilla's only 'mother-figure' is distant and divine, the girl remains free from the mother's suffocating presence. Because of this, she is able to successfully enter the temporal scene: in her case, the mother does not suddenly emerge to hold her back but, thanks to her strong identification with the father, she is able to maintain her faith in her 'manhood'. Parthenopaeus, on the contrary, is held back by his relationship with the mother who eventually, despite appearances, turns out to be more mothering than fathering. As it turns out, when Atalanta's 'inner femininity' leaks out in a burst of maternal anxiety, Parthenopaeus' gender performance is based on his imitation of a woman who has, after all, only been 'playing a man' herself—this damages Parthenopaeus' credibility in the role of a warrior and objectifies him in the eyes of the reader.

It is noteworthy that, eventually, both Achilles and Parthenopaeus are able to break free from the 'mother's womb' and enter the temporal scene. At Odysseus' arrival, Achilles finds the identifiable other that he has been looking for

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141 Heslin 2005, 128–129, 191, 291–292.

and gets in touch with his innate manliness and love of war.<sup>142</sup> As for Parthenopaeus, it is the war against Thebes that provides him with the male role models that he has been looking for and enables him to attempt a transformation from a quasi-Amazon into a 'real' warrior. However, he seems unable to break free from the textual marginalisation that Statius' narrative imposes on him. When Parthenopaeus falls, the eroticising imagery strongly stresses his objectified position and his lack of subjectivity. We read that

*cecidit laxata casside vultus, / aegraque per trepidos exspirat gratia visus, / et  
prensis concussa comis ter colla quaterque / stare negant, ipsisque nefas lac-  
rimabile Thebis, / ibat purpureus niveo de pectore sanguis.*

STAT. *Theb.* 9.879–883

His helmet undone, his face sinks and in his flickering eyes sad beauty dies. Three times, and now four, they clasp his hair and shake his neck that will not stand upright; and—an outrage lamentable even to Thebes itself—blood streams purple from his snow-white breast.

*niveus* and *purpureus* strongly recall the rhetoric of defloration: Parthenopaeus' failure in the male role seems to be emphasised as he is represented as the object of penetration.<sup>143</sup> One can also perceive a clear voyeuristic tone in the way the narrator draws attention to the boy's feminine beauty and to his drooping neck. The male gaze of the reader pierces him, just as the enemy spear has.

Parthenopaeus' death scene is clearly modeled on that of Camilla in the *Aeneid*: the similarities between the two are striking and impossible to miss. In the end of *Aeneid* 11, pierced by Arruns' arrow, Camilla collapses to the ground:

*Illa manu moriens telum trahit, ossa sed inter / ferreus ad costas alto stat  
vulnere mucro. / labitur exsanguis, labuntur frigida leto / lumina, purpureus  
quondam color ora reliquit. / tum sic exspirans Accam ex aequalibus unam /  
adloquitur, fida ante alias quae sola Camillae / quicum partiri curas, atque  
haec ita fatur: / 'hactenus, Acca soror, potui: nunc vulnus acerbum / confi-  
cit, et tenebris nigrescunt omnia circum. / effuge et haec Turno mandata  
novissima perfer: / succedat pugnae Troianosque arceat urbe, / iamque vale.'  
simul his dictis linquebat habenas / ad terram non sponte fluens. tum fri-*

142 Heslin 2005, 286–294.

143 The eroticised overtones of *niveus* and *purpureus* are pointed out by Todd, in his study of Lavinia's blush in *Aeneid* 12. Todd 1980, 29–30. See also Sfyroeras' examination of color symbolism in the *Achilleid* and its Homeric models. Sfyroeras 2014, esp. 235–245.

*gida toto/paulatim exsobvit se corpore, lentaque colla/et captum leto posuit  
caput, arma relinquens,/vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.*

VERG. *Aen.* 11.816–831

She tugs at the weapon with her dying hand, but between the bones, in the deep wound close to the ribs, the iron point stands fixed. She slips down feebly, and her eyes, cold with death, sink; the former rosy complexion leaves her face. Thus dying, she then addresses Acca, one of her age-mates and loyal to Camilla beyond all others, the only one to share her troubles. And she speaks thus: “This far, Acca my sister, I was was able to make it: now the grievous wound consumes me and everything around me turns dim and dark. Flee, and take my last orders to Turnus: he should succeed me in battle and keep the Trojans out of the city. And now farewell.” While she speaks these words, she at once lets go of the bridle and slips unwillingly to the ground. Then, turning cold, she is little by little set free from her body altogether. She lays down her limp neck and her head that is captured by death; she lets go of her weapons, and with a moan her life flees resentfully to the shadows below.

Scholars who have argued for Camilla’s failure in her male social role often point out that the moment when she is wounded is precisely when she fails in the role of a warrior. This is usually explained by the eroticising rhetoric that is omnipresent in the episode—figuratively, death strips Camilla of her maidenhood and returns her to a role of a woman.<sup>144</sup> The sexual imagery in the episode has been studied, for instance, by Fowler, who states that the expression *virgineus cruor*—the spear penetrating into Camilla’s breast and drinking her ‘virginal’ blood—is an obvious allusion to defloration. Fowler considers Virgil’s allusion to marriage and motherhood a distinct reproach of Camilla’s “unnatural” way of life and a reminder of the naturalised female role of a wife and a mother that she failed to fulfill.<sup>145</sup> While the argument in favour of these kinds of strongly moralistic overtones arguably says more about the reader than about the text, it is undeniable that in a sense, death does seem to return Camilla into her body—it forces her to acknowledge the body that she has successfully renounced all her life. This is the only moment in Camilla’s story where she is clearly and undeniably objectified, eroticised

144 Fowler 1987, 196. Compare Camilla’s death with the deaths of the sacrificial maidens of the Graeco-Roman tradition: Eur. *IA* 1540–1580; Eur. *IT.*; Eur. *Hec.* 177–437; Eur. *Tro.* 260–270, 622–629; Lucr. 1.80–101; Ov. *Met.* 13.441–480, 12.24–38.

145 Fowler 1987, 195–196.

and temporarily robbed of subjectivity—and yet, as she falls, she delivers a speech that is pure reason and political interest. At her moment of falling, Camilla, much like Virgil's Dido, fights back against the inevitable marginalisation and erasure that await her. Like Dido, she shows at the last minute that although her body is getting the better of her, she is still a fully functioning rational being, deeply committed to the logic of the symbolic order. Parthenopaeus, on the other hand, is not granted such a glorious or politically-minded exit: in his last words, he only worries about his mother, and about the grief that his death will cause her. In particular, his boyish innocence and the stress laid on a strong mother-son bond further stress Parthenopaeus' failure to become a warrior fully immersed in the temporal scene of politics and war.

It is intriguing that Parthenopaeus' dying scene is far from the only one modeled on Camilla's. As Fowler has noted, Camilla's death is actually varied and recalled multiple times in the *Aeneid*, when the poet depicts the deaths of the male 'virgins' of the epic: young and inexperienced warriors.<sup>146</sup> For instance, the deaths of Pallas and Lausus in book ten are consistently marked by a rhetoric similar to what we find in the scene depicting the fall of the warrior maiden. The vocabulary that implies penetration, and the combination of aesthetic, erotic and tragic elements all make clear that, in a sense, these youngsters, too, are "deflowered in death".<sup>147</sup> The best example is doubtless Euryalus' death in book nine:

—*sed viribus ensis adactus/transabiit costas et candida pectora rumpit./  
volvitur Euryalus leto, pulchrosque per artus/it cruor inque umeros cervix  
conlapsa recumbit:/purpureus veluti cum flos succisus aratro/languescit  
moriens, lassove papavera collo/demisere caput pluvia cum forte gravantur.*

VERG. *Aen.* 9.431–437

But the sword, driven with strength, passes through the ribs and splits the white breast. Euryalus rolls over, dying; blood runs over his beautiful limbs, and his collapsing head sinks down on his shoulder. Just as a purple

146 Fowler 1987, 188–192; noted also by Van Nortwick 2013, 149.

147 Fowler 1987, 188–192, 194; Pyy 2010, 196–201. See, e.g., the death of Pallas, Verg. *Aen.* 10.479–489; a striking similarity to Camilla's death can be perceived especially in 10.486–487: *ille rapit calidum frustra de vulnere telum:/una eademque via sanguis animusque sequuntur*, compare with 11.816–817: *Illa manu moriens telum trahit, ossa sed inter/ferreus ad costas alto stat vulnere mucro*. Van Nortwick discusses Turnus' death from a similar viewpoint: van Nortwick 2013, 149.

flower, when cut down by a plough, droops and dies, or as poppies, with a weary neck, let their heads sink when weighed down by heavy rain.

The beautiful and tragic depiction of Euryalus' death clearly recalls Camilla; it appears that the poet deliberately assimilates these characters by stressing their fragility and their tragic heroism. Moreover, the young victims' softness and grace are evidently present in book twelve of the *Punica* too, where Silius depicts the death of the young Cinyps, Hannibal's favourite:

*solvitur omne decus leto, niveosque per artus/it Stygius color et formae popularatur honores./ambrosiae cecidere comae, violataque cervix/marmoreum in iugulum collo labente recumbit.*

SIL. *Pun.* 12.243–246

Death took away all his grace: the colour of the underworld spread over his snow-white limbs and ruined the beauty of his appearance. His ambrosial locks fell, his neck drooped, and the violated head hung down over the marble-white throat.

*solvitur omne decus leto* seems a strange statement to make, since Silius' detailed depiction of Cinyps' death in fact appears to strongly stress the beautiful and alluring elements of the youth's appearance. The disordered state of the boy's hair adds an erotic touch to his beauty (just as in the case of Parthenopaeus) and the vocabulary (*violata*; *recumbo*) underlines the innuendo of sexual intercourse. Cinyps' death is an excellent example of the epic tradition where penetration by weapons and penetration by a phallos appear as structurally equivalent—without a context, it would be difficult to tell whether this is a battle that sounds like sex, or sex that sounds like a battle. In a way, this kind of a depiction that casts the victim into a feminised role of a sexual object, works in the same way as in Camilla's case, when the spear was described as 'nursing' on her virginal blood. But whereas in Camilla's case, it draws the reader's attention to her body and points to its unused potential to become a means of production, in the case of these youngsters, it underlines their bodies' failure to become weapons of destruction.

Because the indissoluble connection between sex and death appears to be of such crucial significance to the metaphorical language of Roman war epic, it is worth discussing briefly how this connection works in the construction of a narratological subject position for the reader of epic. The connection between power and penetrability in ancient Roman culture is a much disputed topic. The Foucauldian idea of a Greek polis as divided into the groups of "the polit-

ically empowered and not, the penetrators and the penetrated” has been criticised as unsuitable to Rome, a society where, instead of binary absolutes, one finds a finely nuanced social hierarchy and where the line that distinguishes between the categories of *vir* and non-*vir* is much more blurry than in classical Athens.<sup>148</sup> The dying young warriors in the *Aeneid*, in the *Punica* and, in particular, in the *Thebaid*, certainly seem to manifest this ambiguity: they are ephobic and alluring, yet valiant, truculent and brave in battle—perfect examples of falling in between the categories of ‘the penetrators and the penetrated’.

It is particularly intriguing to note how not only sex and violence but sex, violence, gaze and language get closely entwined in the discourse concerning penetration in Roman culture. Walters and Fredrick have pointed out that the different forms of bodily violability were structurally equivalent in the Roman thinking—the social hierarchy and power structures were based on “bodily integrity and freedom, or the lack of it, from invasion from the outside”.<sup>149</sup> However, the phenomenon concerns much more than just sex or violence; it has to do with the control over one’s personal space, as well as over the impact that the surrounding world has on one. It is not only pain, but also things such as hunger, disease, fatigue, and pleasure that can “penetrate” the body and reduce a man into something less than a *vir*.<sup>150</sup> At its most extreme, this thinking can be taken to mean that to be affected by anything (*pati*) is to be penetrated, to be in a ‘womanly’ role, turned from a subject into an object.<sup>151</sup>

With regard to the theoretical scope of this book, the idea that follows from this notion is particularly important: namely, that in pleasure and pain, it is the *body* that penetrates the *mind*, thus destroying one’s subjectivity. As Fredrick puts it, any intense bodily experience “cripples one’s ability to think, to exist as a discursive subject”.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, pain can be “language-destroying”—as a result of the focus on the body, the self disintegrates. When examined in Kristevan terms, we could say that extreme pain and pleasure are experiences *located in the body*, outside the symbolic order, and to be an object of them *is* to be penetrated, to be dragged back into the semiotic *chôra*, from the male/mind/language category to the female/body/object category. I would suggest that this is exactly the reason why Camilla, in the end, proves to be more ‘manly’ than many men of Roman epic: in her final moments, even if she is

148 Fredrick 2002, 9–10, 239. As an example, Fredrick mentions freedmen as operating ‘somewhere in between’, with a possibly unpolarised sexuality and identity. Fredrick 2002, 242.

149 Walters 1997, 30, 37–39; Fredrick 2002, 237.

150 Fredrick 2002, 245; see also Walters 1997, 39.

151 Walters 1997, 30. See also above footnote 112.

152 Fredrick 2002, 238.

painfully reminded of her female body, she is able to suppress its needs and to avoid its interference with her mind. But the effeminate young warriors of epic—most evidently, Parthenopaeus and Cinyps—fall without such an opportunity to manifest their control over their bodies and their commitment to the symbolic order. At the close of their stories, they, like many epic women, are reduced to *nothing but* their bodies: objects of the penetrating weapon, the penetrating gaze and (it is implied), the penetrating phallos.

In a sense, these young warriors seem to exist in the narrative only as mirrors that reflect the empowered manliness of the proper *virī* of the story. Their unfinished and fragile masculinity stresses the manliness of those who kill them. Hence, they become ‘surrogate women’ through whom the real men of the epic testify their manhood. However, I would argue that it is not only for the benefit of this internal audience that the young *morituri* are shaped as exemplary non-*virī*—more importantly, these victims invite the external audience (the reader) to construct *his* manliness and subjectivity in contrast to them. In the stories of the dying young warriors of Roman war epic, the detailed and graphic depictions of drooping necks, pierced chests and locks drenched in blood vividly evoke a tableau of penetration where the object is completely helpless, otherised and impossible to be identified with. While the external reader observes this picture from the outside, he identifies with the violator and all but participates in the act of violation, penetrating the fragile youngster with his omnipotent gaze.<sup>153</sup> He adopts an active role in the narrative, and momentarily becomes an empowered penetrator himself. Therefore, it is justifiable to argue that these episodes are in fact intended to construct, not only the empowered masculinity of the male protagonists of the stories, but also (and more importantly) that of the elite male reader. The fragile youngsters get objectified and marginalised as a result of a collaboration and an interaction between the author and the reader and, after serving their narrative purpose, they are violently erased from the epic.

The examples discussed in this chapter demonstrate in a vivid manner how the conflict between the assumed biological sex and the performed gender in Roman war epic can be used to manipulate and steer the reader’s emotions and sympathies. The ideological undertone typical of ancient patriarchal societies,

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153 It has often been argued that the violating (penetrating) gaze is primarily associated with male subjectivity in ancient literature. In a way, it could be considered as important a building block of the symbolic order as language is, and as complementary to it—the world is constructed first by observing, then by naming the observed. Building on Jay’s reading of Derrida, Fredrick speaks of phallogocentricism, a connection between the phallus, representation, and the eye. Fredrick 2002, 2.

according to which the male body is for killing and the female body for giving birth, is continuously challenged, defended, and called into question again in the epic tales about women who take up arms and men who are penetrated by them. In this intertextual and allusive epic interaction, the projected reader is challenged to assess his own subjectivity, since the abject other might come to greet him either in the armour of a mythical Greek hero or in that of a Numidian Amazon queen—and the epic subject, on the other hand, in the form of a Virgilian warrior maiden.

## Sabine Successors? The Failure of Female Mediation

The ends and closures of Roman war epic are themes that have generated a great deal of academic study.<sup>1</sup> The end of war is an event that usually anticipates the end of the whole poem and strongly determines its closing ethos. For the ideological content of the epic, the end of the conflict can be considered an equally important structural point as its beginning. Against this background, it might seem somewhat odd or surprising that Roman war epics rarely present a harmonious closure: more often than not, the narrative seems to be left unfinished, or the ending is confusing, since it directly contradicts or ignores something that has happened earlier.<sup>2</sup> The best example is the much-disputed ending of the *Aeneid*. The episode where *pius* Aeneas thrusts his sword into Turnus' breast, ignoring his pleas for mercy, has given rise to so many differing readings concerning Virgil's moral code and the ethics of the *Aeneid* that they form a branch of their own among scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

The other surviving Roman war epics do not appear to offer any much greater feeling of cohesion and closure. The *Pharsalia* breaks off in book ten, leaving the reader in doubt about how the poem would have ended—or whether the confusingly abrupt end is, in fact, deliberate and the poet's final note on the topic of civil war. The *Argonautica* is unquestionably incomplete, and ends without even hinting at the approaching end. Of Statius' *Achilleid*, only one and a half books survive. The situation is not much easier in the case of the *Thebaid* and the *Punica*, epics that were completed and that have survived in their entirety. Although an articulate and indisputable end is achieved in these poems, it is in both cases ambiguous and morally confusing in a manner

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1 For studies of closure in Roman epic, see Dietrich 1999; Putnam 1990; Putnam 1995; Fantham 1997; Hardie 1993; Hardie 1997, 139–162.

2 This feature can be seen in Homeric epic, too. De Jong, who has examined closure in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, points out that the lack of formalised endings has been linked to the oral background of these poems. De Jong 2007, 19. In Roman war epic of the early Principate, this naturally cannot be the reason—it seems more likely that the authoritative Homeric example influenced the Roman poets and had an impact on their ways of dealing with ending and closure.

3 See e.g. Quinn 1968, 270–278; Putnam 1990; Putnam 1995, 172–243, Gill 1997, 228–241; Galinsky 1988.

similar to the *Aeneid*. The *Thebaid* ends with *nefas* conquering every positive value cherished in the Roman worldview. After the protagonists have been wiped off the stage, social harmony is ostensibly restored by Theseus, who takes over the corrupt Thebes and ends Creon's tyranny. However, the moral ambiguity of Theseus' character makes the reader doubt about the peace and prosperity of his reign. Because of the gloomy overtones of the scene, many scholars have argued that the Theban cycle, marked by violence and self-destruction, represents a pattern of *nefas* that even the destruction of Oedipus' family cannot set right.<sup>4</sup>

The *Punica* has a different but nonetheless ambiguous ending. While the narrator rejoices in the end of the second Punic War, he simultaneously reminds the reader that this is anything but the end of trouble for the Romans.<sup>5</sup> The victory at the war, while it marks the beginning of Rome's mastery over the Mediterranean, is represented as the moral peak of the Roman people, from whence the inevitable direction is decline—a moral decay that will culminate in a civil war.<sup>6</sup> This means that the ambiguity that characterises the endings of Roman war-centred epics, from the *Aeneid* onwards, is strongly present in Silius Italicus' patriotic poem too.<sup>7</sup> All in all, the end of war in Roman war epics generally appears to pose more questions than it answers: this is a feature that, at first sight, would seem to conflict with the genre's fondness for master narratives and teleological progressions. As Hardie puts it, epic is a genre that “strives for totality and completion”; at the same time, however it is characterised by constant instability.<sup>8</sup> The continuous tension

4 The ending of the *Thebaid* is a disputed subject; a prevalent view is that Statius closes the epic with the same desperation that marks it throughout, or at least with very ambiguous overtones concerning the moral issues. See e.g. Hershkowitz 1998, 296–301; Pagán 2000, 434–448; Ganiban 2007, 212–232; McNelis 2007, 152–177. For an alternative reading, see Fantham, who argues that the epic can be interpreted as having an optimistic ending. Fantham 1997. Bessone discusses the ending from the broader perspective of Flavian imperial ideology. Bessone 2013, 101–105.

5 Sil. *Pun.* 17.618–654.

6 In *Pun.* 10.657–658, Silius states that *haec tum Roma fuit. post te cui vertere mores/si stabat fatis, potius, Carthago, maneres*; as Dominik puts it, “Carthage is ruined militarily by defeat but Rome is ruined morally by victory”. Dominik 2003, 495. A future decline is implied already in Sil. *Pun.* 3.575–585, and is made explicit in book fifteen by the threat of the goddess *Voluptas*, who claims that *venient, venient mea tempora quondam, cum docilis nostris magno certamine Roma/serviet imperiis, et honos mihi habebitur uni* (Sil. *Pun.* 15.125–127). Here, Silius appears to recall the Roman historiographic tradition that often viewed the Punic Wars as the origin of the Roman decline. Val. Max. 7.2.3; Sall. *Cat.* 10.1, 11.4–8, *Iug.* 41.1–5; Vell. Pat. 1.12.2–7, 2.1–3. Jacobs 2010, 124–125.

7 See Dietrich 1999, 42.

8 Hardie 1993, 1–3.

between closing the text and keeping it open is a feature most characteristic of the war epics of the Roman Principate.<sup>9</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the final moments of war and in the final pages of the epics, women often appear as central characters. In a sense, this reflects the traditions of Graeco-Roman literature in general: we can see the deep-rooted idea of women as the victims of war who question its meaning and purpose—examined in detail in the previous chapters—crystallised in the literary archetype of a female mediator. The woman who places herself between the warring parties and uses her familial authority to end the hostilities is a character that Roman legendary history was particularly fond of.<sup>10</sup> The story about the Sabine women is the best-known story where women, on their own initiative, intervene to stop the war.<sup>11</sup> Another famous example is Coriolanus' mother Veturia, a legendary matron who prevents the Volscian attack against Rome.<sup>12</sup> These women use their emotional and social power to prevent, delay or end an armed conflict—they place themselves in between the battle fronts, transfer the enmity between the men to themselves, and stand against the patriarchal power in order to protect the patrilineal continuity.

These exemplary stories created a positive model for Roman women to emulate, and conveyed an idea that, in difficult times, traditional female virtues could come to the rescue and save the day. The idea of female self-sacrifice as the final obstacle standing in the way of an unjust war therefore characterises the Roman legendary past and defines the appropriate political activity of women as peace-making and mediating.<sup>13</sup> It is also crucial to note that, because these stories were so essential to the Romans' perception of their common past, the kind of female virtue that was depicted in them was gradually established as an important defining factor in Roman identity.

It is obvious that models such as the Sabine women and Veturia shaped the Roman epic poets' understanding of the female role at the end of war, and affected their ways of interpreting elements from Roman history and from classical mythology. Nevertheless, while the legacy of Roman historiography is clearly strong in war epic, it is intriguing that in this respect, the differences between the two genres are often more evident than their similarities. There is a dark and threatening overtone—an aura of violence and destruction—that marks the peaceful efforts of the epic women, and usually dooms them to fail-

9 Dietrich 1999, 43.

10 Ganiban 2007, 152–159.

11 Liv. 1.9–13; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.30–33, 2.45–46; Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 19.

12 Liv. 2.40; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.44–54; Val. Max. 5.2.1a; Plut. *Vit. Cor.* 33–36.

13 Pomeroy 1975, 186.

ure from the very outset. In order to understand why this is so, one must go back, and examine epic women's role in the development of the conflict, starting from the beginning of the war.

### 1 The Futility of *mora*, the Failure of Mediation: Mixing and Juxtaposing Epic with Historiography

A typical way of opposing war and violence in Roman literature is via the tactic of delay—or *mora*, as it is sometimes called.<sup>14</sup> Generally, the *mora* theme means that one or more of the characters endeavour to postpone the crisis, regardless of whether they know that these efforts are in vain.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the internal and the external audiences are usually well aware of the futility of the attempt. It is notable that, when the *mora* theme appears in war-centred epic, the delayer practically never offers a valid alternative to war; this is what makes her or his attempt all the more feeble and ineffective.

In certain situations, *mora* can develop into more active mediation between the warring parties. Mediators are generally more confident about their cause than delayers, and often have some genuine chance of getting their way. Moreover, the mediator usually offers some sort of an alternative to the war, and is able to imagine the peaceful coexistence of the warring parties after the conflict is over.

In Roman historiography, in particular, women tend to play crucial roles in the *mora/mediatrix* tradition—and this does not concern the legendary past alone, but is a phenomenon that can be observed in Roman authors' depictions of the more recent, recorded history. Outstanding examples of women acting as both delayers and mediators can be found especially in the accounts of the civil war period. Appian, Plutarch and Velleius Paterculus represent both Julia and Octavia as maintainers of peace between the men in their family: both women are praised for having been the only thing that held the triumvirates together—until the inevitable collapse.<sup>16</sup> In this literary tradition, the woman is in the first place an instrument who, through her position in the patriarchal family structure, links the enemies to each other. Because of her unique rela-

14 For the definition and function of *mora* in epic, see Ganiban 2007, 152–175; Schetter 1960, 115–116.

15 Ganiban has studied the Homeric, the Virgilian and the Lucanian influence on the *mora* topos in Statius' *Thebaid*; see Ganiban 2007, 152–153, 156, 158–159.

16 On Julia, e.g., App. *B Civ.* 2.19; Vell. Pat. 2.47.2.; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 23; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 23.4–5; on Octavia, e.g., Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 31.2–3, 35.1–3, 54.3.

tionship with both sides of the conflict, she can operate ‘behind the scenes’ to mediate the conflicting goals of her husband and her birth family.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the grounding principle of this literary tradition, and the matter that enables the women’s mediating activity, is that the woman is understood to be an outsider in the conflicts of men on the grounds of her sex. She is a non-political creature by nature, driven primarily by her pursuit for familial harmony and by her need to secure the generational continuity. This outsider status enables her to distance her own person from the conflict and remain, in a sense, impartial. The characteristically Roman issue of the woman’s conflicting loyalties towards her husband and her birth family is crucial to this theme: the high praise that Julia and Octavia receive is largely due to their ability to remain loyal to both directions and to distance themselves from the political content of the conflict. Correspondingly, women of the late Republic who failed to do precisely this are judged harshly in the literary sources. Skinner argues that Clodia Metelli’s bad reputation was largely due to the fact that she openly took her brother’s side in his particular rivalries, regardless of the tension between him and her husband.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, the ability not to choose sides was considered the ultimate feminine virtue that, when practiced to perfection, could maintain peace in the entire Republic. On the other hand, having an ulterior agenda and meddling in political affairs for one’s own benefit could easily lead to the public defamation of a Roman elite woman. It shattered the illusion of the temporal scene—that is, the political affairs—as the male domain, and of the female domestic *pietas* as a *force majeure* that could stand in the way of war when things went awry.

In Roman war epic, the adaptations of the *mora/mediatrix* theme often differ drastically from the historiographic tradition. For instance, whereas the mediating women are many and memorable in the works of Augustan historiographers, their coeval Virgil makes relatively little use of this storyline.<sup>19</sup> When he does so, he leans considerably more towards the *mora* than the *mediatrix* theme. In the *Aeneid*, women do not run *inter tela volantia*,<sup>20</sup> and in the few episodes where they try to delay the violence, they do not appear to have much

17 For further discussion of the significance of family relations for political alliances, see e.g. Harders 2008, 51–59, 281–288; Bauman 1994, 91–93.

18 Skinner 1983, 280. For Clodius’ conflicts with his political adversaries, see Gruen 1997, 95–98, 255–258. On Clodia’s role as an intermediary, Cic. *Att.* 2.9.1, 2.14.1. For Cicero’s accusations of Clodia, see Cic. *Att.* 2.12.2; Cic. *Cael.* 20.50, 32.78, 50. Skinner 1983, *passim*; Skinner 2011, 1–19; Butrica 2002, 507–516; Harders 2008: 215–248.

19 In addition to the stories about the Sabine women and Veturia, see also the less happy tale of the Horatii and the Curiatii: Liv. 1.24–26; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.13–22.

20 Liv. 1.13.1.

confidence in themselves. Instead, their efforts to delay the inevitable seem weak and doomed from the outset. In book twelve, when Turnus is departing for a duel against Aeneas, both Amata and Latinus strive to change his mind.<sup>21</sup> First, the king, who blames himself for Turnus' inevitable demise, entreats him to surrender and save his life. When Turnus remains unmoved by his arguments, Amata, in turn, steps in:

*At regina nova pugnae conterrita sorte/flebat et ardentem generum moritura tenebat: 'Turne, per has ego te lacrimas, per si quis Amatae/tangit honos animum: spes tu nunc una, senectae/tu requies miserae, decus imperiumque Latini/te penes, in te omnis domus inclinata recumbit./unum oro: desiste manum committere Teucris./qui te cumque manent isto certamine casus/et me, Turne, manent; simul haec invisa relinquam/lumina nec generum Aenean captiva videbo.'*

VERG. *Aen.* 12.54–63

But the queen, terrified by this new turn of the conflict, wept and, ready to die, clutched her zealous son-in-law: "Turnus, by these tears, by whatever esteem for Amata that may yet touch your heart—you are now my only hope, the repose of my miserable old age; the honour and power of Latinus are in your hands, on you our entire falling house leans—I beg you this one thing: desist from joining combat with the Trojans. Whatever disasters await you in that battle await me too, Turnus; at the same time with you I will leave this hateful light of life, and will not, taken captive, see Aeneas as my son."

As I noted in chapter two, Amata is the prime example of a passionate epic woman driven by her bodily drives. Frustrated by her constant marginalisation and her lack of influence, she is inclined to forsake reason and repeatedly behaves like a raving lunatic. Here, once again, Amata's passionate and self-destructive speech—modeled on the speeches of Hecuba and Andromache in the *Iliad*—appears as a direct antithesis to her husband's composed and reasonably argued pleas.<sup>22</sup> Whereas Latinus' requests are rational, Amata is all emotion—furthermore, her pleas ignore the interests of the community, since they are all about her and her personal suffering. Both approaches, nevertheless, turn out to be equally ineffective. One look at the blushing Lavinia

21 The episode is strongly modelled on Hom. *Il.* 22.37–92, where Priam and Hecuba together try to stop Hector from meeting Achilles in a duel.

22 Hom. *Il.* 22.82–89, 6.405–439.

is enough to excite Turnus to rush more eagerly to arms.<sup>23</sup> The intervention is so strikingly weak and ineffective that it appears to completely undermine the Roman historiographic tradition concerning women's mediating roles.

This inefficient delay is repeated about a hundred lines later, when Juno sends Turnus' sister, the water-nymph Iuturna, to protect him in battle and to prevent his duel with Aeneas.<sup>24</sup> Iuturna's help is rejected by Turnus who, upon hearing about Amata's death, is stricken with grief and accepts his own forthcoming doom in a fatalistic manner.<sup>25</sup> Overlooking Turnus' rejection of her help, Iuturna continues to guard his steps until Jupiter himself eventually sends down *dirae* to drive the nymph from the battlefield.<sup>26</sup> The Iuturna episode is a textbook example of useless, yet hopeful, *mora*—a frustrating fight against the inevitable destiny. Its sole function appears to be to depict Juno's final intrusion into the war, and to anticipate the reconciliation between her and Jupiter.<sup>27</sup>

Virgil therefore deliberately distances himself from the historiographic tradition that his coevals represent. His female characters are a far cry from the courageous Sabine women. In the epic universe of the *Aeneid*, the teleological drive of war and violence cannot be stopped with women's tears—apparently, all they can do is to start it.

The pessimistic approach towards women's ability to delay conflicts is evident also in the epics of Lucan and Statius. Not only are the failures of *mora* and mediation more repetitive in the works of Virgil's epic successors, but their ideological significance seems to be accentuated further. In the *Aeneid*, the failures of Amata and Iuturna to protect Turnus are firmly in line with the teleological drive of the epic, and with the optimistic idea concerning the future union of the Trojans and the Italians—in a sense, the women's efforts *must* fail in order that a new, peaceful regime can be established. This Virgilian hopefulness is, however, completely absent from the *Pharsalia* and the *Thebaid*. In Lucan's civil war epic, *mora* is embodied in the person of Julia, whose marriage to Pompey was supposed to maintain peace between the triumvirs. Here, the remarkable difference between epic and historiography can be particularly well observed: whereas Livy and Plutarch repeatedly praise Julia for her mediating work, in the *Pharsalia* her role as an arbiter is never actualised.<sup>28</sup> Lucan only states that she *could* have been that person—he never admits that, for a good

23 Verg. *Aen.* 12.64–84.

24 Verg. *Aen.* 12.134–160.

25 Verg. *Aen.* 12.468–485, 12.623–683.

26 Verg. *Aen.* 12.780–790, 12.843–886.

27 Verg. *Aen.* 12.791–842.

28 Liv. *Per.* 106; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 23; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 53.

while, she actually *was*. Even Julia's ghost does not raise a finger to reconcile Caesar and Pompey; when she appears to Pompey before the battle of Pharsalia, she is more of a threatening Fury than a peaceful arbiter:<sup>29</sup>

—*diri tum plena horroris imago/visa caput maestum per hiantes Iulia terras/tollere et accenso furialis stare sepulcro.*

LUC. *Phar.* 3.9–11

—Then Julia, a ghost full of dread and horror, was seen raising her sad head above the gaping earth and standing frenzied on her kindled funeral pyre.

Julia's frightening appearance is made scarier by her speech, where she threatens to haunt Pompey until his death—a death that the civil war will soon bring about. “My shadows, my ghost, will never let you forget, Magnus, that you are Caesar's son-in-law” (*numquam tibi, Magne, per umbras/perque meos manes genero non esse licebit*), she states, but this reference to her role as a link between the adversaries is not peaceful, but rather increases the hostility.<sup>30</sup> In effect, Julia's appearance only excites Pompey's fear and battle lust, and makes him rush more eagerly to arms.

The poet also stresses Julia's wasted potential as an arbiter, stating that

*Nam pignora iuncti/sanguinis et diro ferales omine taedas/abstulit ad manes Parcarum Iulia saeva/intercepta manu. Quod si tibi fata dedissent/maiores in luce moras, tu sola furem/inde virum poteras atque hinc retinere parentem/armatasque manus excusso iungere ferro,/ut generos soceris mediae iunxere Sabinae./Morte tua discussa fides, bellumque movere/permisum ducibus.*

LUC. *Phar.* 1.111–120

For when Julia was cut off by the cruel hand of fate, she bore with her to the underworld the promise of offspring united by blood and the wedding torches which the terrible omen had turned into funeral torches. If only Fate had granted you a longer life, Julia, only you could then have restrained the fury of your husband on one side and your father on the other. You might have struck down their swords and made them clasp

29 Luc. *Phar.* 3.8–35.

30 Luc. *Phar.* 3.31–32.

their armed hands, as the Sabine women, stepping between the sons- and the fathers-in-law, joined them together. But loyalty was quashed by your death, and it allowed the generals to pursue war.

The fact that the narrator explicitly mentions the Sabine simile looks like a deliberate attempt to underline Julia's failure to rise to the level set by her legendary paragons. It is a marked comparison between the good old legendary times and the hopeless decay of the late Republic.

The bitterness and the disappointment at Julia's wasted potential run through the *Pharsalia*, as the poet repeatedly refers to Pompey as Caesar's *gener*, reminding the reader of the broken family bond between them.<sup>31</sup> It would also seem that with the poet's hindsight, Lucan constructs this female failure to mediate and maintain peace as a feature that marks the Roman civil wars throughout. Before relating Julia's death, he explains the origins of the civil war:

*Dividitur ferro regnum, populique potentis,/quae mare, quae terras, quae  
totum possidet orbem,/non cepit fortuna duos.*

LUC. *Phar.* 1.109–111

The kingly power was divided by the sword; and the prosperity of the mighty people, that possessed sea and land and the whole wide world, was not enough for two.

The reader instantly recalls the failure of not only the first, but also the second triumvirate to divide the *orbis* between the commanders. By emphasising Julia's unrealised potential to maintain peace in the empire, Lucan therefore hints at Octavia's future failure to do so. Women's failed attempts to fulfill their mediating roles become the milestones of the history of the civil wars.

The whole situation seems paradoxical and marked with a cruel irony; civil war is a situation where the familial and the political spheres intermingle and the warring parties are closely related to each other, and this provides optimal circumstances for female mediation. The stage is set for the successors of the Sabines to save the day—but, against all odds, these efforts fail, and the women's family-driven mediation proves inadequate to solve the political crisis that underlies the situation. In the *Pharsalia*, the ideal of a virtuous *mediatrix*

31 Luc. *Phar.* 1.289–290, 2.652, 3.31–32, 4.188, 4.802, 6.5, 6.12, 6.304–305, 7.611, 7.723, 7.806, 8.555, 9.952, 9.1015, 9.1026, 9.1049, 9.1055, 9.1058, 9.1086, 10.170, 10.184, 10.417. Caesar as Pompey's *socer*, see Luc. *Phar.* 7.71, 9.1038, 9.1094. Compare Verg. *Aen.* 6.828–831.

who operates behind the scenes is definitively shattered, and the poet offers no Virgilian hope that this disappointment might lead to a happy ending—instead, the failure paves the way for the shattering of the collective Roman-ness and eventually, for despotism and tyranny.

While Lucan plays with the grim and gloomy *mora* theme that suits the topic and style of his epic, Statius, in turn, depicts several failures of more active interference. In book three of the *Thebaid*, when the chthonic forces are unleashed and the war is on its way, Venus takes a stand for peace. The poet describes how the goddess steps in front of Mars' chariots, begging for restraint:

*tunc pectora summo/acclinata iugo vultumque obliqua madentem/incipit—/‘bella etiam in Thebas, socer o pulcherrime, bella/ipse paras ferroque tuos abolere nepotes?/nec genus Harmoniae nec te conubia caelo/festa nec hae quicquam lacrimae, furibunde, morantur?/criminis haec merces? hoc fama pudorque relictus,/hoc mihi Lemniacae de te meruere catenae?/perge libens; at non eadem Vulcania nobis/obsequia, et laesi servit tamen ira mariti./illum ego perpetuis mihi desudare caminis/si iubeam vigilesque operi transmittere noctes, gaudeat ornatusque novos ipsique laboret/arma tibi; tu—sed scopulos et aëna precando/flectere corda paro—.’*

STAT. *Theb.* 3.265–267, 3.269–281

Then, leaning her breast against the top of the yoke, with her teary face inclined to one side, she begins:—‘War against *Thebes* even? O you, the best of fathers, do you yourself prepare to destroy your own descendants by the sword and war? Is it that neither Harmonia's race, nor the wedding party in heaven, nor these tears can hold you back whatsoever, you madman? Is this the reward of my adultery? Is this what I deserve from you after forsaking my reputation and my shame, after suffering the chains of Lemnos? On your merry way then! But not so does Vulcan obey me; at least my betrayed husband's anger serves me still. If I ordered him to ceaselessly sweat for me at his forge, and spend sleepless nights at work, he would be happy to, and would drudge at new equipment—he would even make weapons for you. But you—oh, but it is rocks and a heart of bronze that I aim to soften with my pleading’.

Venus' speech is a very typically feminine plea, since all her arguments are grounded on the personal relationship between herself and the addressee; she demands that the other delays his action as a personal favour to *her*. As female mediators are wont to do, she does not meddle with the political background of the conflict, nor does she seek direct personal gain from preventing

it—these elements notwithstanding, her plea is completely void of power to persuade, as she herself seems to be well aware. Much like the manly matrons discussed in chapter four, Venus gives up before even finishing her plea, as if her efforts to stop or delay the war were a mere formality. We should note that this is an entirely different Venus than the bloodthirsty *dira* one meets in *Thebaid* 5, when she reappears in the story of the Lemnian conflict. There, her power to generate violence and destruction is limitless and unparalleled; here, she seems to be aware of her inability to stand in the way of the inevitable. It would seem that Statius' Venus—like Virgil's Amata—is at her most powerful when stirring up violence, not when trying to prevent it.

Unsurprisingly, Mars' answer is just as hollow as Venus' plea. Although he is stunned by her bold gesture, it has no real influence on him:

*O mihi bellorum requies et sacra voluptas/unaque pax animo; soli cui tanta potestas/divorumque hominumque, meis occurrere telis/impune et media quamvis in caede frementes/hos assistere equos, hunc ensem avellere dextrae.—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 3.295–299

O, my respite from the wars, my sacred pleasure, the one and only peace of my mind: You alone of gods and men have such power, that you can march to meet my weapons and escape punishment, and step, as you like, in the midst of these growling horses that are headed for slaughter, and wrest this sword from my hand.

The flattery notwithstanding, the reader is left with an impression that these are empty words, mere verbiage intended to conceal the fact that Venus' influence is miniscule and her opinion insignificant. After invoking the unalterable will of Fate, Mars hastens away without giving Venus another opportunity to have her say. The whole episode is a feast of idle words, and a grotesque antithesis to the heroic interventions of women in Roman historiography. Its sole function appears to be to stress the decline of that tradition—thus, Statius' epic follows in the footsteps of Virgil and Lucan as it continues juxtaposing epic with historiography, and develops the theme in an ever gloomier direction. The encounter between Venus and Mars informs the reader in a straightforward way that in this poem, the tears of women will not work wonders in the machinations of war. The author depicts civil/familial war as a situation where female *pietas* is inadequate to stand in the way of destruction.

Venus' plea paves the way for the ultimate failure of mediation that comes in books seven and eleven in the figure of Jocasta. The mother's failure to prevent her two sons from engaging in a duel is one the most doleful episodes in the whole of the Roman epic tradition. It is a perverse reworking of the story of the Sabine women and especially of that of Veturia—Statius takes these episodes from the legendary past and reverses them completely.<sup>32</sup> He accomplishes this by drawing on influence from Athenian tragedy: as Lovatt points out, the poet sets the models of tragedy against the models of historiography in order to create and increase intertextual suspense.<sup>33</sup>

Statius' most important literary models in this attempt are, on the one hand, Euripides, and on the other, Seneca—in their tragedies, both these authors relate their own versions of Jocasta's mediating role. In Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Jocasta manages to arrange a truce between her sons, and tries to convince them to give up arms for good. However, her efforts are wasted, since Polynices and Eteocles end up antagonising each other even further.<sup>34</sup> At the end of the play, Jocasta is informed that her sons are about to engage in a duel; upon hearing this, she makes one last attempt to rush in between them.<sup>35</sup> However, when the mother finds her sons dead, she takes her own life, laying her body on top of them.<sup>36</sup> Seneca's version of the story in his *Phoenissae* is a rather direct parallel to the tale of the Sabine women: the queen rushes in between the battle lines, forcing the fighting to halt.<sup>37</sup> She then addresses both of her sons with extensive speeches, to turn their minds around.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, this is where the play breaks off, so the emotional impact of Jocasta's speech and what eventually causes her to fail remain unknown.

Although Statius strongly leans on both Euripides and Seneca, he slightly alters the story by giving Jocasta two comparative episodes where she addresses each of her sons separately. This is a clever narrative technique, since the parallel episodes pile up the excitement and the pathos by repetition.<sup>39</sup> Jocasta's

32 For further discussion, see Soubiran 1969, 698–699.

33 Lovatt 2010, 82.

34 Eur. *Phoen.* 301–637. In Aeschylus' *Septem*, Jocasta does not appear at all, but the chorus takes on the mediating role. See Aesch. *Sept.* 677–719, 686 in particular.

35 Eur. *Phoen.* 1217–1283.

36 Eur. *Phoen.* 1454–1459.

37 For further analysis of Seneca's influence on Statius, see Aricò 2002. For Seneca's way of utilising the Euripidean and Aeschylean elements in his *Phoenissae*, see Mazzoli 2002. The tragic elements of Jocasta's story in Roman literature have been discussed by Smolenaars too (Smolenaars 2008).

38 Sen. *Phoen.* 420–664.

39 Vessey 1973, 270–271; Micozzi 1998, 114, 119.

first speech—to Polynices—takes place in the Argive camp outside Thebes, just before the outbreak of the war. The mother's grim appearance creates an immediate impression that she is beside herself and prepared for desperate deeds:

*ecce truces oculos sordentibus obsita canis/exsanguis Iocasta genas et brachia planctu/nigra ferens ramumque oleae cum velleris atri/nexibus, Eumenidum velut antiquissima, portis/egreditur magna cum maiestate malorum./hinc atque hinc natae, melior iam sexus, aniles/praeicipitantem artus et plus quam possit euntem/sustentant. venit ante hostes, et pectore nudo/claustra adversa ferit tremulisque ululatus orat/admitti: 'reserate viam! rogat impia belli/mater; in his aliquod ius exsecrabile castris/huic utero est.' trepidi visam expavere manipuli/auditamque magis;—illa—clamorem horrendum luctu furiata resolvit—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 7.474–486, 7.489–490

See, Jocasta goes forth from the gates in all the majesty of her sorrows. Her fierce eyes are covered with filthy grey hair, her cheeks are bloodless, and her arms are black from beating. She carries an olive branch bound with black wool like the oldest of the Furies. She marches forth towards the gates, majestic in all the evils. On both sides, her daughters, now the better sex, support her old woman's frame as she rushes on headlong and moves faster than she can. She arrives in the face of the enemy, and smites the opposing gates with her naked bosom, begging, with trembling wails, to be let in: 'Unbar my way! The impious mother of war asks it. In this camp, this womb has some accursed right.' Seeing her makes the soldiers tremble with fear, hearing her even more so.—Frantic with grief, she lets out a terrifying scream.

Jocasta's wailing, her loosened hair and beaten arms—as well as the daughters she is dragging along—are traditional *signa* of female lament, and as such, they neatly fall into the sphere of the symbolic order.<sup>40</sup> However, these elements are darkened by her apparently chthonic and maenadic appearance and behaviour: these bring to mind Virgil's Amata when possessed by the Fury. Jocasta's apparent lack of self-control and her difficulties to put her agony into words are the clearest signs that she is spiralling out of reach of symbolic logic. She is described as *furiata*, and seems to be entirely driven by her bod-

40 Vessey 1973, 271–272; Ganiban 2007, 111–114.

ily drives. And in fact, the queen explicitly refers to her womb as the cause of her entitlement—but also, it would seem, as the source of her motivation. Like Virgil's Amata, Jocasta is frustrated by her narrative insignificance: her motherly authority has been disregarded, and her frustration at this marginalisation finally makes her lose control and resort to the semiotic modality of communication.

Jocasta's maternal body, in fact, not only appears as a cause and motivation that underlies her own actions, but is indirectly depicted as the driving force of the war narrative at large. When she describes herself as *impia mater belli*, her life-giving power is mixed with the death drive that has taken hold of the family. Jocasta's womb, it would seem, is a symbol and the origin of the misdirected sex and death drives within the Theban family—it is simultaneously a reminder of Oedipus' patricide and an implication of Polynices' and Eteocles' future fratricide.

This aura of violence and destruction about the queen is blatantly obvious to the internal audience of the episode, whose reactions make it clear that this is not traditional motherly mourning regulated by social conventions. The queen's a verbal cry, *clamorem horrendum*—a resort to the semiotic modality of communication—evokes horror and fear in the listeners: we read that *trepidi visam expavere manipuli/auditamque magis*. The fear that the Argive soldiers feel at the sight of the queen seems a natural reaction in the face of the abject: it is a mixture of disgust and recognition (of something that is simultaneously both strange and familiar), and it is a discomfort caused by an encounter with the threatening, animalistic side of humanity.<sup>41</sup> Jocasta is a woman entirely defined by her motherhood, yet this is a motherhood marked with death and incest. She does not signify, but *is* the failure of the symbolic order to maintain clear boundaries between civilisation and nature, human being and beast, life and death—the failure to mark out a precise area of culture for the drives of sex and death. This seems to be the underlying cause of the horror that she evokes in the internal audience—and presumably in the external reader as well. She is the Other, deprived of subjectivity and impossible to relate to—but at the same time, a strangely familiar character who reveals the fragility of the social order and civilisation.

It is intriguing that Jocasta herself strongly stresses the primal abjection and the consequent difference between herself and her son. On the one hand, her claims are entirely based on the fact that once, she and her son used to be of one flesh—on the other, she continuously underlines the fact that this bond has

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41 Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 232).

been broken and that they now are others to each other. This can be observed in how Jocasta refuses Polynices' embraces:<sup>42</sup>

*venit attonitae Cadmeius heros/obvius, et raptam lacrimis gaudentibus implet/solaturque tenens, atque inter singula, 'matrem,/matrem' iterat, nunc ipsam urgens, nunc cara sororum/pectora, cum mixta fletus anus asperat ira:/quid molles lacrimas venerandaque nomina fingis,/rex Argive, mihi? quid colla amplexibus ambis/invisamque teris ferrato pectore matrem?—longae tua iussa cohortes/expectant, multoque latus praefulgurat ense./a miserae matres! hunc te noctesque diesque/deflebam? si verba tamen monitusque tuorum/dignaris, dum castra silent suspensaque bellum/horrescit pietas, genetrix iubeoque rogoque:/i mecum patriosque deos arsuraque saltem/tecta vide, fratremque (quid aufers lumina?), fratrem/alloquere et regnum iam me sub iudice posce—'.*

STAT. *Theb.* 7.492–499, 7.501–509

The Cadmean hero comes to meet the stunned woman. He grabs her and, shedding tears of joy, holds and comforts her. And over and over he repeats “mother!” “mother!”, entreating now Jocasta herself, now the dear hearts of his sisters—when the old woman’s weeping is sharpened by anger that is mixed with it: “Why do you feign tender tears and pretend to call me by respectful names, Argive king? Why do you wrap both arms around my neck in an embrace and hug your hateful mother with iron-clad breast?—Far-reaching cohorts await your order and so many swords glitter at your side. O miserable mother! Is this you, for whom I wept day and night? Still, if you have any respect for the words and warnings of your people, while the arms are silent and anxious Piety trembles at the thought of war, I your mother command and beg: go with me and at least look upon your country’s gods and the homes about to burn, and your brother—why do you turn your eyes away?—speak to your brother and claim the throne now with me as your judge.”

While Polynices is trying to repair and restore the broken bond by repetitively addressing Jocasta as *mater*, Jocasta addresses him as *rex Argive*, thus stressing

42 As Augoustakis notes, Polynices' vain attempt to embrace his mother is Statius' inversion of the epic tradition where a son tries to embrace his deceased parents. Augoustakis 2010, 64–65. In particular, the episode is parallel to the passage in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus tries to embrace the shade of his mother and to the one in *Aeneid* 6, where Aeneas tries to embrace the shade of Anchises. Hom *Od.* 11.204; Verg. *Aen.* 6.697–702.

both his disloyalty towards his *patria* and his role as a servant of the temporal scene. The message is clear enough: the mother-son bond has been irreparably broken, both physically and emotionally. Polynices has torn himself away from his mother and dedicated his life to the symbolic order. This is why, instead of referring to her maternal anxiety, Jocasta pleads to Polynices' loyalty towards the political organism: to his city, to his people and to his native gods.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, in the climax of her speech, when she turns from addressing Polynices to address his soldiers, she cannot resist exploiting familial pity. Pledging her undying love for her son, she pleads to the Argive warriors and reminds them of *their* suffering mothers at home.

At first, Jocasta's speech—which has by now strained every rhetorical device from guilt and reason to pity and compassion—appears to have some real influence. It would seem that, when she ceases her non-verbal wailing and finds the words to express herself, the queen regains some of her subjectivity: the internal audience is momentarily able to relate to her suffering, and to imagine, perhaps not their own selves, but at least their own mothers in her place. The Argive troops are moved to tears, and their battle lust is weakened:

*tumidas frangebant dicta cohortes, / nutantesque virum galeas et sparsa  
videres / fletibus arma piis. quales ubi tela virosque / pectoris impulsu rabidi  
stravere leones, / protinus ira minor, gaudentque in corpore capto / securam  
differre famem: sic flexa Pelasgum / corda labant, ferrique avidus mansue-  
erat ardor.*

STAT. *Theb.* 7.527–533

The restless cohorts were defeated by her words, and one could see the men's helmets swoon and their armour sprinkled with pious tears. As when lions, driven by the rage in their breasts, have spread weapons and men all over, straightaway their anger calms down, and they are happy to sate their hunger untroubled on the corpse that they have captured: so the Pelasgians' turning hearts waver, and their eager passion for war grows tame.

Polynices himself, after hearing his mother out, appears to be affected by her words. The lust for power that has driven him on, is momentarily quelled

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43 In Roman war epic, this sort of rhetoric is typical of episodes that discuss civil war as a breaking of *fas*. Compare, for instance, Lucan's depiction of Caesar's soldiers, who are portrayed as being anxious about their native gods and afraid to raise their swords against Rome. Luc. *Phar.* 1.352–356.

and replaced by affection: the narrator relates that “his mind is in turmoil, and his kingdom is forgotten” (*variaque animum turbante procella/exciderat regnum*).<sup>44</sup> This yielding, however, only lasts for a fleeting moment before Tydeus, “remembering his righteous anger” (*iustae—memor irae*),<sup>45</sup> begins to stir up anew the Argives’ bloodlust. He reminds Polynices of the harsh realities of political affairs, and makes it clear that his mother’s intentions, even if innocent and sincere, are inadequate to resolve the conflict between the brothers. Tydeus’ words immediately turn the soldiers’ minds around. We read that

*rursus mutata trahuntur/agmina consiliis: subito ceu turbine caeli/obvius  
adversum Boreae Notus abstulit aequor./arma iterum furiaeque placent;  
fera tempus Erinys/arripit et primae molitur semina pugnae.*

STAT. *Theb.* 7.559–563

The troops, swayed by his words, change their stance again: just as when in a sudden hurricane the south wind storming down snatches from the north wind the mastery of the sea. War and the Furies seem pleasing to them again; fierce Erinys seizes the moment and sows the seeds of the first battle.

With regard to the moral judgement of the protagonists’ actions, the episode is most confusing and unsettling. The author clearly juxtaposes family and war, and associates the female with the former and the male with the latter. Nevertheless, in the corrupt moral universe of the *Thebaid*, it is unclear which one is ruled by reason and which one by emotion. On the one hand, Jocasta’s motherly plea is threatening and chthonic, the very embodiment of the abject: it abhors the soldiers and reminds them of the sins of her family. On the other, her speech calls forth pious tears in the warriors: she now appears as a representative of the motherly role that *does* fit in with the logic of the symbolic order. In a similar way, it remains unclear how the reader is expected to judge the male protagonists of the episode, or to relate to them. On the one hand, Tydeus’ anger is described as aroused by *iustae—memor irae*: it is rightful anger in line with the heroic code of epic. But on the other hand, when the warriors are overtaken by battle frenzy at his urging, their bloodlust seems more like the venting of an animalistic death drive than an institutionalised service of the

44 Stat. *Theb.* 7.536–537. As Soubiran notes, here Statius clearly alters the tradition; in Athenian tragedy and in Roman historiography, Polynices does not easily yield to his filial affection. Soubiran 1969, 694.

45 Stat. *Theb.* 7.358.

temporal scene. It is compared to an uncontrollable hurricane, and the fact that it is fertile ground for the Fury to intervene enhances the impression of semi-otic rage. The episode, therefore, seems one of the prime examples within the epic tradition that question the gendered nature of the symbolic and the semi-otic modalities. By underlining the conflicted and broken mother–son bond between Jocasta and Polynices, and the immoral nature of the war at large, it exposes the animalistic aspects of the human psyche, and shows how easily they can get out of control.

In the end, bold and impressive as Jocasta's intervention in *Thebaid* 7 is, it is of course doomed to fail. The tumult of war in the camp strips the queen of the remnants of her bold fury, and she flees.<sup>46</sup> The *Thebaid*, therefore, discernibly underlines the downfall of female negotiation, depicting it as even more pathetic than in Statius' literary models. Whereas in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Jocasta manages to persuade her sons to a temporary truce, in the *Thebaid*, the mere pursuit only ends up triggering the conflict.<sup>47</sup> Jocasta's failure is made worse by her humiliating exit—she, who a few lines earlier boasted of being prepared to die, flees the minute that things start to heat up.

Jocasta's second attempt to reconcile her sons takes place in the end of the epic, when she pleads to Eteocles in Thebes. Like the queen's previous appearance in book seven, it is clearly modelled on Euripides; however, Statius adds to the pathos of the episode by delaying it until book eleven, where the mother makes her move just before the beginning of the decisive duel.<sup>48</sup> This is a strategic choice that, besides increasing the narrative suspense, associates the episode with the Roman legendary tradition concerning women *in medias acies*, and invites the reader to compare it to Veturia's story, in particular.

Jocasta's second intervention repeats many elements from the first, and appears to be modeled on it. Nevertheless, as Ganiban notices, in her second attempt, the queen appears even more frenzied than earlier, in book seven:<sup>49</sup>

*At genetrix, primam funestae sortis ut amens/expavit famam (nec tarde creditit), ibat/scissa comam vultusque et pectore nuda cruento,/non sexus decorisve memor: Pentheia qualis/ mater ad insani scandebat culmina montis,/promissum saevo caput allatura Lyaeo./non comites, non ferre piae vestigia natae/aequa valent: tantum miserae dolor ultimus addit/robur,*

46 Stat. *Theb.* 7.609–610.

47 Eur. *Phoen.* 301–637.

48 For further discussion of the dramatic impact of this narrative choice, see Smolenaars 2008, 224.

49 Ganiban 2007, 164.

*et exsanguis crudescunt luctibus anni./iamque decus galeae, iam specula saeva ligabat/ductor et ad lituos hilarem intrepidumque tubarum/prospiciebat equum, subito cum apparuit ingens/mater; et ipse metu famulumque expalluit omnis/coetus, et oblatam retro dedit armiger hastam.*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.315–328

But his mother, upon hearing the first rumour of this fatal fortune (nor was she slow to believe it), was frightened and frenzied. She went with torn hair and face, with her naked bosom stained with blood, unmindful of her sex or of a decent appearance: like Pentheus' mother climbing to the top of the mad mountain about to take the promised head to cruel Lyaeus. Neither her companions nor her loyal daughters can manage to follow in her footsteps: such strength does this final agony give the miserable woman, and her griefs add violent vigour to her feeble years. And already the leader was binding on the glory of his helmet and his cruel shields and viewing his horse (who was happy to hear the war-trumpets and did not fear the horns), when suddenly his mother was there, looking mighty and enormous. And he and his attendants all turned pale with fear and his shield-bearer took back the exposed spear.

Whereas in *Thebaid* 7, Jocasta still makes an attempt to play the traditional part of a distraught mother—flavoured with some admittedly threatening chthonic elements—this time, her appearance clearly denotes that she has stepped outside the limitations not only of womanhood but of humanity altogether. When she storms out to meet Eteocles, her grim appearance creates an impression of an apparition of a deity: she is *ingens*, and her looks are enough to turn Eteocles from a courageous warrior into a mere mortal shrinking from fear.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Jocasta has taken the beating of her breast—a symbolic sign of female lament—too far, turning it into a non-verbal expression of her despair: we read that she has been tearing at her breasts until they bled. This encounter with the physical reality of the mother's body and its mortality is particularly shocking and abhorrent to the internal audience: they turn pale with fear, immobile and petrified.

The traumatic encounter with the object that “disturbs identity, system and order” is therefore even stronger in Jocasta's second intervention than it was

<sup>50</sup> Compare the episode in the *Aeneid*, where Allecto reveals her true self to Turnus, Verg *Aen.* 7.445–450. Spectres also assume a large bodily mass when they appear to mortals; thus, e.g., the ghost of Creusa, who is depicted as *nota maior imago* (Verg. *Aen.* 2.773).

in her first.<sup>51</sup> The conflation of the maternal life-giving power and the animalistic death drive is made explicit by a direct reference to a murderous mother: when Jocasta rushes to meet her son, she is compared to Agave, who famously tore her son to pieces in a Bacchic frenzy.<sup>52</sup> Hershkowitz and Ganiban have suggested that this comparison implies a violent intent on Jocasta's part: it makes the reader wonder whether her desires are so beneficial towards her sons, after all.<sup>53</sup> I believe, however, that instead of directly implying Jocasta's violent intent against her sons, the simile further emphasises her forsaking of the logic of the symbolic order. Like Agave, she is in a state of fury where all reason has ceased to exist, and where there is no longer any difference between birth and death.

After this powerful first impression, Jocasta begins her speech. It is clear that her state of mind is far more tormented than in book seven: she has let go of the means of persuasion and all rhetorical devices, and resorts to a passionate rage:

*quis furor? unde iterum regni integrata resurgit/Eumenis? ipsi etiam post omnia, comminus ipsi/stabitis? usque adeo geminas duxisse cohortes/et facinus mandasse parum est? quo deinde redibit/victor? in hosne sinus? o diri coniugis olim/felices tenebrae! datis, improba lumina, poenas:/haec spectanda dies. quo, saeve, minantia flectis/ora? quid alternus vultus palloorque ruborque/mutat, et obnixa frangunt mala murmura dentes?/me miseram! vinces. prius haec tamen arma necesse est/experiare domi: stabo ipso in limine portae/auspicium infelix scelerumque immanis imago./haec tibi canities, haec sunt calcanda, nefande,/ubera, perque uterum sonipes hic matris agendus.*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.329–338

51 Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 232).

52 The simile is borrowed from Seneca, but has dramatically different overtones in Statius' epic. While in the *Phoenissae* 363–367, Jocasta is depicted as envying Agave for her ignorance about her crime, in the *Thebaid*, instead, Jocasta is compared to Agave at the moment of killing her son. The purpose of this is to stress the queen's tormented state of mind: *Pentheia qualis/ mater ad insane scandebat culmina montis,/promissum saevo caput allatura Lyaeo*. As Ganiban perceptively notes, Statius' Jocasta truly becomes Agave; moreover, she becomes Agave, paradoxically, at the precise moment when she herself is trying to save her son's life. Therefore, Statius recalls a figure of crime at the very moment when he is seemingly fashioning a character that embodies feminine *pietas*. Ganiban 2007, 164–165.

53 Hershkowitz 1998, 291; Ganiban 2007, 164–165.

What is this madness? From where does the Fury of our kingdom rise again all refreshed? Will you yourselves, after everything that has happened, will you *yourselves* meet in close combat? Is it not enough that you have gone all the way leading two armies, passing your crime on to them? Where shall the victor then return? To this bosom of mine? O, my dreadful husband's blindness, what a stroke of luck it was! Wicked eyes, you are punished, having to see this day. You savage, where do you turn your threatening face? Why does your face turn now pale, now red? Why do your clenched teeth struggle to staunch evil mumblings? Alas for me! You will be victorious. First, however, you must try out those arms at home: I will stand in the very threshold of the gate, as an abominable omen, as a monstrous ghost of crimes. This grey hair, and these breasts you must trample on, you wretch, this horse you must drive through your mother's womb.

We should note that Jocasta appears to borrow many elements from her earlier speech to Polynices. As before, she underlines the irrevocable separation and the difference between the two beings who used to be of one flesh. Likewise, she once again refrains from addressing her son by his name, but refers to him as *saevus*, thus stressing the breaking of the emotional bond between them. Also, in a similar manner as when addressing Polynices, Jocasta offers herself as a surrogate victim through whom her sons must prove the depth of their hatred. Recalling Suetonius' story of Agrippina's murder by her son Nero, Jocasta invites Eteocles to direct his rage against the womb that bore him and the breasts that nursed him: she is inviting him to complete the primal abjection by actually destroying and obliterating the mother's body.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Jocasta's speech to Eteocles appears as a more desperate, violent, and irrational variant of her encounter with Polynices.

We should also note that the reactions of Jocasta's son are both strikingly similar and drastically different from each other. In book seven, when Jocasta refers to the native gods of Thebes and to homes destroyed by war, she suddenly halts mid-sentence to note Polynices' reaction. *quid aufers lumina?*<sup>55</sup> denotes that he is turning his eyes away from his mother, out of shame or of fear, or to avoid being persuaded by her.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Eteocles, too, is depicted as avoiding

54 Tac. *Ann.* 14.8; Sen. *Oct.* 368–374; Cass. Dio 61.13.5. For an alternative version of the story, see Suet. *Ner.* 34.

55 Stat. *Theb.* 7.508.

56 The episode can be compared to Atalanta's efforts to prevent Parthenopaeus from going

eye contact with his mother. *quo, saeve, minantia flectis/ora?* Jocasta asks, trying in vain to connect with him. Nevertheless, while Polynices' refusal to meet his mother's eyes appears to be an attempt to resist her authority, Eteocles, on the contrary, is depicted as no less crazed than Jocasta herself. Eyes downcast, he mutters to himself, almost as if she was not present at all. Jocasta's mad, Fury-like aspect is reflected in her son, who completely shuts her out. Whereas with Polynices, Jocasta was able to temporarily return to the conventional role of a grieving mother and reach her son through symbolic communication, with Eteocles, there is no such hope, because both participants of the interaction appear to be completely lacking reason and overtaken by their bodily drives. Thus, Jocasta's second intervention appears as a grim and gloomy repetition of the first one, a passage that even more clearly denotes the fragility of reason, logic and familial loyalty in an unrighteous war.

Jocasta's fear that turns into rage, and the threatening elements about her character, are something that clearly sets her apart from the Euripidean model. Whereas in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, the queen appears as a suffering victim of the familial strife, in the *Thebaid*, she is a demanding mother who wields a threatening aura of violence herself. Rather than begging, she commands; rather than putting her hope in her sons' goodwill, she demands their obedience. Moreover, while in Euripides' play, Polynices and Eteocles bravely argue with Jocasta, in the *Thebaid*, they make no such attempt. As Soubiran has suggested, this powerful image of motherhood is the very thing that characterises Statius' Jocasta as Roman in essence.<sup>57</sup> The frightening, demanding, authoritative mother is a literary archetype typical of the Roman culture of the early Principate.<sup>58</sup> The way in which Statius draws on the historiographic tradition becomes particularly clear when one compares his Jocasta with Livy's Veturia.<sup>59</sup> Like Jocasta, Veturia harshly scorns her son and refuses his affectionate embrace, stressing her role as an authoritative mother:

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to war in book four; in that episode, as the mother addresses the son, he is depicted as *ad humum pallens*, pale and with eyes downcast. Stat. *Theb.* 4.318.

57 Soubiran 1969, 694–694, 699.

58 On the phenomenon, its Republican background and its appearance in Augustan literature, see Brazouski 1991; Soubiran 1969, 695, 699; Hallett 1984, 130–131, 94–95, 243, 246–248; Dixon 1988, 175–176, 179–187.

59 Soubiran 1969, 694–695. As Soubiran points out, Jocasta's self-awareness and her demanding attitude strongly align her with Livy's Veturia, and alienate her not only from Athenian tragedy, but also from Roman historiography written in Greek. Soubiran perceives a notable difference in the degree of motherly authority in Livy's and Dionysius' versions of Veturia, and argues that it is the Livian model that Statius follows in his fashioning of Jocasta.

*Coriolanus prope ut amens consternatus ab sede sua cum ferret matri obviam complexum, mulier in iram ex precibus versa 'Sine, priusquam complexum accipio, sciam,' inquit, 'ad hostem an ad filium venerim, captiva materne in castris tuis sim.—Potuisti populari hanc terram, quae te genuit atque aluit?'*

LIV. 2.40.5–7

Coriolanus started up like a madman from his seat, and running to meet his mother would have embraced her, but her entreaties turned to anger, and she said: "Suffer me to learn, before I accept your embrace, whether I have come to an enemy or son; whether I am a captive or a mother in your camp.—Could you bring yourself to ravage this country which gave you birth and reared you?"<sup>60</sup>

The similarities of this passage with those describing Jocasta's interventions in the *Thebaid* are obvious, particularly the stress on maternal authority. Statius' Jocasta, like Livy's Veturia, is not a wronged victim, but a strong parent who expects and demands obedience from her sons. By reworking the Livian model, Statius thereby brings a characteristically Roman overtone to his depiction of the tragic queen.

The unmistakable similarities between Livy's Veturia and Statius' Jocasta also immediately underline the most crucial difference between these two literary characters: whereas one of them manages to successfully persuade her son and saves the people from war, the other one fails to do so. In effect, the allusion to the Livian model in the *Thebaid* is so apparent that it is as if the poet was deliberately inviting the reader to compare Jocasta to Veturia, in order to draw attention to her inability to fulfill that role. By doing so, the author questions the exemplary discourse that defines female virtue and mediation as essential parts of *Romanitas*.

Newlands considers Jocasta's failure to be ideologically significant to Statius' epic, and uses the queen as an example when she argues for the 'decline of motherhood' in Flavian poetry.<sup>61</sup> It is indeed true that, in the *Thebaid*, the downfall of motherly authority has a crucial and discernible role and wields considerable narrative significance, but I am not convinced that Statius' depiction of Jocasta should be read as a reflection of the social reality of his time—nor would I consider the downfall of motherly authority that it depicts to be a

60 English translation of the *Ab Urbe Condita* by B.O. Foster, LCL 1967.

61 Newlands 2006, esp. 212–222.

phenomenon particularly typical of the Flavian period. Rather, I view it as an expression of a more ancient cultural phenomenon: a mother–son tension that forms an integral part of Roman family dynamics at least from the late Republic onwards.<sup>62</sup> The difference between the tones taken by Livy and Statius, I would suggest, has more to do with the genre than with the social reality of the time of writing. While Livy's depiction of Roman legendary history is, in general, an extreme idealisation of the virtues of the good old days, Statius' cynical epic tends to underline the downfall of all kinds of familial loyalty as a product of civil/familial war. In Jocasta's ineffectual pleas to her sons, Statius combines elements from Athenian tragedy and Roman historiography, and establishes the ambivalent and threatening mother figure as part of the epic tradition. He is, of course, building on Virgilian ground, exploiting the character of Amata in the *Aeneid*, but he enhances the aura of violence and despair. Paradoxically, Statius' epic mother is stronger, scarier and more aware of her authority than any of her literary models—and yet, she fails more magnificently than any of them.<sup>63</sup>

The cynical message about the inefficiency of women's attempts to mediate is consolidated by repetition, when the poet depicts Antigone's failed efforts to reconcile her brothers. In book eleven, while Jocasta is pleading to Eteocles in Thebes, Antigone climbs to the top of the city wall and addresses Polynices, who waits outside:

*At parte ex alia tacitos obstante tumultu/Antigone furata gradus (nec casta retardat/virginitas) volat Ogygii fastigia muri/exsuperare furens—magno*

62 See Dixon 1988, 175–176, 179–187. In particular, the 'decline of motherhood' appears to be related to the strong women of the Julio-Claudian imperial house; for the conflicted relationship between Nero and Agrippina, see Tac. *Ann.* 13.12–15, 13.18–19, 14.3–9; Suet. *Ner.* 34; between Livia and Tiberius, Suet. *Vit. Tib.* 50–51. In these accounts, the determined and authoritative mother becomes a controlling and manipulative one, and the line between the two appears to be very fine.

63 It should be noted that during the fourth century BCE, there was a parallel tradition to the Theban legend, according to which Jocasta was not the mother of Oedipus' children, but the rivalling brothers were born to his second wife Eurygeneia. This version of the story is mentioned, e.g., by Pausanias (9.5.11). It eventually died out because of the popularity of the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides, but it was certainly still known in the early Principate. For further discussion, see Smolenaars 2008, 221. For Statius' epic, it seems essential that Jocasta is mother (and grandmother) to Polynices and Eteocles—through this incestuous relationship, the breaking of motherly authority can be fully depicted on multiple levels. Tense and perverted family relationships and the constant pursuit to break free from the preceding generation are the lifeblood of the Oedipal legend; Statius takes the myth and reworks it masterfully into a reflection of the Roman mindset and family dynamics.

*prius omnia planctu/implet et ex muris ceu descensura profatur:/comprime tela manu paulumque hanc respice turrem,/frater, et horrentes refer in mea lumina cristas!/agnoscisne hostes? sic annua pacta fidemque/poscimus? hi questus, haec est bona causa modesti exsulis? Argolicos per te, germane, penates/(nam Tyriis iam nullus honos), per si quid in illa/dulce domo, summitte animos: en utraque gentis/turba rogant ambaeque acies; rogat illa suorum/Antigone devota malis suspectaque regi,/et tantum tua, dure, soror.—illum gemitu iam supplice mater/frangit et exsertum dimittere dicitur ense:/tu mihi fortis adhuc, mihi, quae tua nocte dieque/exsilia error-  
esque fleo iam iamque tumentem/placavi tibi saepe patrem?’*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.354–357, 11.361–371, 11.375–379

From another part, Antigone, with silent steps, rushes through the opposing tumult (nor does her chaste virginity hold her back), frenzied and ready to surmount the summit of the Ogygian walls.—First, she fills everything around with great wailing, and speaks as though she was about to throw herself from the wall: ‘Hold your weapons, brother, and look at this tower for a little moment. Turn your trembling crests to face my eyes! Do you see enemies? Is this how we claim the yearly pact and brotherly loyalty? Are these the complaints, is this the good cause of a humble exile? I beg you by your Argive home, brother (since for the Tyrians you have no honour left), by anything that is dear to you in that home, restrain your mind. Look! A crowd of both peoples and both armies is begging you. Antigone begs, devoted to the crimes of her family, mistrustful of the king and sister only to you, O cruel one!—Mother is already defeating him with her suppliant wails, and they say he is putting his drawn sword down. Are *you* still unyielding to *me*—to me, who cry over your exile and wanderings night and day, and who have often calmed down our father, when he was about to lose his temper with you?’<sup>64</sup>

It is notable that Antigone’s approach is considerably more humble and suppliant than that of Jocasta. Since she does not wield maternal authority, she cannot command Polynices; instead, she chooses different tactics, emphasising their affectionate bond as siblings. At first, her approach appears to work: Polynices’ anger calms down and his heart is softened, as it was earlier, in book seven:

64 *nec casta retardat/virginitas* (11.355–356) recalls a passage in Euripides’ *Phoenissae*, where Jocasta encourages Antigone to expel her virginal modesty in order to follow her mother on her mission to reconcile the brothers. Eur. *Phoen.* 1264–1269.

*his paulum furor elanguescere dictis/coeperat, obstreperet quamquam atque obstaret Erinys;/iam summissa manus, lente iam flectit habenas,/iam tacet; erumpunt gemitus, lacrimasque fatetur/cassis; hebent irae, pariterque et abire nocentem/et venisse pudet—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.382–387

Hearing these words, little by little his anger begins to grow weaker, although the brawling Fury still objects. Already his hand is falling, already he is turning the reins more slowly, already he has fallen silent. Moans burst out of him, and through his helmet one could see his tears. Anger grows dull, and he is equally ashamed of leaving, and of having come in guilt.

In a manner characteristic of his epic, Statius increases the narrative suspense by depicting a moment of wavering between *pietas* and *nefas*. However, before Polynices has time to make up his mind, the Fury once again intervenes, hurling Eteocles from the city to challenge his brother.<sup>65</sup> With this decisive moment, the last attempt for reconciliation fails and Antigone is quietly removed from the scene.

Antigone's role as a mediator is somewhat confusing, since it is not necessary in any narrative sense; in effect, all she does is repeat Jocasta's failure. What makes things even more perplexing is that Statius' decision to give Antigone so much room in his epic does not seem to derive directly from any literary model: in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Antigone is Jocasta's docile companion and does not speak once in the whole play. As Ganiban notes, she appears only with Jocasta and always in the same function as her.<sup>66</sup> The same kind of auxiliary function marks Antigone in Seneca's *Phoenissae*, where the maiden only ever appears as consoling her father or as spurring her mother on.<sup>67</sup> In the *Thebaid*, instead, Antigone performs as a protagonist in her own right.<sup>68</sup> On these grounds, some

65 Micozzi perceives strong Lucanian overtones in the way Statius develops the drama in this episode (see e.g. *Phar.* 4.157–252). Micozzi 1998, 120. Nevertheless, it is significant that while Lucan once again avoids introducing a divine agent in the situation, Statius leaves it to a Fury to stir up the conflict.

66 Ganiban 2007, 166.

67 For Antigone and Oedipus, Sen. *Phoen.* 51–319; for Antigone and Jocasta, Sen. *Phoen.* 403–418.

68 Venini believes that Antigone's active participation is Statius' innovation, since it does not feature in the plays of Euripides and Seneca. Venini 1970, X s. e 90. See also Lesueur 1992, 235. Aricò, however, points out that the theme is visually depicted on a few Etruscan urns that show Jocasta and Antigone both positioned in a mediating position between the rivalling brothers. Aricò 2002, 184.

readers have observed her as an exceptionally empowered character.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Antigone, no matter how courageous she may be, does not achieve her ends, any more than her mother does.

We should note that while the end results of Jocasta's and Antigone's pleas are the same, the reasons for their failure are different. If Jocasta's mimicking of Livy's Veturia is darkened by her chthonic appearance and by her resort to the semiotic, the same cannot be said about Antigone's fairly well constructed speech, nor about her calm and submissive approach. Instead, it would appear that Antigone's influence as a political arbiter is undermined by her obvious partiality. Unlike her mother, Antigone has a favourite. In her appeal to Polynices, she repeatedly stresses the close and affectionate bond between herself and him. Besides reminding him of her constant support,<sup>70</sup> Antigone's choice of words shows where her sympathies lie: *frater* and *germane* stress her familial relationship with Polynices; in contrast, Eteocles is simply referred to as *rex* and *ille*. What is more, she explicitly blames Eteocles for the conflict, stating that *nempe ille fidem et stata foedera rupit, / ille nocens saevusque suis* ("was it not he who broke faith and your treaty, is it not he who is cruel and hurtful towards his own people?").<sup>71</sup> Antigone therefore deliberately distances herself from her other brother—but, while doing so, she distances herself from the Roman exemplary tradition that epitomises the ideal of female mediating behaviour. By taking Polynices' side, and by expressing her own opinion about who is to blame for the familial conflict, Antigone fails in the archetypal role of a female arbiter. She is no longer an unbiased woman, nor an outsider to the political affairs.

It appears, therefore, that Statius utilises Antigone's character to repeat and reinforce the message delivered by Jocasta's failure: that this is not the kind of story where virtuous women turn up to save the day in the *patria's* darkest hour, reconciling the interests of family and state. Instead, it is a story about women (and men) who either forget their place in the patriarchal hierarchy, or who are overwhelmed and driven out of their minds by their all-consuming bodily drives. By underlining this message, the poet steers the epic towards its final note of destruction that brings the *Thebaid* to its end: Eteocles and Polynices' mutual fratricide.

Perhaps this is what the discernible significance of failed female mediation in the *Thebaid* is all about: while it reveals the shattering of unity within the

69 Lesueur 1992, 223–235; Vessey 1973, 131–133.

70 Stat. *Theb.* 11.377–379.

71 Stat. *Theb.* 11.380–381.

family, it anticipates the shattering of unity within the state and the community. Ganiban has argued that throughout her appearance in the epic, Jocasta strongly endeavours to reveal the Theban war for what it really is—that is, a fratricide and a *nefas*.<sup>72</sup> I support this notion, and I would add that in this task, Jocasta's womanhood and motherhood work as her most crucial instruments. When Jocasta places her motherhood as a barrier between Polynices and Eteocles, she actually breaks down all distinction between them. Her womb, which she offers as a surrogate victim, is what defines the existence of both of her sons: in this womb, not only have they been of one flesh with their mother, but they have been of one flesh with *each other*. Jocasta seems to believe that her mere existence is enough to reveal the quintessential sameness of her sons and the self-destructive nature of their quarrel. The parallel episodes where Jocasta addresses her sons, and the sons' similar reactions, reinforce this idea of underlying sameness.

Read against this background, Antigone's function in the *Thebaid* appears to be the same as Jocasta's—as a connecting familial link between Eteocles and Polynices, she is a powerful reminder of the quintessential sameness of the warring parties. By her existence, rather than by her actions, she exposes the *nefas* that marks the Theban war—although failing to offer a valid alternative to it. It would seem that in Statius' epic, much as in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, familial relationships are a powerful tool for demonstrating the unjustness of war, but highly inefficient at solving the conflict. In the end, the civil war as a violent disintegration of the political organism—the collective self—is symbolically represented in Polynices' and Eteocles' mutual fratricide. Denying their quintessential sameness, they destroy each other and themselves, just as the war does on the level of society.

In this aspect, Statius' Jocasta and Antigone strongly remind me of Lucan's Julia, who likewise seems to exist in the epic only in order to draw attention to how different from her exemplary literary models she is. Just as Statius associates Jocasta with Livy's Veturia, only to emphasise her failure in this role, so too Lucan recalls the Roman historians' depictions of Julia's death, only to turn the story from a positive *exemplum* into a tale of failure. This deliberate breaking of the literary tradition concerning women's mediating attempts is a way of underlining the message about the destructive power of the civil war: it anticipates the complete dissolving of the collective identity. Statius follows the Lucanian example when he represents the family and the state as comparative levels where this breaking of unity happens—and where women are no longer

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72 Ganiban 2007, 111.

capable of performing as unbiased outsiders and selfless arbiters in the conflicts of men, because the lines that separate the private and the public, the 'female sphere' and the temporal scene, have been irrevocably blurred.

## 2 Functional Failures: Epic Women Tangled Up with War

The episodes discussed in this chapter demonstrate that the epic women's failures at peace-making and mediating, which constitute a recurrent theme in Roman war epic, are more than merely doleful manifestations of the decline of the traditional Roman female virtues: they have a functional role in the epic discourse concerning the civil war. Of course, to a certain extent, the poets' hands are tied when it comes to the structure of a myth or a historical narrative—in every account of the Roman civil war, Julia has to die, just as every version of the Theban war has to end with a fratricide. However, it appears to be significant that the Roman epic poets do not merely follow the narrative tradition when they depict the female failures of mediating—they celebrate the theme, exploiting it to the fullest in their construction and deconstruction of ideas concerning Roman-ness.<sup>73</sup>

As I noted above, Statius' representation of Jocasta in the *Thebaid* is among the best examples of this. In Statius' epic, the queen has a very prominent and memorable role—precisely because of her failed attempts to stop the drive of war—which in fact would not in the least be necessary for the main plotline of the story. It is crucial to note that there was an alternative tradition available, where Jocasta is not present in the story about the Theban war at all. Statius could have followed a popular version of the myth where the queen kills herself upon finding out about her incestuous marriage, immediately before Oedipus blinds himself.<sup>74</sup> It is particularly intriguing that Statius not only rejects this version of the myth but also appears to deliberately remind the reader of the

73 As De Jong points out, this is where the unending opportunities of tradition lie—because the mythical stories are well known to the audience, the poet can emphasise those parts that he considers important, and skip over others. De Jong 2004, 20; De Jong 2007, 37. As Lamari states, ancient literature is often extremely reception-oriented, since the authors took full advantage of the intertextual awareness of their audience. Lamari 2009, 416–418.

74 This version of the myth is generally considered to be more ancient; it was part of the oral tradition and features, for instance, in Aeschylus' *Septem contra Thebas*. Smolenaars suggests that a shift in tradition took place from the Euripides' *Phoenissae* onwards, after which, in most versions of the story, Jocasta lives on after Oedipus' blinding of himself and acts as a mediator between her sons. Smolenaars 2008, 222.

rejected option. As Smolenaars has observantly noted, the passage in *Thebaid* 1 where Oedipus' fury is described is a direct allusion to the alternative tradition concerning Jocasta: when Oedipus tells the tale of how he blinded himself, the king claims that "afterwards, I punished myself and eagerly pushed fingers through my yielding eyes, relinquishing sight, beside my miserable mother" (*mox avidus poenae digitis cedentibus ultro/incubui miseraque oculos in matre reliqui*).<sup>75</sup> This phrasing seems to refer to the alternative version of the myth, since it implies that Jocasta is already dead and lying in front of Oedipus.<sup>76</sup> Obviously, the passage conflicts with the rest of the epic, where the queen is very much alive.

The passage has understandably evoked a great deal of confusion among readers of the *Thebaid*, and various possible explanations of the contradiction have been proposed: it has been discussed both as a lapse that has not been removed during the final redaction of the work, and as a deliberate touch of controversy typical of Roman epic.<sup>77</sup> It should be noted that, in the research tradition of Roman epic, the argument in favour of the work being 'unfinished', 'unpolished', or 'contaminated' (that is, deliberately or unintentionally altered at some later stage of manuscript circulation) is usually particularly popular whenever there is something that does not make sense or something that contradicts the narrative logic of the work as a whole. Arguably, this is the easy way out because, technically, it could be true, and after two millennia of manuscript tradition, there is no one to disprove it. In this study, I have deliberately chosen to avoid this approach with regard to the many contradictions in Roman war epic, on the grounds that I find it both uninteresting and unproductive—and, in the end, no less speculative than any other way of reading. Instead, I aim to appreciate the contradictions, the ruptures and the loose ends of epic, and to examine what narrative purpose they might serve *as such*, not only despite themselves. As O'Hara points out, inconsistency is an indispensable part of the Roman epic canon and a feature that is intrinsically linked to its rich intertextual tradition.<sup>78</sup> Enduring contradictions might therefore open up a whole new world for the contemporary reader of epic—since it is in any case impossible to get into the poet's head and resolve the question of how 'deliber-

75 Stat. *Theb.* 1.71–72.

76 Stat. *Theb.* 1.71–72. Smolenaars 2008, 219.

77 Lesueur 1990, 119; Smolenaars, 2008, 219.

78 O'Hara 2007, esp. 1–2, 4. Classen, too, has stressed that in Roman poetry, examining the alternative that the author does not use, and whether he rejects or ignores it, is often just as important as examining the version he uses, when considering the ideological overtones of the work. Classen 2002, 18.

ate' his 'mistakes' are, one might just as well embrace the death of the author and create the meaning for these inconsistencies for oneself.

From the Kristevan viewpoint, contradictions, ruptures and inconsistencies in the narrative logic of epic are, of course, of prime importance since they can be considered as expressions of the semiotic pressure on the logic of the symbolic order. They are the breaking points where the semiotic makes itself heard, and where the signifying practice of narrative temporarily breaks down in favour of the signifying practice of poetry. In other words, epic's phenotext gives way and is temporarily replaced by genotext, and the two are merged in what constitutes the real intertextuality in the Kristevan sense: the dynamic interaction between different signifying practices. Read through this interpretative lens, the fact that Statius' Jocasta is dead at one moment and alive at another underlines her central role in the *Thebaid* as a channel through which the semiotic pressure is charged into the narrative. It completes the picture of her as the queen of the *chôra*, already manifested in her averbal communication and in her chthonic appearance that marked her failed pleas for peace.

Furthermore, the fact that Statius reminds the reader that Jocasta did not *need* to exist in his poem draws attention to the fact that she *does*. The only purpose of her existence is her role as an arbiter between her sons; and the only function of that role is its ultimate downfall and failure. In short, Statius' Jocasta exists only to try and fail, and it seems as if the poet wanted the reader to notice this. It is a prime example of the ways in which Roman war epics revel in the failure of female mediation, making the most of the earlier mythical and literary tradition and emphasising the narrative significance of the theme in their works.

It is arguable that up to now, the functional role of the theme in the genre has not been fully acknowledged. When discussing the inefficiency of epic women's pleas for peace, most studies have stressed the rhetorical weakness of the entreaties, labeling them as both poorly composed and feebly expressed.<sup>79</sup> As I already argued in chapter three, this way of reading is an excellent expression of the deep-rooted thinking according to which, in Roman epic, the logic and language (the symbolic modality) constitute the male domain, whereas women are from the outset judged as illogical, non-political creatures driven by their emotions and prisoners of their bodies. However, it is crucial to notice that while women's pleas for peace almost invariably fail to convince, female speech in general is anything but ineffective in epic. Besides the various rhet-

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79 Heslin 2005, 131–134; Kozák 2013, 250–255; Hardie 2012, 7; von Albrecht 1999, 283–284; Fuhrer 2010, 67–72, 75–77.

orical breakthroughs of Furies and goddesses, there are numerous episodes where mortal women successfully speak and make a difference—one of the most significant is Argia's speech in *Thebaid* 3, which brings about the Theban war.<sup>80</sup> It seems, therefore, that it is not female speech in general that is badly composed and ineffective but rather female speech *for certain ends*. In Roman war epic, women prove very effective when promoting war, but when negotiating peace, they have no real influence whatsoever. This pattern appears so often that it is worth examining the phenomenon in a little more depth: why is it that the female rhetoric is at its clumsiest specifically when it aims at stopping, preventing or delaying war and destruction?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to examine more closely the overall role of the speaker in the poem. In *Aeneid* 12, when Amata fails to persuade Turnus to give up the fight, the fact that the attempt is doomed is apparent even to the speaker herself. The queen ends her speech by claiming that should Turnus perish, she would leave the world together with him—this does not seem like a mere rhetorical threat, but rather like a compliant remark by a woman who is already yielding to her failure.<sup>81</sup> Amata, like Statius' Venus, does not seem to really believe in her chances of standing in the way of the war, and this considerably weakens her rhetorical performance.

And is it any wonder if she does not believe this, when we bear in mind her role in the epic as a whole, and in the beginning of the war in particular? It is crucial to notice that all the peace-making women examined in this chapter are in one way or another closely associated with the beginning of the conflict: if they are not directly guilty of agitating for war, they are at least profoundly entangled in the underlying causes of the conflict. This, I propose, is one of the main reasons why their rhetoric sounds hollow and their attempts lack credibility. Amata's plea to Turnus in *Aeneid* 12 is close to being tragicomic, since the reader is all too aware that it was the queen herself who stirred up the war in the first place. How could she now wield any credibility in her peace-promoting role?

The same applies to Julia in *Pharsalia* 3, where Lucan's way of consistently downplaying Julia's role as a mediator goes as far as to transform her from an arbiter for peace into a warlike Fury. In book three, she is "a ghost full of dread and horror" (*diri tum plena horroris imago*)<sup>82</sup> that makes Pompey rush more

80 Stat. *Theb.* 3.695–707. See also Cleopatra in the *Pharsalia* (although Lucan states that Cleopatra's speech was successful because of her beauty, rather than because of her rhetorical skills). Luc. *Phar.* 10.82–106.

81 Verg. *Aen.* 12.61–62.

82 Luc. *Phar.* 3.9.

eagerly to arms—Lucan recalls the episode in *Aeneid* 7, where Allecto's nightly visit arouses Turnus' *amor ferri*, and thus deliberately associates Julia with a chthonic warmongering Fury.<sup>83</sup> In the light of this episode, the narrator's reference to Julia's potential to become a literary descendant of the Sabine women seems even more absurd and cynical than it otherwise would. In the universe of Roman epic, Julia, too, is more Fury-like than mediating, too tightly entwined with the circle of destruction to break free from it.

In the *Thebaid*, Statius recurrently brings up this controversial and twofold role of women in respect of epic warfare. Venus' plea to Mars in *Thebaid* 3, discussed above in this chapter, can be characterised as a textbook example of ineffective rhetoric:<sup>84</sup> it is based on blame and on accusations that do not help her agenda at all.<sup>85</sup> Venus' last sentence—*sed scopulos et aëna precando/flectere corda paro*—implies that she herself is fully aware of this.<sup>86</sup> Like Virgil's Amata, Statius' Venus anticipates her failure and does not even bother to try her best. Again, I argue that this is mainly because the role of an advocate for peace is grotesquely inconsistent with Venus' overall function in the *Thebaid*. As I noted in chapter five, Statius' Venus is a strikingly violent and quasi-chthonic goddess: in the Lemnian episode, her bloodthirst, cruelty and savagery are unmatched by any of the gods or mortals. This representation of the goddess casts a shadow of doubt on her peaceful efforts in book three and undermines her credibility. How could she succeed in pleading for peace, when there is an aspect of her that surpasses even the hellish rage of the Furies?

The same phenomenon can be observed in the character of Jocasta in books seven and eleven. As I have shown, although the queen is demanding truce, peace and reconciliation, she wields a threatening aura of violence.<sup>87</sup> She is explicitly compared to a Fury,<sup>88</sup> and to Agave who slaughters her son in a Bacchic frenzy.<sup>89</sup> These inter- and intratextual associations, as Ganiban notes, doom her from the start.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, she is doomed from the start because, like Virgil's Amata, Jocasta cannot escape the fact that she is intrinsically entwined with the narrative of war from its very beginning. Statius paints a fascinating

83 Verg. *Aen.* 7.460–462.

84 Heslin 2005, 131–134.

85 Statius states that *lacrimas non pertulit ultra/Bellipotens* (*Stat. Theb.* 3.291–292). These words could be read as an expression of Mars' pity for Venus; however, they could likewise be interpreted as a sign of his frustration with her complaints.

86 *Stat. Theb.* 3.280–281.

87 Ganiban 2007, 160.

88 *Stat. Theb.* 7.477–478.

89 *Stat. Theb.* 11.315–320.

90 Ganiban 2007, 111.

picture of the queen as wavering between guilt and defiance, between self-defense and self-accusation. In book eleven, she denies all responsibility, blaming her husband:

*parce: quid oppositam capulo parmaque repellis?/non ego te contra Stygiis feralia sanxi/vota deis, caeco nec Erinyas ore rogavi./exaudi miseram: genetrix te, saeve, precatur, non pater—.*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.339–342

Spare me: why do you thrust me away with sword-hilt and shield, when I stand up to you? I took no fatal vows to Stygian gods against you, nor did I blindly pray to the Furies. Listen to me in my misery: it is your mother who begs you, O savage, not your father.

In book seven, instead, Jocasta identifies herself as the cause and origin of all the destruction, exaggerating her own role in the conflict. “I married and gave birth to horror” (*nupsi equidem peperique nefas*), she claims, and defines her role as “mother to the impious war” (*impia belli mater*).<sup>91</sup> These two episodes aptly manifest Jocasta’s complex position at the root of the Theban conflict. While it is Oedipus who is guilty of summoning the Fury, and Polynices and Eteocles who pull the trigger, it is Jocasta, who is in a sense the cause that underlies all these actions. Her involvement with the crisis goes further back, and her guilt is, in a sense, an intrinsic part of the fates of her family. Hershkowitz has defined the queen as “ultimately responsible for the destruction of both her sons simply by having conceived them incestuously”.<sup>92</sup> According to her reading, while Oedipus is responsible for initiating the destructive circle in the Theban family, he could manage this only through Jocasta’s fertile womb: “Oedipus actively compounds the madness that J. can only passively accept and endure”.<sup>93</sup> The gender dynamics of guilt in this tableau depict the man as the agitator of *nefas* and *furor*, and the woman as a *locus* where the seeds of madness can be sown over and over again. While, in this sense, Jocasta differs from her most obvious literary model—Virgil’s actively destructive Amata—her functional role at the root of the conflict explains why it is impossible for her to become an advocate for peace. As Ganiban puts it, she is unable to fight *nefas*, because *nefas* is what defines her and contaminates her surroundings.<sup>94</sup>

91 Stat. *Theb.* 7.514, 7.483–484.

92 Hershkowitz 1998, 291. See also Keith 2000, 96.

93 Hershkowitz 1998, 280.

94 Ganiban 2007, 160–161.

This means that the readings of Roman epic that strive to view women as the voice of peace in the corrupt world of war do not seem to be supported by characters such as Amata in the *Aeneid*, Julia in the *Pharsalia*, and Jocasta and Venus in the *Thebaid*.<sup>95</sup> The intertextual allusions that burden these epic women with madness, war, and violence make it impossible for them to be taken seriously as arbiters for peace. This reinforces the impression that in Roman war epic, the female role is more closely associated with death than with life: instead of appearing as the voice of peace in the grim world of war, the women appear as strikingly similar to the warmongering men of their families, similar in their inclination towards the violence and destruction that tear the community to pieces.<sup>96</sup> The works of the Roman imperial poets express very little faith in Sabine successors who could stand in the way of destruction and constitute a basis for collective *Romanitas* in an environment marked by tyranny and civil war.

Once again, the level of optimism is what clearly distinguishes the *Aeneid* from Lucan's and Statius' more cynical civil war epics. Notably, both the *Pharsalia* and the *Thebaid* lack the Virgilian hopefulness that the end of the war could bring about a new kind of unity and peace; instead, they merely depict tyranny, bloodlust and imperial greed as matters that inevitably both shatter and define *Romanitas*. Besides undermining female *pietas* as a possible basis for collective Roman identity, Lucan and Statius undermine the idea that the traditionally gendered roles in terms of war and peace could uphold order in a corrupted society.

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95 For some of these readings, see, e.g., Vessey 1973, 271; Leuseur 1992, 239.

96 It is crucial to notice that not only epic women but authoritative men, too, repeatedly seem to fail to convince when they are trying to delay or stop the drive of violence. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned Latinus' futile attempt to stop Turnus from meeting Aeneas in a duel. Another example can be found in Statius' *Thebaid*, where the Argive king Adrastus plays the part of Virgil's Latinus. Time after time in books two to eleven, he steps in, trying to prevent further hostilities, with no real effect whatsoever (*Stat. Theb.* 2.364–374, 3.442–459, 3.386–393, 7.537–538, 11.110–111, 11.196–197, 11.426–443). For a more general discussion of the failures of male rhetoric in the genre, see Dominik 1994a 213–235; see also Fuhrer 2010, 1–75.

## Dynamics of Death

The focus of the genre on war and violence naturally means that death is one of the most dominant and recurring themes in Roman war epic. While deaths of courageous warriors structure the epic narrative from first to last book, the narrative significance of the theme often increases further towards the end of the poem. The equivocal endings and the lack of closure—features characteristic of Roman war epic—can be seen as due in part to troubling or ambiguous deaths at the end of the poems that take the reader by surprise or, as sometimes happens, are left unexplained. The significance of these deaths to the narrative structure and to the ideological content of the epics is obviously great, and therefore it is worthwhile to examine a little more closely the gendered dynamics of death in Roman war-centred epic.

In general, the Roman war epics seem to follow in the footsteps of Greco-Roman mythology and legendary tradition, in that female deaths have a great structural significance in them. In particular, a woman's death often works as a prelude or a postlude to war.<sup>1</sup> Dido's death as related in the *Aeneid* provokes the Punic War in the *Punica*. Likewise, in the *Pharsalia*, Julia's death is the final straw in the outbreak of the civil war. Amata's suicide in the *Aeneid* inspires Turnus to rush to his doom, and hence generates the end of the epic. In the *Thebaid*, Jocasta kills herself as the last victim of the war, after the conflict has ended in the mutual slaughter of her sons. Camilla's death closes book eleven of the *Aeneid* and triggers the collapse of the Italian side, and Creusa's disappearance marks the end of the Trojan war in *Aeneid* 2. Deaths of women, therefore, clearly structure the rhythm of the epic narrative: they are connected to ends and beginnings, and they often appear as junctions that connect episodes, closing one plotline and marking the beginning of something new.

Feminist readings of Roman narrative literature—historiography, in particular—have often viewed the death of a woman as a situation where the juxtaposition of genders is at its strongest: male agency and imperial establish-

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1 Keith 2000, 101. This tradition is firmly based on the model of Athenian tragedy and its sacrificial maidens Iphigenia and Polyxena (Eur. *IA* 1540–1580; Eur. *IT* 342–379, 852–861; Aesch. *Ag.* 1521–1530, Eur. *Hec.* 488–582, Eur. *Tro.* 634–683). The sacrificial deaths of these innocent virgins are entwined with the war narrative, since one of them enables the beginning of a war, and the other marks its end and appeasement. For Roman variants, see See Lucr. 1.80–101; Ov. *Met.* 12.24–38, 13.441–480; Sen. *Tro.* 1117–1161; Verg. *Aen.* 2.116–119.

ment are made possible by the violent subjugation and erasure of a woman, who embodies the resistance to the predestined drive of the narrative.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this phenomenon has been perceived as strongly connected to the process of forming Roman identity: in the legendary stories of Lucretia, Verginia, Tarpeia and Horatia, the death of a woman comes to define not only the male action, but also the patriarchal community's perception of itself. The woman's death empowers the men to strive for justice and for the restoration of the normative power structures.<sup>3</sup> The dead female body operates as a *locus* for male agency, and in death, the woman becomes the absolute object: victim of the male gaze of both the internal and the external audiences. The male subject and the patriarchal community define themselves and reconstruct their identities on the basis of this violent objectifying of the dead woman.<sup>4</sup>

Read in this light, it is particularly intriguing that in war epic, the gendered casting of roles in terms of agency, subjectivity and focalisation seems quite different, and the deaths of women do not always—nor even usually—appear as events that consisted of male action and female *locus*. In chapter three, I pointed out that rape as a factual matter is an extremely rare, almost non-existent, topic in Roman war epic. Moreover, other forms of violence inflicted by men upon women are equally rare. The warrior maidens aside, no woman in the poetry of Virgil, Lucan, Statius, Silius Italicus or Valerius Flaccus is killed by a man. And while it is indisputable that the reasons for women's suicides are related to men, no woman dies a death of Lucretia, that is, a suicide caused by shame and violation. Instead, it is remarkable how determinedly the epic women claim for themselves the power over their deaths—as if to compensate for the marginalisation they suffer in their lives. Unlike in Roman legendary history, in war-centred epic women's bodies do not necessarily and self-evidently become building material for the acts of men. They might, however, become building material for Roman identity or for the collective self, as I shall now demonstrate.

2 Most elaborately argued for in Keith 2000, 104, 112–116, 130. Similar ideas have been presented in Nugent 1999, 267–270 and Joshel 1992, 121.

3 Keith 2000, 112–116, 130. Keith argues that in Roman epic, too, the death of an innocent woman legitimises the violent mission of the hero, and, “over her dead body, he regenerates or transforms the social order”. See also Nugent 1999, 267–270 and Joshel 1992, 121.

4 See Joshel 1992, 112–113; Keith 2000, 102–103; Hemker 1985, 41, 46; Joplin 1990, esp. 64–68.

## 1 Death, Power and Narrative Control: Creusa, Dido, and Cleopatra

In the whole of Roman epic poetry, there is no better example of a female character empowered by death than Dido in the *Aeneid*, and this makes it suitable to begin this chapter by taking a closer look at the themes of agency and subjectivity in the Dido episode, and by discussing how the story relates to other deaths of women in Virgil's epic. In particular, Dido's death appears in an interesting light when examined in relation to the death of Creusa, another woman in Aeneas' life who perishes before the hero's epic quest ever gets properly started. At first sight, these two deaths appear as different as could be, in terms of agency, power and textual subjectivity. However, as I will try to demonstrate, they are structurally very similar and can be read as complementing each other in Virgil's epic narrative.

Creusa's death, which is also the first death of a woman in the *Aeneid*, takes place in the second book of the epic. It is related in an embedded narrative with Aeneas himself as a secondary narrator: in what becomes the first war episode of the entire poem, the hero describes how Troy fell and he gathered his scattered followers in an attempt to flee.<sup>5</sup> In Aeneas' story, when the flight is discussed and debated, Creusa's narrative presence is strong. The reader cannot forget about Aeneas' wife, since she is repeatedly mentioned, and the hero's concern for her safety is made evident. Creusa is even granted a voice of her own: when Aeneas is planning on rushing back to the battle, she steps in to stop him. Aeneas relates that:

*Hinc ferro accingor rursus clipeoque sinistram/insertabam aptans meque  
extra tecta ferebam./ecce autem complexa pedes in limine coniunx/haere-  
bat parvumque patri tendebat Iulum:/'si periturus abis, et nos rape in omnia  
tecum;/sin aliquam expertus sumptis spem ponis in armis,/hanc primum  
tutare domum. cui parvus Iulus,/cui pater et coniunx quondam tua dicta  
relinquor?'*

VERG. *Aen.* 2.671–678

5 When Virgil composed the *Aeneid*, there were apparently at least two ancient traditions concerning Creusa's fate. In one of them, she accompanies Aeneas on his journey; this version was presumably represented by Naevius, and it is depicted in a few vase paintings that show Creusa following Aeneas on his departure from Troy (or Aeneas and Creusa together with their son). According to the other tradition, Cybele and Aphrodite attempted to rescue Creusa from Troy (see Pausanias 10.26.1). As Perkell notes, Virgil vaguely follows the second one, while, however, excising any hope of rescue for Creusa. Perkell 1981, 358.

I gird on this sword again, I pass my left arm through the shield and, fastening it, I leave the house. But look! On the threshold my wife clasps me, clinging to my feet and holding up little Iulus for his father to see. “If you go to your doom, take us, too, to share all with you. But if, judging by your past experience, you place some hope in the armour that you wear, then protect this house first. To what fate do you leave little Iulus, to what fate your father—and me that was once called your wife?”

Creusa’s speech, which clearly reflects the Homeric tradition concerning suffering wives and mothers, foreshadows her fate. *coniunx quondam tua dicta* implies that her alliance with Aeneas is coming to an end before its time. Moreover, when Aeneas, encouraged by a portent from Jupiter, finally agrees to flee, his plan of action anticipates the future course of the events:

*‘ergo age, care pater, cervici imponere nostrae;/ipse subibo umeris, nec me labor iste gravabit./quo res cumque cadent, unum et commune periculum,/ una salus ambobus erit. mihi parvus Iulus/sit comes, et longe servet vesitiga coniunx.—tu, genitor, cape sacra manu patriosque Penates—.’—haec fatus latos umeros subiectaue colla/veste super fulvique insternor pelle leonis,/succedoque oneri; dextrae se parvus Iulus/implicuit sequiturque patrem non passibus aequis;/pone subit coniunx.*

VERG. *Aen.* 2.707–711, 2.717, 2.721–725

“Come then, dear father, mount on my neck: I myself will bow my shoulders under you, and this task will not be a burden to me. However things may fall, the two of us will meet one and the same danger, or one salvation. Let little Iulus accompany me, and my wife shall follow our steps from a distance.—You, father, take in your arms the sacred objects of our household gods, and those of our homeland—.”—Having spoken thus, I spread a garment of tawny lion’s skin over my broad shoulders and bowed neck, and took on the burden. Little Iulus clasps his hand in mine and follows his father, although his steps are no match for mine. My wife follows behind.

It is apparent that Creusa has already begun to vanish at this point, although she is in fact still present.<sup>6</sup> She is referred to as following *pone* and *longe*, and Aeneas has ceased to call her by her name—she is simply his *coniunx*, already

6 On non-corporeal deaths of women in the *Aeneid*, Nugent 1999, 264–269.

a somewhat abstract and generic character.<sup>7</sup> The episode is perhaps the best example of the marginalisation of women in epic, a phenomenon that takes place simultaneously on the narrative and on the ideological levels. As Creusa gradually vanishes from the lines of Virgil's epic, her significance to its ideology also fades out. As a woman, she has done her duty and secured the patrilineal continuity—now, it becomes more difficult to define what her role in the family and in the epic should be, and it is more convenient to subtly write her off. As Nugent and Oliensis have rightly observed, the iconic tableau of Aeneas' departure is a physical representation of patrilineal succession where the position of the woman is marginal.<sup>8</sup> What *pious* Aeneas values is what he keeps close—the father (who signifies his respect for past generations), the son (who symbolises his hope for the continuance of the family) and the household gods (who protect his founding mission). The family, the gods, and the *patria*—all the classical components of the Virgilian *pietas*—can be perceived in this tableau. It is all too obvious that the wife and conjugal love are not among them.

Considering Creusa's gradual marginalisation in this embedded narrative, and the way in which the narrator foreshadows her fate, it does not come as a surprise when she eventually goes missing in the chaos and confusion of the war. When Aeneas realises that Creusa is no longer with him, he depicts himself as going mad with worry:

*quem non incusavi amens hominumque deorumque/aut quid in eversa vidi  
crudelius urbe?/Ascanium Anchisenque patrem Teucrosque penates/com-  
mendo sociis et curva valle recondo;/ipse urbem repeto et cingor fulgentibus  
armis./stat casus renovare omnis omnemque reverti/per Troiam et rursus  
caput obiectare periclis.—ausus quin etiam voces iactare per umbram/*

7 Heinze points out that in visual arts, Creusa is often depicted as walking before Aeneas; he also suggests that Creusa's seclusion from the rest of the family is necessary in order that Aeneas would not notice her disappearance until afterwards, when it is too late. Heinze 1903, 59–61. Heinze, unfortunately, does not make a proper reference to the visual sources he is talking about. He points out, however, that in the tradition prior to Virgil, the fleeing Aeneas is sometimes represented as accompanied by his wife, who is called Eurydice (see e.g. Paus. 10.26.1, Enn. *Ann.* 37v). This name, naturally, carries strong connotations of disappearance and left-behind-ness. The name Creusa is, however, favoured by the Augustan authors; see Liv. 1.3; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.31.4. Heinze 1903, 57, n. 3, 58, n. 1.

8 Nugent 1999, 264; Oliensis 1997b, 304–305. Perkell notes that Creusa's disappearance appears to trouble Servius, too, who tries to explain it away by proposing that Aeneas' departure with his son is to be read 'with son and wife' (*quidam comiti pro comitibus accipi volunt*). Perkell 1981, 358, 360.

*implevi clamore vias, maestusque Creusam/nequiquam ingeminans iterumque iterumque vocavi.*

VERG. *Aen.* 2.745–751, 2.768–770

What man or god did I not accuse, out of my mind with frenzy, what crueller fate did I see in the destroyed city? I entrusted Ascanius, my father Anchises, and the household gods of Troy to my comrades and hid them in a bendy valley. I myself headed back for the city, and girded on my shiny arms. I stood to renew every disaster, to trace my way back through all Troy, and to again expose my life to dangers.—I even dared to cry out loud into the shadows; I filled the streets with shouts and, sadly and in vain, repeatedly called for Creusa, again and again.

Now he leaves behind his father, his son, and his household gods and is suddenly awakened to the realisation that he even has a wife. As if to excuse his neglect of her, Aeneas exaggerates his anxiety at her disappearance. It is crucial to note that it is Aeneas whose voice we hear and whose viewpoint is delivered to the reader; likewise, it is Aeneas who is the victim in this passage—not Creusa, whose whereabouts and condition remain a mystery. Arguably, this is a behavioural pattern very typical of Virgil's hero: after causing some irreversible misfortune by being *immemor*, he acts heartbroken, denies all responsibility and stresses his own suffering. One finds him repeating this pattern on numerous occasions later on: his desertion of Dido is the best example, and the death of Pallas in book ten is another.<sup>9</sup> Ironically for a hero who is destined to move ever onward on his epic mission, Aeneas seems obsessed with the past. He repeatedly strives to go backwards, to absolve himself of the guilt that he feels over something that happened before, and to change the past rather than the future.<sup>10</sup>

And time after time, this is denied to him. His desperate attempt to rewrite Creusa's fate is futile: this becomes clear to him when her ghost appears. Aeneas relates that while he was looking for his wife in mad frenzy, her *umbra* suddenly appeared to him, *nota maior imago*, and dispelled his cares with comforting words:

9 Verg. *Aen.* 10.426–509.

10 As Gowing points out, in Roman thinking, the endeavour to rewrite the past and to control memory was a way of controlling and determining the present. See Gowing 2005, 1–15. For further analysis of this theme as an integral feature in Roman imperial literature, see Gowing 2005, 2; Casali 2003, 61–63, 66–68.

*tum sic adfari et curas his demere dictis: / 'quid tantum insano iuvat indulgere dolori, / o dulcis coniunx? non haec sine numine divum / eveniunt; nec te comitem hinc portare Creusam / fas aut ille sinit superi regnator Olympi. — lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusae. / non ego Myrmidonum sedes Dolopumve superbas / aspiciam aut Graeis servitum matribus ibo, / Dardanis et divae Veneris nurus ... / sed me magna deum genetrix his detinet oris. / iamque vale et nati serva communis amorem.'*

VERG. *Aen.* 2.775–779, 2.784–789

Then she spoke to me thus, expelling my concerns with these words: “What does it help to indulge like that in senseless grief, O dear husband? This does not happen against the will of the gods; it is not the divine destiny that you should take Creusa from here as your partner, and the ruler of high Olympus does not allow it.—Expel your tears for your beloved Creusa. I will never see the mighty homes of the Myrmidons or Dolopians, or go to be the slave of Greek matrons—I, a Trojan woman and daughter-in-law of goddess Venus ... but the great mother of the gods keeps me on these shores. And now goodbye, and cherish your love for our common child.”

Apparently, Creusa is now deceased and has found peace, although neither the internal nor the external audience will ever find out how she actually met her end. However, what seems noteworthy is that after her passing, Creusa finds her voice again (if only as a phantom whipped up by Aeneas' guilty conscious). She explains her death to be the will of Jupiter himself, and makes clear that she herself is content with her fate. Moreover, in her own words Creusa absolves Aeneas of guilt and responsibility and sends him on his way, to pursue a new dynastic marriage in a new homeland. In a way, her speech appears to represent her passing as a sacrificial death, in the manner of Iphigenia's, that ensures the continuance of the hero's epic mission.

Unsurprisingly, the Creusa episode has often been examined as a prime example of the epic tendency to erase female characters from the narrative whenever they appear to hinder the male heroic mission.<sup>11</sup> Submitting to the male ideology of the poem, Creusa actually writes *herself* off the story, thus committing a 'narrative suicide' in order to serve the needs of the patriarchal, patrilineal community, and to support the male hero's search for a new identity. It is, however, crucial to notice that exactly for this reason, Creusa's speech

11 Perkell 1981, 360–361; Keith 2000, 118; Nugent 1999.

wields considerable narrative power. It has to be from *her* lips that Aeneas is set free: *she* needs to be given a voice here, for she is the only one who can stop the hero from wandering around in agony and set him on his course. The teleological drive of the epic depends on Creusa's ability to convince her addressee, and at this, she is successful.

After Aeneas has been convinced, there is no longer anything to keep Creusa in the story. Immediately after her speech, Aeneas leaves Troy, leaving behind the wife who symbolises the falling city, and—in the larger scale of things—his past and his Trojan-ness.<sup>12</sup> He is now a refugee in search of a new home, a new fate and a new wife.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the disintegration of his Trojan identity is thus assured, it is significant that Creusa, too, as an embodiment of this identity, vanishes from the narrative immediately after her speech. After *Aeneid* 2, her name never comes up again, apart from a single mention in book nine, when Ascanius vows to take Euryalus' mother as his surrogate mother, "lacking only the name of Creusa" (*nomenque Creusae/solum defuerit*).<sup>14</sup> By means of this final reference, Creusa's place is filled by another even in the life of her son. This complete disappearance strengthens the idea that Creusa is symbolic of a time and place that the *Aeneadae* must leave behind in order to carry on.

Scholars who read the Creusa episode as a violent erasure of a woman in favour of the hero's epic mission have often emphasised the similarities between Creusa and Dido in this respect. According to Perkell, both episodes deal with Aeneas' abandonment of a woman he claims to love. Likewise, in both cases, this abandonment is due to the hero's praised *pietas* and, finally, in both stories, it eventually leads to the woman's death. Perkell argues that it is as if the women that Aeneas loves exist only to be removed from the story; she considers the pattern to be a part of Virgil's attempt to represent the emotional cost of becoming an imperial people.<sup>15</sup>

As I see it, the deaths of Creusa and Dido indeed complement each other in the structure of Virgil's epic, but this does not mean that their narrative and ideological purposes would be the same. Instead, I suggest that Dido's death in book four works as a deliberate antithesis to Creusa's passing—or, in fact, to Aeneas' version of it. We should note that the story of Creusa's disappearance, as we learn it, is told by Aeneas himself, and its primary internal audience

12 See Syed 2005, 140–142.

13 Bettini 1997; Evans 2003; Syed 2005, 175–176. The necessity of demolishing Aeneas' Trojan-ness is made explicit in the last book, when Juno demands that the identity of the future people is to be constructed upon the Latin culture, not the Trojan. Verg. *Aen.* 12.826–828.

14 Verg. *Aen.* 9. 297–298.

15 Perkell 1981, 356–357, 370.

is none other than Dido. Whether she believes Aeneas' story or not, remains a mystery—as de Jong observes, these kinds of long external analepses told by secondary narrators are practically unfalsifiable for the narratees.<sup>16</sup> In Aeneas' case, however, the external audience might be tempted to doubt the verifiability of his story: Creusa's speech, in particular, so conveniently demolishes the hero's every concern, that it could be argued to be an outstanding example of Aeneas' habit of rewriting his painful past. It is not that Aeneas would deliberately lie to Dido; it is more likely that he is trying to convince *himself*, in order to be able to live with his past and to move on with his future. In any case, the fact that Dido is the primary narratee of Aeneas' story about Creusa's death is the crucial link between the two women, and, I suggest, Dido's judgment of the tale can be observed as having an impact on her later actions and decisions.

Unlike Creusa, who erases herself from the narrative in favour of Aeneas' epic mission, Dido makes sure that her death will ensure her continuous presence in Aeneas' future. Most readings of *Aeneid* 4 have examined Dido's behaviour after Aeneas has left her as frantic, impulsive and out-of-control;<sup>17</sup> however, the way she elaborately plans her suicide down to the last detail, and how she deceitfully manages to hide her plans from everyone, create a different impression of the queen's state of mind. This is not the behaviour of a mad woman—or if it is, it is not the madness of the maenadic and ecstatic kind that Dido manifests earlier in book four. After pondering every possible route open to her and deciding on death,<sup>18</sup> Dido conducts the last moments of her life as if it is a magnificent show. Her death is not forced upon her, nor is it an impulsive act of agony; rather, it is a carefully designed and executed performance, targeted at making a lasting impression. Altogether, Dido's determinacy and power in designing her own death are remarkable and without comparison in the epic tradition.

In Dido's preparation for her death, one can perceive how different her fate actually is from the fates of the sacrificial women of Roman legendary history, and how different it is from that of Creusa. The women loved by Aeneas may both be destined to die; however, Dido's determinacy to die on her own terms marks her as drastically different from Creusa. Furthermore, while Creusa's

16 De Jong 2007, 23. Casali discusses Aeneas' account of his departure from Troy, pointing out rhetorical devices that make the story dubious. He points to an alternative, 'anti-Roman' tradition, in which Aeneas' flight was depicted as the betrayal of his *patria* (Dion. Hal. 1.48.3). Casali 2003, 61–63, 66–68. See also Ahl 1989.

17 See, e.g., Cairns 1989, 129–150; Syed 2005, 98.

18 Verg. *Aen.* 4.529–547.

death is hidden from the eyes of both Aeneas and his audience, Dido's death is elaborately depicted down to every last detail—this visual feast considerably increases the memorability of the act. It is also crucial to note that, by the end of book four, the power dynamics of the story have considerably shifted. When discussing *Aeneid* 2, where Aeneas relates the story about the fall of Troy, Syed rightly points out his powerful position compared to the other characters of the poem: Aeneas' role as an internal secondary narrator gives him the power to shape and control the story in a way others cannot.<sup>19</sup> Arguably, these dynamics are reversed at the end of book four. Aeneas' power over the narrative is limited to his own part in the story: he can choose to leave Carthage, but beyond that, he is not in control of the events, as Dido's suicide demonstrates. It is remarkable that Aeneas in fact turns from a narrator into a narratee: later, in book six, he mentions that the news of Dido's death was told to him (*mihi nuntius—venerat*). Thus, Aeneas' control over the narrative, established in the beginning of his and Dido's love story, is taken away from him at the end of it.

Aeneas' hasty flight from Carthage makes evident his lack of control over the events. Much as with the fall of Troy, the hero leaves the stage in the dead of night—this time, because he does not know what Dido might be planning and is terrified by it.<sup>20</sup> While Aeneas' departure is an integral part of both Creusa's and Dido's death episodes, the manner of his leaving could not be more different in these two tales. From Troy, the hero flees with Creusa's blessings, but from Carthage, he sails away with Dido's curse upon him. The structural positioning of these episodes at the beginning and at the end of Dido and Aeneas' love story strengthens the idea that they are meant to be read in the light of each other, as two very different articulations of the same theme. While Creusa's death validates and justifies Aeneas' imperial mission, Dido's death challenges and opposes it on both narrative and ideological levels.

Dido's attempt to secure her presence in the narrative and in Aeneas' future turns out to be successful. With her final curse, she evokes undying hostility between her own and Aeneas' descendants and makes her Punic people a crucial factor in the identity of future Romans. Moreover, on a more personal level, Aeneas never seems to be able to completely escape the memory of Dido, as he himself anticipates when he swears that “nor will I ever regret remembering

19 Syed 2005, 69–74. For further discussion of Aeneas' role as a secondary narrator, see Rossi, who compares him to Homer's Odysseus. Rossi 2002, 248–251. See also Keith, who argues that in classical epic in general, “male narrators tend to control the narrative”. Keith 1999, 216.

20 Verg. *Aen.* 4.554–583.

Elissa, as long as I can remember anything, as long as my spirit rules my body” (*nec me meminisse pigebit Elissae, / dum memor ipse mei, dum spiritus hos regit artus*).<sup>21</sup> The latter part of the *Aeneid* shows these words to be quite true, since time after time, various allusions and references remind the reader of Dido: the best example is the death of Pallas in book ten, when the bitterly mourning Aeneas is depicted as wrapping the body in a fabric woven by the queen.<sup>22</sup> Thus, whereas Creusa vanishes, Dido’s narrative presence remains strong despite (and because of) her death: it is the way she designed it, perhaps inspired by the pitiable fate of Aeneas’ first wife.

The differences and the similarities between the Creusa episode and Dido’s story can be very clearly observed in book six, where Aeneas’ obsessive need to control the memory of the past becomes evident again. In his visit to the underworld, he suddenly has a vision of Dido’s ghost and tries to address her, in order to explain ‘what really happened’ between them. Shedding tears, he speaks to her:

*infelix Dido, verus mihi nuntius ergo/venerat exstinctam, ferroque extrema  
secutam?/funeris heu! tibi causa fui? per sidera iuro,/per superos, et si qua  
fides tellure sub ima est,/invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi./sed me iussa  
deum, quae nunc has ire per umbras,/per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque  
profundam,/imperii egere suis; nec credere quivi/hunc tantum tibi me dis-  
cessu ferre dolorem./siste gradum teque aspectu ne subtrahe nostro./quem  
fugis? extremum fato, quod te adloquor, hoc est.*

VERG. *Aen.* 6.456–466

Poor Dido—it was true then, the news I received, saying you were dead and had sought your end by the sword? Alas! Was I the cause of your death? I swear by the stars, by the gods, and by whatever good faith there may be in the underworld: it was against my will that I left from your shores, O queen. But the gods’ commands, which now make me pass through these shadows, through rugged and forsaken places and the deep night, compelled me with their orders. And I could not believe that my departure could bring you such agony. Halt your steps and do not withdraw from my view. Whom do you run from? By the decree of fate, these are the last words that I will ever speak to you.

21 Verg. *Aen.* 4.335–336.

22 Verg. *Aen.* 11.72–75. For further analysis, see Reed 2007, 73–100 (esp. 80–83); Monti 1981, 96; Putnam 1995, 19.

Aeneas, however, seems to forget that Dido has heard his excuses before—she was the primary narratee when Aeneas explained away his responsibility for Creusa's death. It is therefore no surprise that she refuses to engage with Aeneas, and is completely indifferent towards his version of the story. We read that

*illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat/nec magis incepto vultum sermone  
movetur;/quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes./tandem corripuit sese  
atque inimica refugit/in nemus umbriferum, coniunx ubi pristinus illi/res-  
pondet curis aequatque Sychaeus amorem./nec minus Aeneas, casu percus-  
sus iniquo,/prosequitur lacrimis longe et miseratur euntem.*

VERG. *Aen.* 6.469–476

She, turning away, kept her eyes fixed on the ground and as he spoke, her face was as immovable as if she was made of hard stone or Marpesian rock. Finally, she snatched herself away and, hostile, fled back to the shady grove, where her former husband Sychaeus attends to her troubles and returns her love. Aeneas, nonetheless, struck by her unfair doom, follows her with teary eyes from a distance, and pities her as she goes.

As von Albrecht and Skinner have pointed out, the episode is an obvious reversal of the episode in book four where Dido pleads to Aeneas, trying to stop him from leaving her.<sup>23</sup> More importantly, I would add, it is a rewriting of Creusa's death and disappearance. Now it is Aeneas who follows from a distance (*prosequitur longe*), who tries to cling on to Dido and to keep her from fading out. Like Dido and Creusa before him, Aeneas now has to experience the impossibility of keeping someone around who simply does not care enough to stay.

Dido's refusal to speak is a particularly intriguing element in the episode, since it demonstrates that, while having a voice is a crucial part of epic subjectivity, sometimes holding one's tongue can be a more powerful narrative act. Dido's silence grants her just as much power as Creusa's speech did to her. In a very subtle way, the poet brings to discussion the artificial nature of memory and the battle over its control, themes crucial to the Augustan period. Virgil's way of dealing with female deaths in his epic is a fitting reminder that the one who controls the past controls the future. Moreover, as Dido's silence shows,

23 Von Albrecht 1965, 54–64; Skinner 2000, 102.

the control over that past is not only in the hands of the one telling the story, but also in the hands of the audience who choose how (or if) to receive it.

Dido's chilly reaction to Aeneas' pleas demonstrates her control over her fate: even in death, she does not allow Aeneas to do to her what he did to Creusa; that is, to turn her into a mere memory, and into a hallmark of his imperial establishment. She refuses to absolve the hero of his guilt, and by so doing, makes sure that he will not be set free from her memory. Instead, Dido and Carthage become defining characteristics in Aeneas' self-fashioning—and, moreover, in that of his Roman descendants. Through a pivotal female death, the fates and the identities of Rome and its great enemy are irrevocably entwined. Dido's suicide makes sure that the past will continue to determine the future, just as Dido will continue to determine Aeneas, and Carthage Rome.

Therefore, the deaths of Dido and Creusa, while structurally parallel, demonstrate the two very different ways of constructing literary subjectivity for women in Roman war epic. Whereas Creusa is removed from the narrative and deprived of her significance in the poem, Dido, by exiting the epic in the manner of her own choosing, remains in the story until the very end. Furthermore, by claiming power over her own death, she ends up as a permanent factor in Aeneas' identity, and in the collective identity of his successors. Because of these crucial differences, I would suggest that instead of Creusa, Dido's most significant *alter ego*, and the model whose death her suicide mimics is, once again, Cleopatra. Virgil fashions Dido's death in such a manner that the Egyptian queen can be constantly perceived in the background, and this resemblance adds both authority and threat to the power that the queen wields over her own demise.

Since a spectacular death is what both Dido and Cleopatra were most famous for in Augustan Rome, it does not come as a surprise that the foreshadowing of doom is one of the most obvious and notable intratextual devices through which the two queens are associated with each other in the *Aeneid*.<sup>24</sup> Throughout her story, Dido is described as *infelix* and *moritura*—both expressions that in Virgil's vocabulary unmistakably mark the forthcoming doom of a dangerous *dux femina*.<sup>25</sup> Besides these attributes, she is also depicted as *mori-*

24 See Benario 1970.

25 *infelix*: 1.712, 1.749, 4.529, 4.596. *moritura*: 4.308. Also, *certa mori* (4.564) and *moriens* (4.673). Compare the representation of Amata and Camilla: Verg. *Aen.* 7.376, 11.563, 11.587–589, 11.816. Keith interprets Virgil's continuous foreshadowing of Dido's death as a way of exculpating Aeneas of responsibility for it (see, e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 4.169–170, 4.308, 4.318, 4.323, 4.385–387, 4.436, 4.519, 4.604). Keith 2000, 112–114, 118. For further discussion, see Benario 1970; Pyy 2011, 94–97.

*ens* and *certa mori*.<sup>26</sup> As for Cleopatra, the only time she is directly mentioned in the *Aeneid*, the narrator makes sure to stress her approaching death: when Cleopatra is depicted as commander at the battle of Actium, we read that “the queen in the middle summons her troops with her native rattle, and does not yet notice the twin snakes behind her” (*regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro, / necdum etiam geminos a tergo respicit anguis*).<sup>27</sup> In this episode, the connection between the two queens is made explicit by the rhetoric of death: Cleopatra at Actium is described as *pallentem morte futura*, while Dido in book four is *pallida morte futura*.<sup>28</sup> The deaths of both Dido and Cleopatra, therefore, are consistently depicted as both inevitable and predestined, required by the teleological narrative of epic as well as by its patriotic ideology. Yet, inevitable as these deaths may be, it is equally noteworthy that what connects the two queens is that they themselves actively choose and control the manner of their passing.

Of course, when discussing Cleopatra’s death in this context, it is the literary tradition concerning the case that is under examination, not the historical event itself. By as early as the Augustan period, the queen’s suicide had become a legend of mythical dimensions, and the strong partiality of all the surviving literary sources makes it impossible to accurately trace the events behind the myth.<sup>29</sup> The sources that relate the story are marked by admiration, contempt, and fear of the queen, and a strong orientalist tendency is present throughout. Unsurprisingly, it seems that the Absolute Other is at her most fascinating when accompanied by the exciting presence of death. Perhaps the most famous example of the literary commemoration of the event is Horace’s ode 1.37, where these ambiguous feelings are elaborately expressed:

*Quae generosius/perire quaerens nec muliebriter/expavit ensem nec latentis/classe cita reparavit oras;/ausa et iacentem visere regiam/vultu sereno, fortis et asperas/tractare serpentis, ut atrum/corpore combiberet vene-*

26 Verg. *Aen.* 4.674, 4.564.

27 Verg. *Aen.* 8.696–697.

28 Verg. *Aen.* 8.709, 4.644. Servius notes that *aut pallidior, quam solent homines esse post mortem: aut ‘pallida’ omine mortis futurae*. Serv. *Aen.* 4.664.

29 Although the Augustan authors favoured the myth of a queen who ‘escaped’ from the hands of the *princeps* by death, it seems plausible that for the *princeps* himself, Cleopatra’s suicide was an agreeable solution to the problem of what to do with her. On Cleopatra’s suicide and the literary tradition concerning it, see Hughes-Hallett 1990; Pelling 2001; Wyke 1992.

*num,/deliberata morte ferocior,/saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens/privata deduci superbo/non humilis mulier triumpho.*<sup>30</sup>

HOR. *Carm.* 1.37.21–32

Determined to die more nobly, she showed no womanly fear of the sword, nor did she use her swift fleet to gain some hidden shore. She had the strength of mind to gaze on her ruined palace with a calm countenance, and the courage to handle the sharp-toothed serpents, letting her body drink in their black venom. Once she had resolved to die she was all the more defiant—determined, no doubt, to cheat the cruel Liburnians; she would not be stripped of her royalty and conveyed to face a jeering triumph: no humble woman she.<sup>31</sup>

Horace's depiction demonstrates the significance of Cleopatra's death for the Augustan mythmaking tradition in the early imperial period. Doubtless, the queen's death was the final matter that assured her immortality and her renown as the strangest, most fascinating enemy that Rome ever had. This is the literary tradition against which one should understand and examine the formation of the archetype of a *regina moritura* in Roman war epic of the early Principate.

In the *Carmen de bello Actiaco*, a fragmentary epic poem from the 60s CE,<sup>32</sup> we find a rare and detailed epic depiction of Cleopatra's preparation for death. The queen's tragic end apparently played a considerable part in this poem; however, the fragments that survive do not include the actual death scene, only an episode where she tests different ways of dying, using slaves and criminals as her guinea-pigs:

[Dele]ctumqu[e loc]um quo noxia turba co[i]ret/praeberetque suae spectacula tri[s]tia mortis./Qualis ad instantis acies cum tela parantur,/signa tubae classesque simul terrestibus armis,/est facies ea visa loci, cum saeva coirent/instrumenta necis, v[a]rio congesta paratu:/und[i]que sic illuc campo deforme co[a]c[t]um/omne vagabatur leti genus, omne timoris.—  
[Hic i]acet [absumptus f]erro, tu[m]et [il]le ven[eno]/aut pendent [cav]is cervicibus aspide mollem/labitur in somnum trahiturque libidine mortis:/

30 The intertextual link between Horace's Cleopatra and Virgil's Dido has been discussed, e.g., in Benario 1970, 2–6, and Galinsky 2003 (*passim*).

31 English translation of the *Odes and Epodes* by N. Rudd, *LCL* 2004.

32 The poem dates at the latest to the Neronian era, but many have pushed it back to the Augustan period. Cozzolino 1975, 81; Benario 1983, 1656–1658; Zecchini 1987; Immarco Bonavolontà 1984 and 1992.

*percutit [ad]flatu brevis hunc sine morsibus anguis,/volnere seu t[e]nui  
pars inlita parva veneni/ocius interem[i]t, laqueis pars cogitur artis/in[t]er-  
saeptam animam pressis effundere venis,/i[n]mersisque f[r]eto clausurunt  
guttura fauces./[H]as inter strages solio descendit et inter—.*

COL. 5–6

And the chosen place where the guilty mob might assemble and offer grim spectacles of their own deaths. just as when weapons are being prepared for oncoming battles, standards, trumpets, and fleets, along with land arms, so seemed the appearance of the place, when the cruel instruments of death assembled, brought together with varied preparation: gathered there on the field from every place in this way, every foul kind of death was wandering, every kind of fear.—This one lies cut off by the sword, that one is swollen with poison or, with the asp hanging on his hollow neck, drifts into soft sleep and is led on by the desire for death: this one a small snake kills with its breath without a bite, or a small amount of poison, smeared in a slight wound, kills more quickly, some are compelled by tightened nooses to pour forth their blocked breath from compressed passageways, and the throats of those plunged in water closed the openings. In the midst of this slaughter she descended from her throne and among ...<sup>33</sup>

This episode—most likely the model and inspiration for Plutarch and Cassius Dio later on—shows Cleopatra walking amongst the death and the dying, calmly calculating the best possible way to go.<sup>34</sup> As Keith puts it, the queen is “both the director and the audience of the spectacular theatre of death”.<sup>35</sup> And this is merely a rehearsal for her performance in the leading role.

The way in which Cleopatra plans her passing in the *Carmen de bello Actiaco* instantly recalls Dido in the *Aeneid*. Admittedly, Dido only ponders possible alternatives to death, not the manner of death itself. However, in their determinacy and elaboration, the two epic queens strikingly resemble each other. They

33 English translation of the fragments of the *Carmen de bello Actiaco* by H.W. Benario, in Benario 1983.

34 Plutarch and Dio depict Cleopatra in a similar setting, testing suitable ways to die. Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 71; Cass. Dio 51.11.2. As Cozzolino notes, Lucan, too, observably imitates *Carmen's* Cleopatra when he depicts people looking for death through multiple means (Luc. *Phar.* 2.148–159). Cozzolino 1975, 82–86.

35 Keith 2000, 121. Compare with Eldred's perceptive analysis of suicide as a spectacle and a performance in the *Pharsalia*; Eldred 2002, esp. 61–67.

plan their suicides down to every detail, not only to make it an easy passing, but primarily to make it a spectacular one. In short, they want to attain control of their life and renown.

Keith argues that the death of Cleopatra in the *Carmen de bello Actiaco* “constructs and confirms distinctions between Roman and foreigner, conqueror and conquered, living and dead, male and female”.<sup>36</sup> As I see it, the situation is actually the opposite of this: Cleopatra, although perhaps forced to leave the stage, actively denies the conqueror an opportunity to determine her fate—thus, she confuses and questions the power dynamics between the two. Rather than confirming, her actions blur the distinction between object and agent, for she is not only acted upon, but claims a role as the ultimate decision-maker over her own death. Moreover, Cleopatra is the unquestionable focaliser of the episode, as the reader gazes upon the dying people through her eyes, focusing on what she considers important: the manner and efficiency of each form of death, on how quick or how gory it is. I would argue that the epic Cleopatra, by submitting herself to a death of her own choosing, actually gains considerable textual subjectivity: the reader is invited to feel what she feels, to imagine himself in the position of those who are dying, as she does.

In this way, the literary topos where a woman's death manifests and showcases male power over her body, is undermined, and instead, Roman war epic presents a female subjectivity that is rather unparalleled in the ancient literary tradition. The situation is similar to that of Dido, who pierces herself with the *ensis Dardanius*. The sword is a phallic symbol of Aeneas' power to penetrate and kill, a power essentially associated with manhood in the universe of epic. Nevertheless, when Dido's own hand plunges it in her breast, she robs Aeneas of this power and changes from a female *locus* of male action into someone who is simultaneously an object and a subject—and definitely an empowered agent.<sup>37</sup> What perfects Dido's revenge, is that this act simultaneously both disempowers Aeneas *and* places upon him the responsibility for the queen's death. Compared to the mythical tales of sacrificed virgins or to the raped and killed women of the Roman legendary past, it is clear to the reader that this is a completely different story. Instead of a male, mobile hero of epic striving for action ‘over her dead body’, one finds a female subject who objectifies herself and thereby ends up undermining (and eternally defining) the male hero.

36 Keith 2000, 121.

37 See Reed 2007, 83; Eldred 2002, 64.

This message is strengthened by Dido's dying speech, in which she manages to claim credit for her suicide while simultaneously blaming Aeneas for it. The queen's last words clearly represent her as the sovereign of her own life and death:

*'dulces exuviae, dum fata deusque sinebat, accipite hanc animam meque his exsolvite curis./vixi et, quem dederat cursum Fortuna, peregi,/et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago./urbem praeclaram statui, mea moenia vidi,/ulta virum poenas inimico a fratre recepi,/felix, heu! nimium felix, si litora tantum/numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae!'/dixit et os impressa toro, 'moriemur inultae,/sed moriamur', ait. 'sic, sic iuvat ire sub umbras./hauriat hunc oculis ignem crudelis ab alto/Dardanus et nostrae secum ferat omina mortis.'/Dixerat, atque illam media inter talia ferro/conlapsam aspiciunt comites, ensemque cruore/spumantem sparsasque manus.*

VERG. *Aen.* 4.651–665

"O spoils of my struggle, sweet to me while fate and the god allowed it, accept this life of mine and release me from these troubles! I have lived my life, and I have finished the course that Fortune had given; and now my mighty ghost shall go beneath the earth. I made a famous city rise; I have seen my walls; avenging my husband, I punished my hostile brother—happy, oh! too happy I would have been, if only the Dardan ships had never touched our shores!" She spoke and, pressing her face against the couch, said: "I will die unavenged, but let me die! Thus, thus I am happy to go under the shades. May the cruel Trojan's eyes drink in this fire in the skies, and carry with him the omens of my death." She spoke, and in the midst of these words, her attendants see her fallen on the sword, the blade foaming with blood and her hands spattered.

The especially striking point is that the same speech could, with moderate alterations, be attributed to Cleopatra. Dido recalls her accomplishments as a queen and proclaims that, had she been allowed to rule in peace, without ever meeting the Trojan exiles, both her own fate and that of her people would have been happier. It is easy for the reader to recall Cleopatra. In effect, Lucan's statement *Hoc animi nox illa dedit, quae prima cubili/miscuit incestam ducibus Ptolemaida nostris* seems like a deliberate reference to Dido's last words. It demonstrates how the two queens continue to be connected and associated in the intertextual tradition of Roman epic, and perhaps it implies something about how the

Roman audience might have read Virgil's Dido with Cleopatra in mind—and Lucan's Cleopatra with Dido in mind.<sup>38</sup>

But although they are empowered, it cannot be denied that both Dido and Cleopatra are certainly objects of gaze at the moment of their passing—and not a neutral gaze but, as pointed out above, an otherising, voyeuristic gaze that drinks in the scandalous and eroticised aspects of their deaths.<sup>39</sup> However, it is also crucial to notice that while the queens clearly are objectified by onlookers and by the gaze of the reader, they do wield a narrative power quite exceptional to women, in directing that gaze. When Virgil's Dido controls the time, the place and the manner of her suicide, she—like Cleopatra in the *Carmen de bello Actiaco*—becomes the director of her death; and just like the omnipotent gaze of a movie director, she decides where the camera travels, what it leaves out and what the audience will gaze upon.<sup>40</sup> The male gaze that strongly marks the deaths of Iphigenia, Polyxena, Lucretia and Verginia is, in Dido's death, controlled by the queen herself. This is made evident in the first lines of book five, which opens with the Trojans' departure from Carthage:

*Interea medium Aeneas iam classe tenebat/certus iter fluctusque atros  
Aquilone secabat,/moenia respiciens, quae iam infelicis Elissae/conluent  
flammis. quae tantum accenderit ignem/causa latet; duri magno sed amore  
dolores/polluto notumque, furens quid femina possit,/triste per augurium  
Teucrorum pectora ducunt.*

VERG. *Aen.* 5.1–7

Meanwhile, Aeneas with his fleet was now holding steadily his course on the open sea and splitting the black waves stirred up by the north wind. He looks back on the city walls that are now lit up with poor Elissa's flames. What cause kindled such a fire, they do not know; but the awareness of the harsh pains when great love is defiled, and that of which a furious woman is capable, put sad forebodings in the hearts of the Trojans.

38 Luc. *Phar.* 10.69.

39 See Keith (2000), who examines the role of male gaze in the death scene of Lucretius' Iphigenia. Keith suggests that the poet invites his audience to identify with the male characters who gaze upon the death of the woman, symbolically establishing the gender hierarchy. Keith 2000, 110–111. Richlin discusses the roles of the male viewer and the female object in the case of the *Metamorphoses*. Richlin 1992, 160–164.

40 Sontag 1966, 243–244. Moreover, not only is Dido the director; finally, she also becomes the audience of her own show. As Reed perceptively observes, she is “both a gazing lamenter and a gazed-upon lamented, so persistent in her consciousness”. Reed 2007, 79.

Dido's power over the gaze becomes obvious when one compares this episode with *Aeneid* 4.661–662. Aeneas sees exactly what Dido wants him to see, what she has carefully prepared as a feast for his guilty eyes.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the role of the gaze in this episode strengthens the message delivered by Dido's speech: besides claiming the control over her own death, Dido claims control over the narrative, temporarily stripping Aeneas of it and subverting the power dynamics of the poem.

The functional role of Dido's subjectivity in Virgil's epic can be illuminated by examining her role as the Absolute Other to the projected Roman reader. As I noted before, being a woman, a foreigner and a monarch, Dido embodies the 'difference': that is, the threatening and animalistic death and sex drives that distinguish her from 'the Roman self'. However, what constantly hints at the underlying same-ness between the self and the other is the fear, evident in all orientalist discourses, that if let too close, the other might end up corrupting the subject and turning him into her image. This phenomenon can be clearly observed in Dido's story. When Mercury intervenes in *Aeneid* 4 to remind Aeneas of his mission, the hero is already going through a transition to become a Carthaginian. He is depicted as supervising the building of Dido's city, and his attire is strikingly foreign: "his sword was twinkling with tawny jasper, and a cloak falling down his shoulders blazed with Tyrian purple" (*illi stellatus iaspide fulva/ensis erat, Tyrioque ardebat murice laena/demissa exumeris*).<sup>42</sup> In effect, it appears that the very reason why Mercury needs to intervene is because otherwise, Aeneas would stop pursuing the new (Italian) identity, and happily adopt Dido's. Shockingly enough, the reader is made to realise that Aeneas' future Latin-ness is not an essential part of him, any more than his old Trojan-ness is. Under different circumstances, he could have turned into a Carthaginian, and Rome would never have seen the light of day. In fact, the epic hero and the Absolute Other seem to have more in common than the reader would like to admit.

Naturally, this aspect of Dido's story strongly recalls Cleopatra. As I pointed out in chapter two, Aeneas' eagerness to build Dido's city instead of looking for his own reminds the reader of the accusations against Mark Antony during the civil war. According to later accounts by Appian and Dio, Antony, bewitched by Cleopatra, was prioritising Egypt's benefit at Rome's expense. According to Appian, he was "swiftly transformed", and "this passion was the

41 Compare Luc. *Phar.* 4.500, where Vulteius addresses Caesar as the imaginary audience of his suicide. Eldred discusses this episode in Eldred 2002, 65–66.

42 Verg. *Aen.* 4.261–263.

beginning and the end of his evils".<sup>43</sup> Dio, for his part, calls Antony "entirely demoralised", and states that

καὶ τό τε στρατήγιον βασιλείον ὠνόμαζε, καὶ ἀκινάκην ἔστιν ὅτε παρεζώννυτο, ἐσθητή τε ἕξω τῶν πατριῶν ἐχρήτο, καὶ ἐπὶ κλίνης ἐπιχρύσου δίφρου τε ὁμοίου καὶ ἐν τῷ κοινῷ ἔωράτο. συνεγράφετό τε αὐτῇ καὶ συνεπλάττετο, αὐτὸς μὲν Ὅσιρις καὶ Διόνυσος ἐκείνη δὲ Σελήνη τε καὶ Ἴσις λέγοντες εἶναι. ἐξ οὐπερ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα ἔκφρων ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἐκ μαγγανείας τινὸς γεγονέναι ἔδοξεν. οὐ γὰρ ὅτι ἐκείνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς τι παρ' αὐτῷ δυναμένους οὕτω καὶ ἐγοήτευσε καὶ κατέδησεν ὥστ' —.

[h]e also termed his headquarters "the palace," sometimes wore an oriental dagger at his belt, dressed in a manner not in accordance with the customs of his native land, and let himself be seen even in public upon a gilded couch or a chair of that kind. He posed with her for portrait paintings and statues, he representing Osiris or Dionysus and she Selene or Isis. This more than all else made him seem to have been bewitched by her through some enchantment. For she so charmed and enthralled not only him but also the rest who had any influence with him—.<sup>44</sup>

It is significant that Antony's 'transformation' and betrayal were not merely a matter of politics, but that their cultural aspects were under scrutiny, as well.<sup>45</sup> The fading of his Roman identity in the hands of a foreign queen was used against Antony, because it reinforced the image of him as a man corrupted by oriental vices—in contrast to Octavian's true *Romanitas*. The imperial historians' depictions of Antony's effeminate appearance and of his fondness of foreign customs are one expression of this topos.<sup>46</sup> Another can be found in Lucan's depiction of Caesar, indulging in Cleopatra's lavish party, amazed by the wealth and wonders of Egypt—in the *Pharsalia*, Caesar anticipates Antony as a Roman who gives up his *Romanitas* in exchange for the luxury and pleasures offered by the Orient.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, from a Roman viewpoint, Dido's Punic-ness (like Creusa's Trojan-ness) is a problem that causes a threat to Aeneas' self-fashioning and endangers the

43 οὕτω μὲν ὁ Ἀντώνιος ἐνήλλακτο ταχέως, καὶ τὸ πάθος αὐτῷ τοῦτο ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος τῶν ἔπειτα κακῶν ἐγένετο. App. *BC* 5.1.9.

44 Dio 50.5.2–4. English translation of Cassius Dio's *Roman History* by E. Cary, *LCL* 1927.

45 See Williams 2001, 195–196.

46 Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 29.1–2; Cass. Dio 50.5.1–3; 50.27.6; Plin. *HN* 9.119–121.

47 Luc. *Phar.* 10.136–171.

future emergence of *Romanitas*. Deep down, the reader knows that the foreign queen is not an Absolute Other, but an *abject* other: because the interaction with her poses a constant danger of ‘becoming the other’, she must be erased and removed from the narrative. As Keith has put it, just as Aeneas inaugurates his mission through the death of Creusa and confirms it through that of Dido, so too Augustus restores order through the death of Cleopatra.<sup>48</sup> None of these women can become part of the future that is supposed to be built on Italian identity. However, what constitutes the irony is that by leaving Dido, Aeneas offers her the means to establish her position as a constant part of Roman history and as an integral factor in the identity of the Roman people. The foreign queen, therefore, becomes a factor that determines the essence of Roman-ness, but on her own terms, and this destabilises the power balance between the two. By giving Dido power over her own story, the poet demonstrates the impossibility of any community, or individual, to attain full control over the formation of its identity. The process is a two-way street, where those who are ostensibly defined as different are actually continuously shaped by each other. In other words, the self is formed in a dynamic interaction with the other.

Just as in the case of Statius’ Jocasta (discussed in chapter six), here too it is as important to pay attention to the story that is *not* told as it is to analyse the one that is told. In an alternative tradition concerning Dido’s death (related by Pompeius Trogus), the queen of Carthage kills herself on a sacrificial pyre in order to escape marriage to the African king Iarbas, and to honor her vows of chastity.<sup>49</sup> In Trogus’ version of the story, Aeneas does not appear at all, and Dido’s self-sacrifice is depicted as a heroic and patriotic act that epitomises the ideal of chaste female behaviour.<sup>50</sup> In the light of this version, it seems very significant that Virgil chooses a different route, making the queen a vengeful lover rather than a loyal *univira*. It would be easy to argue that he does so merely for the

48 Keith 2000, 115–116, 118.

49 The *Historicae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus have survived only in Junianus Justinus’ *Epitome*, dating to the third century. Just. *Epit.* 18.4–6. It is known that Timaeus, too, included Dido in his historiographic work, and that his version was similar to that of Pompeius Trogus (Timaeus *FGrH* 566 F82). See Gera 1997, 126–127. Naevius, too, certainly mentioned Dido (see Serv. Dan. 4.9; Naev. *BP* 2 frag. 23) but how he depicted her death, remains unknown. See, e.g., Horsfall 1973–1974 (= 1990), 9–11. The versions of Dido’s story in the extinct and fragmentary works that predate Virgil (Timaeus, Naevius, and Varro) have been discussed by Horsfall and Gera; see Horsfall 1973–1974 (= 1990); Gera 1997, 126–140. See also Monti 1981. Macrobius, too, refers to the multifaceted tradition concerning Dido: Macrobius *Sat.* 5.17.4. Servius comments on Virgil’s reworking of the story of Aeneas’ visit to Carthage: Serv. *Aen.* 1.267.

50 Trogus mentions that after her heroic suicide, Dido became a goddess who was worshipped in Carthage until the city was conquered by Romans. Justin. 18.6.

sake of drama and romance, or to downplay Dido's moral standing; however, I suggest that there is a more profound meaning to be found. It is crucial to notice that Virgil's version more fittingly connects Dido's fate with the theme of Roman identity—it makes her the literary *alter ego* of, and a model for, the Augustan Cleopatra, the enemy whose impact on Roman identity is eternal. By comparing the deaths of the two queens, the poet depicts both the Punic Wars and the civil wars as pivotal events that continue to shape 'the Roman self'.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, Dido's story is a prime example that demonstrates how far the death of a woman can reach in Roman war epic, and how far back in myth and history the components of Roman identity may go.

## 2 Getting Rid of the Queen: The Archetype of *regina moritura*

The deaths of Dido and Creusa, therefore, represent two different ways of erasing the woman from the epic narrative—one that constructs textual subjectivity for the female character, and the other that marginalises her. Both, however, are deaths that wield considerable narrative power, as they shape the epic plot and drive the story forward. In addition to these two ways of dealing with a death of a woman, one other recurrent narrative pattern can be found in the tradition of Roman war epic that is of importance to the ideological content of the poems. This storyline relates a suicidal death of the elderly queen of a falling city, and it is narrated both by Virgil in the *Aeneid* and by Statius in the *Thebaid*.

There are many obvious similarities in these two episodes, and they aptly manifest the intertextual circulation of themes and topoi within the epic tradition, as well as its tendency to draw influences from other Graeco-Roman literary genres. Virgil appears to have utilised Euripides' and Sophocles' versions of Jocasta's death, as well as Euripides' Phaedra, as models for Amata's suicide—Statius, besides alluding to these same models, strongly leans on Virgil's Amata in his portrayal of the Theban queen.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the deaths of these two women form an epic archetype of their own: an archetype that is strongly built on the Athenian tragedy's narrative tradition concerning the suicidal death of an elderly woman with well-known sexual transgressions.

51 This is made clear in Silius' *Punica*, where Dido's death looms large over the entire war. It is depicted on Hannibal's armour, and like the picture of Cleopatra on Aeneas' shield, it encourages the hero to keep on pursuing his epic mission. Sil. *Pun.* 2.420–425. On the omnipresence of Dido in the *Punica*, see also 1.85–86, 1.90–91, 8.50–55.

52 For a deeper analysis of these literary paragons, see Mazzoli 2002; Smolenaars 2008.

In the *Aeneid*, Amata's death takes place in book twelve, a few hundred lines before the end of the poem. It comes as no surprise to the reader: earlier, the queen had explicitly stated that she would be unable to live on, should Turnus perish in battle.<sup>53</sup> In effect, Amata's decision to finally take her own life is partly due to her conviction that Turnus has already fallen:

*regina ut tectis venientem proscipit hostem,/incessi muros, ignis ad tecta  
volare,/nusquam acies contra Rutulos, nulla agmina Turni,/infelix pugnae  
iuvenem in certamine credit/exstinctum et subito mentem turbata dolore/se  
causam clamat crinemque caputque malorum,/multaque per maestum de-  
mens effata furorem/purpureos moritura manu discindit amictus/et nodum  
informis leti trabe nectit ab alta./quam cladem miserae postquam accepere  
Latinae,/filia prima manu flavos Lavinia crinis/et roseas laniata genas, tum  
cetera circum/turba furit, resonant late plangoribus aedes.*

VERG. *Aen.* 12.595–607

—as soon as the queen, from her palace, sees the enemy coming, the walls under attack, and flames flying up towards the roofs, but nowhere Rutulian armies or any of Turnus' troops to stand against them, the poor woman believes that Turnus has been killed in battle. Her mind distraught by sudden grief, she cries that she is the cause, the source and the spring of the evils. Having spoken a great deal of frenzied words, out of her mind with grief, she then, intent on dying, tears her purple robes, and from a high beam ties a noose of an inglorious death. And after the unhappy Latin women found out about this disaster, her daughter Lavinia first tears her golden hair and her rosy cheeks with her hand, then all the crowd around her starts raging; the great palace halls ring with wailings.

Amata's death scene complements her previous appearances in the poem, and completes the picture of a frantic woman out of reach of symbolic logic and a slave to her bodily drives. Because she has lost all touch with logic and reason, it is no surprise that she rushes to false conclusions about Turnus' fate and hastens to kill herself. It is somewhat ironic that while Amata acknowledges her own guilt in bringing about the war (*causam clamat crinemque caputque malorum*), she is unable to change the pattern of behaviour that led to this situation. In book twelve, she is just as reckless as earlier in book seven, *demens* and *mentem turbata dolore*. Moreover, just as at the beginning of the war, her

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53 Verg. *Aen.* 12.61–63.

madness is contagious: it spreads like wildfire and excites all the other women around her to rage like madwomen once again.

That Amata kills herself by hanging should be considered important: in the Graeco-Roman literary tradition, the different methods of suicide were ranked differently in honour. Death by sword was the most honourable, manliest way of dying, and women are often represented as lacking the courage for the act—Tacitus' famous story about Messalina's inability to end her life by a blade is a good example.<sup>54</sup> This idea, of course, is strongly related to the conceptual connection between manliness and warfare and to the alleged incompatibility of women and armed violence. The sword is the phallic symbol of male dominance and of the male prerogative to penetrate and kill. As I pointed out above, the fact that Dido kills herself by a sword (Aeneas' sword, for that matter) underlines the overthrowing of the power dynamics in the story, and stresses her position as the master of her own life and death.

Hanging or strangulation, instead, are ways of dying that in Graeco-Roman literary tradition are generally associated with women—and, in particular, with older women with alleged sexual transgressions.<sup>55</sup> Again, it is noteworthy that there was an alternative tradition available, according to which Amata starved herself to death: Burke suggests that Virgil deliberately replaces starvation with hanging in order to associate Amata with characters such as Euripides' Phaedra in *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' Jocasta in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.<sup>56</sup> These are both 'elderly' queens (that is, past their child-bearing years), who hang themselves out of guilt for transgressing the social rules that define normative sexual behaviour. On the basis of this tragic tradition, Burke characterises death by hanging as an "impure" suicide, to which one is driven by guilt.<sup>57</sup> His reading seems to be supported by Virgil's choice of words: the poet describes Amata's way of dying as *informe letum*.<sup>58</sup> This therefore implies that there is something shameful about Amata's death, or about Amata's character in general—this 'something', however, is unspeakable and is never specified.

54 Tac. *Ann.* 11.37.5. See Gris  1982, 66–69; Keith 1999, 232. There are, however, some notable exceptions; see Vell. Pat. 2.26; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 9; Cass. Dio 58.4; Suet. *Tib.* 45; Sen. *Apocol.* 10.4.

55 On strangulation as a shameful manner of dying, see Keith 1999, 232, 238; Loraux 1985, 7–30.

56 Burke 1976, 27; see also Zarker 1969, 16, 18.

57 Burke 1976, 27–28. See also P schl 1962, 124, n. 63.

58 In his commentary on the *Aeneid*, Servius refers to Amata's death as *mors infamissima*. Serv. *Aen.* 12.603.

Zarker and Burke, who read the episode as a loyal variant of the Jocasta and the Phaedra stories, have suggested that Amata's way of killing herself alludes to her abnormal affection for Turnus.<sup>59</sup> It is true that from the very beginning, the queen seems to be strangely attracted to the youth, in a manner that confuses maternal feelings with sexual attraction. The first time Turnus is mentioned in book seven, we read that Amata yearned for him with "wondrous passion" to "unite to her as son-in-law" (*quem regia coniunx/adiungi generum miro properabat amore*).<sup>60</sup> Later on, when the Fury approaches Amata, she is depicted as "overcome by a woman's passion" and "troubled by worries and angers over the coming of the Trojans and Turnus' marriage" (*super adventu Teucrum Turnique hymenaeis/feminae ardentem curaeque iraeque coquebant*).<sup>61</sup> Her daughter, the bride, is not mentioned at all, and in a confused and confusing way, Amata appears to use her as a channel for her own feelings that are not entirely in line with social *decorum*.

Moreover, as Zarker points out, Amata's passionate speech to Turnus upon his departure for battle resembles Dido's plea to Aeneas when she is trying to make him stay.<sup>62</sup> She acts like a deceived lover rather than a concerned mother-in-law, and takes Turnus' refusal to refrain from the duel as a personal insult—rejected by him, there is little reason for her to live on. However, we should note that the Homeric influence is equally clear in this episode, since Amata's speech is obviously modeled on Hecuba's plea to Hector in *Iliad* 22.<sup>63</sup> It would appear, in effect, that Virgil deliberately mixes these literary models in order to underline Amata's inner turmoil and her confusing of maternal affection with sexual attraction.<sup>64</sup> This is in no way out of character for the queen: out of touch with the logic of the symbolic order as she is, it is not at all surprising that she struggles with the normative definitions of kin relations that hold the society together. And it is even less surprising that the merging of the uncontrolled sex and death drives is what eventually brings about her doom. Since Amata is very much a 'slave to her body', she cannot tell apart its different messages. She confuses maternal affection with sexual desire, and

59 Burke 1976, 27–29. Zarker too discusses the relationship between Amata and Turnus, see Zarker 1969, 9–10, 14–18.

60 Verg. *Aen.* 7.56–57.

61 Verg. *Aen.* 7.344–345.

62 Zarker 1969, 15. Furthermore, Zarker argues that the word *moritura* applied to Amata from 12.55 onwards is designed to recall Dido. Zarker 1969, 16.

63 Hom. *Il.* 22.77–86; the similarities to Andromache's speech to Hector in *Il.* 6.404–472 are also obvious.

64 Turnus is explicitly referred to as Amata's *gener* in Verg. *Aen.* 12.55; he himself addresses Amata as *mater* in Verg. *Aen.* 12.74.

sexual desire with self-destruction—eventually, it is the overwhelming desperation caused by the supposed loss of the imaginary son/lover character that makes the queen kill herself.

While the erotic overtones of Amata's suicide clearly evoke the memory of Dido, I would suggest that Dido is not the only epic queen whose death looms large over Virgil's Amata. Already in book seven, when Allecto enters Amata's chamber and finds her worrying about Turnus, the queen's approaching death is implied with an allusion to Cleopatra. We are told that

*huic dea caeruleis unum de crinibus anguem/conicit, inque sinum praecordia ad intima subdit, / quo furibunda domum monstro permisceat omnem. / ille inter vestis et levia pectora lapsus/volvitur attactu nullo, fallitque furem/vipeream inspiras animam; fit tortile collo/aurum ingens coluber, fit longae taenia vittae/innectitque comas et membris lubricus errat.*

VERG. *Aen.* 7.364–353

The goddess flings onto her a snake from her dark hair, and thrusts it into her breast, into her innermost heart, so that, driven mad by that monstrous creature, she would go and enmesh the entire house. Slipping between her clothes and her smooth bosom, it finds its way unfelt by the frantic queen, and breathes its viperous breath. The giant snake becomes a twisted gold necklace; it becomes a garland in her long ribbons, it entwines itself in her hair, and slithers over her limbs.<sup>65</sup>

The passage is rich in an imagery that represents sex and violence as structurally equivalent, and it instantly brings to mind the sensual death of Cleopatra, fetishised in the Roman literary tradition.<sup>66</sup> It is crucial to note that the allusion to Cleopatra clearly marks Amata as a tragic queen consumed by passion and war-lust who will meet a violent end by her own hand. Thus, the episode tightens the web that connects the *reginae moriturae* of the *Aeneid* to each other, and strengthens this epic archetype. However, unlike Cleopatra who, as I argued above, is famously in control of her own death, Amata in this episode appears completely helpless. Unaware of the violation of her bodily integrity, unaware of the snake penetrating her mind through her body, she seems like an object with no control over her fate or over the narrative.

65 The cultic references in the episode have been examined by Pichon. Pichon 1913, 166.

66 See, e.g., Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 85; Cass. Dio 51.11–14.

While Amata might be merely an unaware pawn in the games of the gods, her death is, however, structurally significant, since it anticipates and foreshadows the final end of the Latin war. Because she is one of the final casualties of the war, and because she was largely guilty of propagating the conflict, Amata's death has sometimes been discussed as a 'surrogate death' that purges the stage of the guilt of war and paves the way for a lasting peace.<sup>67</sup> The problem with this kind of reading, however, is that the usefulness of the sacrifice is highly debatable. While Amata clearly acknowledges her guilt at the very end, it remains unclear whether she feels remorse over the war, or if she is merely devastated by its outcome. Unlike Latinus, who at least considers the road not taken, Amata never ponders whether she should have accepted Aeneas as a son-in-law in the first place.<sup>68</sup> Her suicide is not an attempt to rewrite her earlier mistakes; it is merely an act that frees her from facing their painful consequences. Amata's death, therefore, is not sacrificial or surrogate in the proper sense of these words: it does not save lives as it could have, had it been committed earlier—instead, it merely completes and closes the circle of violence.

The situation is strikingly similar to that in the *Thebaid*, where Jocasta kills herself after her failed attempts to mediate between her sons. Once again, the entwined feelings of guilt and grief constitute the motivation for the queen's desperate deed:

*Olim autem inceptae clamore exterrita pugnae/regina extulerat notum  
penetralibus ense,/ensem sceptriferi spoliū lacrimabile Lai./multaque  
cum superis et diro quæsta cubili/et nati furiis et primi coniugis umbris,/luc-  
tata est dextrae, et prono vix pectore ferrum/intravit tandem: venas per-  
rumpit aniles/vulnus et infelix lustratur sanguine lectus./illius exili striden-  
tem in pectore plagam/Ismene collapsa super lacrimisque comisque/sic-  
cabat plangens: qualis Marathonide silva/flebilis Erigone caesi prope funera  
patris/questibus absumptis tristem iam solvere nodum/coeperat et fortes  
ramos moritura legebat.*

STAT. *Theb.* 11.634–647

Then also the queen—frightened by the clamour of the battle that had begun—had brought out the well-known sword from its innermost hiding place—the sword that was a pitiable spoil of sceptred Laius. She made

67 Burke 1976, 27; Zarker 1969, 17; Hardie 1993, 28.

68 Verg. *Aen.* 12.18–45.

a great complaint about the gods and the dreadful bed and her son's madness and her first husband's death; then she struggled with her right hand and at last, leaning her bosom forward, with great difficulty managed to thrust the sword in. The wound breaks her old woman's veins and the miserable bed is purged with blood. Ismene collapsed upon the blow that creaked in her breast, and dried it with her tears and hair, weeping. Like tearful Erigone, in the Marathonian woods next to the body of her dead father, her laments exhausted, she now began to untie the sad knot and, intent on dying, chose the strong branches.

At first sight, the similarities with Amata's suicide are striking. Jocasta, too, is driven to her death by a certainty that there is no other way out of the destruction of the war. Whereas Amata knows that Turnus cannot defeat Aeneas, Jocasta knows that either way, her sons' duel will end with her losing one of them. Furthermore, like Amata's relationship with Turnus, Jocasta's relationship with Polynices and Eteocles is marked by strange and threatening sexual overtones. In the perverted Theban royal house, familial affection and sexual attraction are confused even worse than in the *Aeneid*, and many scholars have suggested that the deeply distorted family relationships form a background to the entire war.<sup>69</sup> Hershkowitz argues that Polynices and Eteocles are not only each other's political, but also sexual rivals, and the prize in this competition is *sinus matris*—translatable either as the mother's womb or as the mother's vagina.<sup>70</sup> Admittedly, this interpretation seems to be supported by lines 11.407–408, where Statius defines the conflict as “a great war of one womb” (*unius ingens/bellum uteri*). Literally, the lines refer to the kindred enemies born out of the same womb; however, there is a crafty double meaning implying that the womb itself, and thus, the mother, is the cause and the object of the brothers' rivalry. Since the twins are a result of their mother's incestuous union with her own son, the confusion concerning the functions of the mother's genitalia has marked their lives from the very beginning. Denying their quintessential sameness and constructing each other as ‘others’, Polynices and Eteocles compete for the position of being the One for their mother: the One who is of the same flesh and of the same being with her. They seek to ‘return to the mother's womb’, hence reversing the primal abjection—but how this impossible return should be made is unclear to everyone. To Polynices and Eteocles, taking control of Thebes appears as a symbolic act of taking possession of the mother's

69 Hershkowitz 1998, 281; Ganiban 2007, 160–161.

70 Hershkowitz 1998, 275, 278–282.

womb, and thus the eroticising vocabulary that associates military conquest with sexual conquest marks these mother-son relationships throughout the epic.

Statius, therefore, appears to deliberately associate Jocasta with Virgil's Amata, by hinting at the confusion between maternal affection and sexual attraction—but he takes this theme even further, stressing the unhealthy family history of Oedipus' house as the background to the war. Moreover, it is crucial to note that Jocasta, unlike Amata, is very aware of these circumstances and actively seeks to revoke them. By the time of her death, she seems to have shaken off the role of a chthonic *dira* and re-entered the symbolic order. *multaque cum superis et diro questa cubili/et nati furiis et primi coniugis umbris* not only makes it clear that the queen is able to deliver a rational dying speech (in the manner of Virgil's Dido and Camilla), but also that she acknowledges the underlying reasons for the war. Unlike Amata, Jocasta is now, suddenly, a woman completely in touch with the sphere of logic and reason, and rather than an act of impulse intended to free her from her pain, her suicide is a carefully designed ritual that is meant to symbolically purge the family from its *nefas*. Unlike Amata, who does not see what is wrong with her relationship with Turnus, Jocasta sees all too well and, as a result, decides to destroy herself.

This reading seems to be supported by the manner of the queen's suicide. We should note that among the stories about the Theban circle, there were as many different traditions concerning Jocasta's suicide as there were concerning her motherhood and her mediating role. The most popular and perhaps best-known version is the one in which the queen hangs herself after hearing about her incestuous relationship with her son. Sophocles favours this version in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and it is mentioned already in Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>71</sup> In Seneca's *Oedipus*, too, Jocasta kills herself upon finding out the truth about her marriage; however, in this version, hanging is replaced by stabbing the womb—a manner of death highly symbolic of her tainted motherhood.<sup>72</sup> The versions of the story where Jocasta is still present at the Theban war and dies during it, are inclined to favour death by a sword: Euripides' *Phoenissae* makes use of this variant, as probably did Seneca's *Phoenissae*, the conclusion of which has not survived.<sup>73</sup>

71 Soph. *OT* 1263–1270; Hom *Od.* 11.271–280. In the *Odyssey*, however, the incestuous mother is called Epicaste. For further discussion, see Smolenaars 2008, 225–226.

72 Sen. *Oed.* 1035–1041.

73 Smolenaars 2008, 225. Jocasta's death by the sword is depicted in Eur. *Phoen.* 1589–1594.

When Statius depicts Jocasta as killing herself with a sword, this is a narrative choice that clearly distinguishes the queen from Virgil's Amata, and aligns her death rather with that of Virgil's Dido, a suicide marked by self-awareness and narrative power.<sup>74</sup> Whereas Dido pierces herself with Aeneas' Trojan sword, Jocasta too uses a very particular sword, *notum—ensem, /ensem sceptriferi spolium lacrimabile Lai*. Technically, this could be a sword that used to belong to her first husband Laius, or it could be the sword with which Oedipus killed Laius—or it could be both, and this is what Statius seems to imply when he describes it as *spolium lacrimabile*.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, like Dido, who had carefully placed the sword upon “the Trojan robes and the well-known bed” (*Iliacas vestes notumque cubile*)<sup>76</sup> as a reminder of her sexual relationship with Aeneas, Jocasta too kills herself on *infelix lectus*: a couch that apparently is related to her incestuous relationship with Oedipus. Therefore, just as Dido's death is depicted as a distortion of her relationship with Aeneas, and as an act that reverses the power dynamics between the two, so Jocasta's suicide is designed to recall this model and to stress the symbolic meaning of her death.<sup>77</sup> Her first husband's sword still carries the stain of a patricide that has thrown the family on to a cycle of self-destruction. Moreover, as a phallic symbol, the sword symbolises the perverted sexual relations that lie at the root of the family's curse. In short, the instrument embodies the underlying reasons for the Theban war. With this sword, the destruction was begun; it is with the same sword that it must be ended.

The vocabulary that strongly implies sexual intercourse strengthens this impression. When the queen collapses upon the sword, it is told that *infelix lus-*

74 Smolenaars observes many verbal references that Statius makes to the death of Dido, and indicates how the poet increases the pathos of the episode by associating Jocasta with Virgil's tragic queen *par excellence*. Smolenaars 2008, 233.

75 In Euripides' play, the queen kills herself with a sword that she takes from one of her dead sons on the battlefield. In Seneca's *Oedipus*, the instrument is the sword with which Jocasta's first husband Laius was killed. Most likely, the sword Jocasta uses in the *Thebaïd* is the very same, the sword that originally belonged to Laius but which Oedipus stole, and with which he killed his father. Smolenaars perceptively observes that *notum ensem* is an allusion to Seneca's *Phoenissae*, where Oedipus asks Antigone to bring him the *notum nece/ensem paterna*. Smolenaars 2008, 231; Sen *Pho.* 106 ff.; see also Sen *Oed.* 1034.

76 Verg. *Aen.* 4.648.

77 This powerful symbolism in the episode leads Hardie to see Dido's act as a kind of an 'anti-marriage'. Hardie 2012, 97. Silius, in turn, recalls Virgil's episode about the sword; he emphasises the symbolical value of the item as he depicts Dido's portrait, which honours her in her temple in Carthage, and adds that *ante pedes ensis Phrygius iacet*. Sil. *Pun.* 1.91.

*tratur sanguine lectus*: her death appears as a symbolic deflowering of a bride. The word *lustratur*, in particular, is noteworthy; instead of staining the bed, Jocasta's blood ritually purifies it. The queen's death is symbolic of her first marriage: it metaphorically restores to her the chastity and the innocence of her wedding night. The blood that Jocasta spills washes away the guilt that has stained her bed for many a decade. In a manner similar to Dido, who regrets her union with Aeneas, the Theban queen attempts to undo the past by offering herself as a sacrificial victim. Moreover, as in Dido's case, the fact that Jocasta herself plunges Laius' sword into her breast, well aware of the symbolic meaning of the act, reverses the power dynamics of the poem. For the first time in the *Thebaid*, she is able to escape the marginalised position of an out-of-control woman and becomes a plenipotentiary agent with textual subjectivity, whose train of thought—despite its self-destructive goal—seems rational and understandable to the reader.

Nevertheless, the significance and impact of Jocasta's act must remain merely symbolic. In the end, she is incapable of changing the course of events by her death: instead of ending the circle of destruction in her family, her suicide actually breeds further violence. For when Ismene sees her mother lying dead on the couch, she in turn falls into a mode of despair and kills herself by hanging. Lavinia's frantic grief upon the death of her mother is thus taken to new extremes by Statius. Failing to become a proper surrogate death that would save the lives of many through the sacrifice of one, Jocasta in the end falls short of her epic model, Virgil's Dido, and once again becomes more of an Amata. While Dido deliberately uses her death to breed further violence, Jocasta is simply ineffectual in stopping it. She cannot stand in the way of the destructive drive of Statius' epic, not by offering herself as an arbiter and not by offering herself as a surrogate victim. At the end of the *Thebaid*, the familial war finds a symbolic end in the self-destruction of the mother whose womb underlies the conflict.

This means that although the dying queens of Virgil and Statius fail to make any difference when it comes to ending the war, they are important characters when it comes to ending the epic, and to determining its closing tone. As I have argued before, the civil or familial wars in Roman epic are wars within the collective self: they can only end either with a complete collapse of unity and identity or with an acceptance of 'the stranger in oneself' and with a formation of a new, coherent identity on this basis. This makes the suicide—the ultimate form of self-destruction—of a character who is neck-deep in the guilt of war an apt closing for Virgil's and Statius' war narratives. It is a symbolic ending of the war that foreshadows its actual end. In Virgil's case, the tragedy ultimately leads to an emergence of a new social harmony where 'the other' is accepted as

part of the self; in Statius' epic, it leads to an irreparable disintegration of collective identity and to a complete erasure of the cursed Theban royal line. In these closures, the Virgilian seeking of unity and the Statian confusion in the face of civil war are both powerfully present.

## Conclusion

Women in war epic seem a curious paradox. In a genre that so explicitly states *arma virumque* as its subject matter,<sup>1</sup> the woman almost inevitably appears as ‘the other’, as someone who, instead of becoming an agent in her own right, is used to stress or to highlight, to criticise or to oppose the deeds and characteristics of the male hero. Can epic women ever speak of themselves, or are they inevitably a mirror that reflects the image of the male hero, for better or for worse? The most popular answer in earlier studies of Roman war epic has been ‘no, they cannot, and yes, they are’: epic women have been repeatedly observed either as ‘absorbed’ into the male ideology of the poem (as the docile servants of the patriarchy) or as its ‘transgressive’ opposers. In both cases, the female characters are considered as inevitably marginal to the poem’s narrative telos and to its ideological content: they are decorative elements who add suspense to the story, or figures of pathos who tend to quickly vanish from the pages of the epic.

Nevertheless, as I have attempted to show in this work, the exceptions to this rule are numerous and remarkable—so many, in fact, that they could be argued to contest the rule. There is Dido, who wards off the marginalisation and refuses to be written off the narrative—in addition to the latter books of the *Aeneid*, her story goes on in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* and in Silius Italicus’ *Punica*, where it continues to determine the Roman identity. There is Camilla, whose significance to the ideological content of Virgil’s epic is peerless, and who, instead of becoming an objectified *locus* of a male imperial conquest, is a plenipotentiary agent in the formation of the future *Romanitas*. Then there are the Lemnian matrons, whose ‘unnatural’ bestiality, in fact, appears to tell a story about the

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1 Verg. *Aen.* 1.1 (compare “*reges et proelia*” in Verg. *Ecl.* 6.3–5). For the articulations of this idea in the proëms of other Roman war epics, see Stat. *Theb.* 1.41, where Statius stresses the significance of collective heroism for his epic (*quem primus heroum, Clio, dabis?*); the same idea can be observed in the proëms of the *Punica*, where Silius speaks of his wish to tell of *quantosque ad bella crearit/et quot Roma viros*—; Sil. *Pun.* 1.4–5. For a beginning that stresses individual heroism instead, see Statius’ *Achilleid* (*heroa velis Scyroque latentem/Dulichia proferre tuba nec in Hectore tracto/sistere, sed tota iuvenem deducere Troia*, Stat. *Achil.* 1.5–7). The ideals of both individual and collective male heroism can be seen to derive from Homeric epic: As has often been noticed, Virgil’s opening words, *arma virumque*, are a freely Latinised version of κλέα ἀνδρῶν—an ideal referred to both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* (Hom. *Il.* 9.189, 9.524, *Od.* 8.73).

Roman self and its vulnerability to the violent drives of the body. And, of course, there is Antigone who, judging by the Graeco-Roman literary tradition, would not need to be present in many of the scenes of the *Thebaid* at all—but she is, because, arguably, her experience matters, and her viewpoint does more to Statius' epic narrative than merely contest or validate its predominant male perspective. This means that the marginality of women in epic remains a complex issue that raises many questions—while it is true, in many cases, that the female characters are used to reflect the qualities of the male hero, this cannot be considered an absolute rule.

Moreover, in many academic discussions, it has remained somewhat ambiguous what the 'marginality' of epic women is actually taken to mean. Arguably, there is narrative marginality, whereby the female characters lack power to make an impact on the plot, or are unimportant to the progress of the story in general—that is, they are 'pushed to the margins'. But there is also a psychological marginality that results from the reader's inability to relate to the character in the narrative—in this work, I have usually referred to this as 'a lack of subjectivity'. The archaic models of war epic and its position in the Roman curriculum mean that there are good reasons to regard the projected reader of the genre as an elite male—*he* is the imaginary addressee of the poem's external narrator, and he is the one whom the characters within the poem have to 'convince' in order to earn their subjectivity. As has been noted, the Roman epic poets construct subject positions for this reader by inviting him to identify with certain characters in the poem (usually argued to be male), and by alienating him from others (almost without exception considered to be female).

In this process, emotions, and the way they are expressed, have a crucial role. Epic women have often been considered as 'over-emotional' characters tangled up with their personal anger, pain, or passion, and therefore as threatening to both the internal and the external audience. Moreover, the women's resort to their private emotions has often been observed as a factor that positions them in opposition to the 'temporal scene': that is, the political affairs and the society ruled by logic and language. It is, however, worth asking whether 'opposing the temporal scene and the logic of the symbolic order' is the same thing as 'opposing the teleological drive of the epic' (another thing that epic women are generally considered to be guilty of). Arguably, in many of the Roman war epics, this 'drive' of the poem is extremely destructive and strongly at odds with the logic of the symbolic order. Whereas the *Aeneid* clearly is an epic directed towards a coherent Roman identity, and the *Punica's* goal is the establishment of Rome's imperial dominion, these 'happy endings' are ambiguous, because they contain a seed for future disruption of the social order. Lucan's *Pharsalia* and Statius' *Thebaid* are a completely different matter, poems where there is

arguably nothing 'heroic' about the drive of the narrative, and where the telos of the epic—if there is one—is the ultimate collapse of social order and the disintegration of collective identity. In these epics, the logic of the symbolic order, on which society is built, is continuously under threat from the violent drive of the epics—their wars are not constructive conflicts, but something that tears society apart. This means that in this kind of situation, the epic woman arguably cannot win: either she condemns the war, thus becoming a character who is 'opposed to the teleological drive of the narrative', or she gets carried away by the chaos and the violence, and is therefore judged as a transgressive character, 'opposed to the logic of the temporal scene'.

In order to dig a little deeper into this issue, it is worth summing up briefly the views taken in the present study of gendered emotions and their narrative purpose in Roman war epic. This topic is marked particularly strongly by the influence of a Roman, politicised form of Stoicism. The idea that the political, military man should be able to entirely suppress his body and his emotions and dedicate himself to the service of the political organism can be observed, in one way or another, in all the epics of the Principate. The body appears as a strange and threatening source of drives that is in a constant danger of crippling language and reason. Because the Graeco-Roman philosophical discourse generally defined the woman as a more corporeal being than the man, women in ancient literature often appear as more vulnerable to the strong bodily experiences such as pain or pleasure. This train of thought, therefore, clearly labels women as more tuned into the semiotic modality, whereas the logic of the symbolic order remains the male domain.

This idea penetrates the Western philosophical discourse, since even today, it can be observed in the idea that (especially negative) strong emotions—and especially when expressed by a woman—undermine one's credibility in the public sphere of politics. The drives of the body must be kept divorced from the temporal order, and the woman can gain a standing in the said order only by "identifying with the father"; by "playing a superman".<sup>2</sup> In Roman war epic, there are many examples of women who do just this. We should note that when epic women subscribe to the values and ideals of the state, suppressing their personal agony (or articulating it in socially acceptable ways), they do in fact become idealised models of *Romanitas*, relatable to the male audience—however, it is equally crucial to note that in this role, they are inevitably marginalised, since their performance, while convincing, can only ever become 'quite close' to the moral excellence manifested by the best of men.

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<sup>2</sup> Kristeva 1974 (in Moi 1986, 154–156).

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that these women appear to entirely lack narrative power in the epic plot. Although they do gain a certain degree of epic subjectivity by becoming points of identification for the reader, they are powerless to impact the course of events in the poem, and they often end up being removed from its pages, violently and against their will.

While this involuntary erasure is the fate of many transgressive epic women too, it is intriguing that in comparison to the women 'playing supermen', these rebellious and subversive characters often wield considerable narrative power. In particular, the fact that women's speech and agency are at their most influential when their goals are violent or destructive, strengthens the impression that in Roman epic, the female role is more strongly connected to war than to peace—it is paradoxically when women become dangerous enemies of the social order that they actually wield most power in the plot. It is the over-emotional and destructive women, with whom the reader is most unlikely to identify, that drive the epic narrative forward, towards its ultimate telos. It would therefore seem that being marginal to the narrative structures of the epic, and being marginal to the construction of the subject position for the reader are two entirely different things.

Intriguingly, the same applies to men in Roman epic. As I have aimed to demonstrate throughout this study, the overwhelming and threatening emotions and their averbal expressions—markers of the semiotic *chôra*—are not an exclusively female phenomenon, but are in fact repeatedly associated with the male subjects of the epic. It is particularly interesting that the vulnerability to the call of the *chôra*, usually considered as a feminine characteristic, appears to be an inalienable part of the ultimate male attribute in the genre: *virtus*, the masculine belligerent courage. In all the epics of the Principate, aggressive heroism carries implications of ambitious, subversive, or threatening behaviour and, as Ripoll points out, is often connected to *furor*—aggressive anger that perverts the warrior's courage, and brings it dangerously close to *crudelitas* and *feritas*.<sup>3</sup> As I have argued throughout this book, *furor* can be considered to be the best expression of the semiotic in epic: it is an uncontrollable and destructive bodily drive that is 'beyond words' and that efficiently alienates the reader from the characters who express it. It would therefore appear that the utmost expressions of manly bellicosity are also the situations in which the male subject of epic is in danger of resorting to the semiotic, and of sliding out of reach of the reader's identifying gaze—however, these are also the situations where *his* power to impact the narrative is at its greatest.

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3 Ripoll 1998, 193, 336, 327–332; McDonnell 2006, 71.

This phenomenon is eminently present in all the surviving imperial war epics. Ripoll and Wright have indicated that in Virgil's epic, *ferox virtus* is often manifested in the character of Turnus, whose manliness—although it indisputably fulfils the requirements of the traditional heroic ideal—is a kind of masculinity that is difficult to control and is potentially 'dehumanising'—the choice of words *per se* expresses the human fear of bodily drives, which are easily labeled as 'bestial'.<sup>4</sup> The poem's depiction of Turnus' inability to contain his *virtus* within the limits of the symbolic order, therefore, mitigates the juxtaposition between the semiotic *chôra* and masculinity as mutually exclusive phenomena.

An even more pronounced discomfort in the face of warlike masculinity can be observed in post-Virgilian epic. Although Lucan's depiction of Julius Caesar in the *Pharsalia* is morally disapproving, Caesar nevertheless remains the unquestionable hero and protagonist of his epic—and, moreover, its dynamic driving force. As Alston and Spentzou put it, he is "inexplicable and sublime", and it is his dangerous ambition that drives on the narrative.<sup>5</sup> In all of Roman war epic, Lucan's Caesar is one of the best examples of an epic subject who fails to conceal and renounce his underlying similarity with 'the other'—one whose greatest strength is his greatest weakness and who, by repeatedly resorting to the semiotic, ends up destabilising the culturally hegemonic identity rather than strengthening it. Arguably, this suits Lucan's luridly bare civil war depiction very well. The antihero of his epic is *the* dynamic force behind the narrative, yet in his *virtus-furor* he is clearly opposed to the logic of the temporal scene. In this sense, Caesar strongly resembles the many destructive women of Roman war epic, such as Virgil's Amata and Dido, or Statius' Jocasta.

The complex villain-hero characters mark the war epics of the Flavian period too. In the *Thebaid*, Statius fills the battlefield with ambivalent heroes full of martial ardour and driven on by frightening emotions.<sup>6</sup> Tydeus and Capaneus are the most classic examples of heroes whose *virtus* develops into something sinister: either into savage *crudelitas* or into arrogant hubris.<sup>7</sup> They are, however, far from being the only ones; from Polynices and Eteocles to Creon and Amphiaraus, the *Thebaid* is an epic of antiheroes, warriors unable to repress their bodily drives. Together, these characters lay waste to society—their distorted *virtus* is the manifestation of the abject itself because, in Kristevan terms,

4 Ripoll 1998, 314–315; Wright 170, n. 3.

5 Alston & Spentzou 2011, 49, 55.

6 Ripoll 1998, 318–323; see also Masterson's analysis in Masterson 2005, 293, n. 12, 300.

7 See Ripoll 1998, 332.

it “evokes horror as it makes the subject feel her mortality and her limits”.<sup>8</sup> It is the ambiguous nature of warlike masculinity that determines Statius’ understanding of *Romanitas*—an unending, Lucanian drive of destruction and self-destruction, enforced by a manliness that is turned into madness. The line that separates the self from the other wavers when the very building block of Roman identity—martial *virtus*—is depicted as the quickest way to the all-consuming darkness of the *chôra*.

The Lucanian model is equally strong, although differently articulated, in Silius Italicus’ *Punica*. Constructed on the model of Lucan’s Caesar, Hannibal is the unquestionable villain-hero of Silius’ epic. His aggressive *virtus* largely overshadows that of the Roman heroes within the epic, and although he is a barbarian, he becomes the most important character defining *Romanitas* in the poem. It is arguable that Hannibal’s terrifying manliness, which borders on insensible frenzy, is something reminiscent of the *virtus Romana*: in his conduct, the reader can observe reflections of the powerful but unreliable bellicosity that makes possible not only the Romans’ world dominion, but also their impending civil strife and self-destruction. In one way, Silius’ Hannibal appears as an *alter ego* of the Roman people—a mirror that reflects Roman-ness in its most and its least attractive forms.<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious from these examples that in Roman imperial war epics, being ‘male’ or ‘Roman’—while these are the most crucial building blocks of subjectivity in the genre—is not enough to protect the character from falling victim to the drives of his body. On the contrary, these attributes can make him *more* vulnerable to these drives, since epic *furor* clearly is something that not only marks women and foreigners, but is an inalienable part of manliness and Roman-ness. As I see it, epic *furor* is simultaneously a productive and a destructive force: without it, the narrative would never move forward—Rome would not be founded, its Mediterranean empire would not be established, nor would civil war ever tear the Republic apart. In the epic plot, *furor* represents the ‘bodily need to communicate’: the underlying motivation for anything, for any speaking subject’s engagement in the signifying practice. But like the semiotic *chôra*, it is a force that needs to be curtailed by the logic of the symbolic order, and by the laws and norms of the temporal scene. Accordingly, the epic plot (and the body politic that constitutes its subject matter) is very similar to the Kristevan *sujet-en-procès*: it comes to being *only* in the interaction between the dynamic *furor* and its socially regulated articulations.

<sup>8</sup> Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 232).

<sup>9</sup> Pyy & van der Keur 2019.

While this study, therefore, is generally opposed to the strong juxtaposition between the male and female roles in epic, at the same time, however, it would be ludicrous to deny that there is a strong and dominant overtone in the Roman epics of the Principate, and that this overtone—loyal to the Graeco-Roman literary tradition—tends to objectify and otherise female characters more often and more strongly than it does men. There is a reason why the figure of the Absolute Other (a female, foreign, sensual and dangerous character) is a recurrent acquaintance on the pages of these epics: and that reason, arguably, is the human attempt to alienate the animalistic aspects of the psyche by turning them into the defining qualities of someone who appears different in all aspects.

The same attempt is apparent in the civil war narratives of Roman war epic. In this book, I consistently deal with civil war as a 'war against the self', as a symbolic shattering of the collective identity. In a war between those who should be natural allies, the subject detaches a part of his self, creating an enemy whom he henceforth perceives as 'the other', and in whom he can locate the disturbing elements that trouble him about himself. However, this act inevitably splits the self in two, destroying the collective identity. The conflict can end only in a complete self-destruction on the collective level, or else, alternatively, it can lead to the subject's confrontation and acceptance of 'the other' as part of the self and, through this acceptance, to the construction of a new, coherent identity. The Roman epic poets' opinions on which it will be differ greatly, because of their different ideological backgrounds and historical circumstances. What is common to all, however, is that the destructiveness of running from the abject, and the necessity of confronting the 'strangers within us,' form a bigger, more comprehensive theme in these epics, a theme that is not limited to the transgressive female characters. Its workings on a more general narrative level are stressed and reinforced by the episodes where gendered otherness and the feminised nature of the abject are questioned.

In this work, I have been particularly interested in and focused on these kinds of episodes: the narrative moments where the poets appear to 'break free' from tradition, and reveal the underlying sameness between the other and the self. Arguably, when the epic poets reverse and rewrite the literary models offered by Roman historiography, Athenian tragedy or Homeric epic, they are communicating something essential about the social environment and the mental ambience in which their works came into being. When they assimilate the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra, or Dido and Aeneas, implying that the Absolute Other might, in fact, be an *abject* other, the reader can hear echoes of the history of the civil wars. Similarly, when they turn the female archetype of a peace-making mediator into a warmongering Fury, contesting the nostalgic

worldview of Roman legendary history, the reader can observe a deep-rooted cynicism that is typical of these disillusioned generations. Furthermore, in the many cases where epic men—the allegedly devoted servants of the political system—are shown playing the role of a mourning mother or a frantic woman, it seems clear that issues of cultural importance are being discussed. I believe that the episodes where Roman epic poets choose to reject the tradition, and turn down its obvious literary models in favour of new (and sometimes disturbing) performances, are exactly the moments where the semiotic pressure on the narrative logic makes its presence heard and gives Roman epic its characteristic bitter-sweet and confusing touch. It would appear that, in the end, the war epics of the Roman Principate are not as keen on master narratives and watertight storylines as they might seem at first sight—on the contrary, they are tales that embrace uncertainty, discomfort, inconsistency and loose ends, making Rome's painful past a living genotext of epic.



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# General Index

- Abjection 16–17, 45, 52–54, 76–79, 86, 94–96, 102, 125, 167, 182, 209, 217–220, 231, 245–251, 288, 295, 304–306
- Absolute Other 16–17, 50–54, 76–79, 89, 164, 177–182, 188, 193–194, 212–220, 280, 286–288, 306
- Acastus, prince of Iolcus 104–105
- Achilles 75n15, 90n45, 91–97, 151, 154–155, 168–168, 214n125, 221–224, 237n21
- Actium, the battle of 50–52, 166n17, 177–178, 196, 198, 280
- Adrastus, king of Argos 34, 36, 266n96
- Aeneas 29–34, 40, 46–50, 53–58, 81, 83n26, 89–90, 105, 115, 169–170, 173, 177, 196, 201, 204, 232, 237–238, 246n42, 266n96, 269–279, 283–288, 289n51, 291–292, 294–295, 297–298, 306
- Agave 251, 264
- Agrippina the Elder 149
- Agrippina the Younger 135n9, 164–165, 252, 255n62
- Allecto 29, 43–45, 58–60, 65–69, 121n103, 173, 185, 199, 250n50, 264, 293
- Amata 14–15, 20–21, 25–26, 58–70, 83, 92, 105, 113–114, 121, 148, 173–174, 184–186, 237–238, 242, 244–245, 255, 263–267, 279n25, 289–298, 304
- Amazons (*includes*: Amazonomachia) 97–99, 132, 198n88, 206, 212–216, 218n131, 222, 231
- Andromache 66, 73n8, 237, 292n63
- Anna, sister of Dido 47, 53n85
- Antigone 20, 85–86, 108, 122–123, 126, 255–259, 297n75, 301
- Antony, Mark 37, 42n56, 51–55, 286–287
- Apollo 15, 63, 79, 100
- Apollonius of Rhodes 183
- Appian 37n46, 38n47, 42, 135n8, 137, 165, 235, 286–287
- Argia 34–37, 40–41, 60, 65, 69, 108, 122–123, 145n27, 263
- Argonauts 28, 87, 182, 189–192, 214–215
- Argos 30n29, 34, 36, 51
- Argus 127–128
- Asbyte 17, 212–219
- Ascanius (*includes*: Iulus) 32, 50, 114, 269–272, 274
- Atalanta 97–99, 101, 106, 114, 116, 119, 124, 126, 222, 224, 252n56
- Athene, *see* Minerva
- Augustus (*includes*: Octavian) 2, 35n46, 43n57, 50–53, 149, 166n17, 196, 198, 200, 287–288
- Bacchanals 63–65, 75n15, 105, 151, 170n27, 185, 190, 251, 264
- Boudicca 177n38, 178
- Brutus, M. Iunius 138–140
- Butler, Judith 10–11, 16, 189n59
- Caesar, C. Iulius 17, 22n2, 24, 37, 51–56, 74–79, 137, 138n15, 145n28, 147–148, 177–182, 188, 197–198, 200, 239–240, 247n43, 286–287, 304–306
- Camilla 131–132, 202–230, 267, 279n25, 296, 300
- Cannae, the battle of 120
- Capua 74, 171–172, 175–176, 196
- Carmen de bello Actiaco* 281–283, 285
- Carthage 24, 53–57, 74n13, 107–108, 152, 158–159, 171–176, 233n6, 276, 279, 285–286, 288, 297n77
- Cassandra 75n16, 79
- Cato the Elder 135n9
- Cato the Younger 19, 138–140, 144–148, 150, 162, 182
- Chiron 91–92, 95–96, 221
- Chôra* 8, 10, 11n49, 17, 21, 26, 31, 41, 44, 46, 50, 60–61, 63, 68, 70, 79, 83, 90, 98, 101, 103, 106, 116, 128, 157, 162, 167, 172, 184, 191, 201, 209, 229, 262, 303–305
- Cicero, M. Tullius 37n46, 42, 120, 165n16, 236m8
- Cinyps 223n140, 228, 230
- Civil war 2, 4–5, 9, 23–25, 32–34, 37–41, 50–57, 70, 78–81, 109–112, 117, 128, 137–138, 144–145, 148, 150, 166, 177–179, 182, 192, 197–198, 202, 218, 232–233, 235, 238–242, 247n43, 255, 259–260, 266–267, 286–287, 289, 298–299, 304–307
- Cixous, Hélène 11

- Cleopatra 17, 42, 50–56, 76, 78, 147–148, 166,  
177–179, 182, 263n80, 269, 279–289, 293,  
306
- Closure 20, 232–234, 267, 298–299
- Colchis 86–87, 181, 199
- Coriolanus 234, 254
- Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi 138
- Cornelia, wife of Pompey 15, 19, 76–79,  
108–109, 141–153, 156–157, 159–160, 162,  
180n45
- Creon 100–104, 106, 118–119, 128, 233, 304
- Creusa 21, 34, 250n50, 267–279, 287–289
- Danaides 188
- Decus* 98, 134, 187, 204–205, 228, 237, 250  
*see also dedecus*, 51
- Deidamia 75n15, 151–152, 154–155
- Deipyle 34–35
- Diana 35, 98, 206–210, 219, 224
- Dido 14–15, 21, 31–32, 46–58, 62–63, 65, 69,  
83n26, 90n48, 105–106, 155, 161, 194n71,  
227, 267, 269, 272, 274–289, 291–293,  
296–298, 300, 304, 306
- Dio Cassius 37n46, 42, 53n86, 135n9, 13,  
138n14, 149n36, 164n9, 165, 166n17,  
178n42, 197n83, 198, 252n54, 282, 286–  
287, 291n54, 293n66
- Dionysius of Halicarnassus 23n3, 28, 38n48,  
140n20, 234n11, 12, 236n19, 253n59,  
271n7, 275n16
- Domitian 2, 79n24
- Drama, Athenian 20, 30n29, 31n31, 71, 89,  
137, 164, 200, 243, 246n44, 253n59, 255,  
267n1, 289, 306
- Ennius 3, 43n58, 112n89, 271n7
- Euripides 27n20, 28n21, 30n29, 31n31,  
39n50, 63n108, 73n8, 75n16, 85n27,  
89, 108, 190n61, 222n136, 226n144, 243,  
249, 253, 255n63, 256n64, 257, 260n74,  
267n1, 289, 291, 296, 297n75
- Euryalus 223n140, 227–228  
mother of, 112–116, 121, 124, 274
- Eteocles 69–70, 118, 122, 243, 245, 249–259,  
265, 295, 304
- Exemplarity 15n60, 20, 42, 64, 77, 80,  
107n76, 112, 131, 135, 138–148, 150, 157–  
158, 162, 166–167, 205, 212, 234, 254,  
258–259
- Feminism 10n41, 11, 20, 164, 267–268
- Fides* 1n4, 24, 29n25, 38–39, 44, 60, 160, 184,  
239, 277
- Focalisation 12–13, 71–72, 80, 86–89, 94–95,  
115, 161, 168
- Freud, Sigmund 6, 10, 11n49
- Fulvia, wife of Mark Antony 37n46, 42–43,  
120, 135n9, 165–166
- Furies 29–30, 41, 43–46, 51–56, 58–70, 100,  
119, 121, 190, 199–201, 239, 244, 248–253,  
257, 263–265, 292, 306
- Furor* 9, 19, 21, 44–46, 48–49, 54, 58–70,  
104–106, 121–129, 133, 160, 163, 183–191,  
195, 251, 255, 257, 265, 285, 290, 303–  
305
- Gaze 12, 81–89, 111, 155–157, 203, 211–  
217, 220, 223–230, 268, 281–286,  
303
- Genotext 8, 10, 159, 162, 307
- Hadrian 198
- Hannibal 14n55, 22n2, 24, 39n51, 56–57,  
107–108, 138n16, 152–154, 162, 171–175,  
212–213, 223n140, 228, 289n51, 305
- Hector 66, 106n75, 237n21, 292
- Hecuba 27n20, 30, 73n8, 89, 106n75, 237,  
292
- Helen 27–28, 31–32, 84, 85n28
- Hellenism 1, 4, 178
- Hercules 79n24, 214n125, 216
- Hippolyte 215, 218
- Historiography 9, 15n60, 20–21, 38n47, 40,  
42–43, 64, 71, 73n8, 77, 112n89, 131,  
135–141, 157, 164–166, 176, 178, 233n6,  
234–243, 248n44, 253–255, 267–268,  
288n49, 306
- Homer 1, 3–4, 27–31, 42n55, 71, 73, 80n25,  
85n27, 89, 90n45, 91, 93n55, 106n75,  
107n78, 110n85, 196, 205n98, 207, 213,  
225n143, 232n2, 235n15, 237n21, 22, 270,  
276n19, 292, 296, 300n1, 306
- Horace 28n20, 29n26, 51n75, 52n78, 108n80,  
158n55, 166n17, 188n56, 280–281
- Hypsipyle 116, 182–186, 190, 194, 199–200
- Ide 123–124
- Imilce, wife of Hannibal 152–157, 162
- Incest 245, 255n63, 260, 265, 295–298

- Intertextuality  
 Kristevan definition 9, 262  
 narratological use 3, 4n13, 50, 231, 243, 260n73, 261, 266, 281n30, 284–285, 289
- Ira* 43, 45, 58–59, 66, 70, 82–84, 104–105, 122–123, 133, 159, 178n43, 179–180, 184, 191, 195, 200, 216, 241, 246–248, 254, 257, 292
- Irigaray, Luce 11
- Ismene 294–295, 298
- Ismenos 117–119, 170n27
- Iulus, *see* Ascanius
- Iuturna 43n59, 205n98, 238
- Jason 28, 31n31, 86–88, 104–105, 194
- Jocasta 14, 20–21, 30, 35n44, 89, 116, 243–267, 288–289, 291–292, 294–298, 304
- Julia, daughter of Caesar 20, 37–41, 235–236, 238–240, 259–260, 263–264, 266–267
- Juno 29n26, 33, 35n44, 45, 47, 57n96, 65, 69, 90, 121n103, 191–192, 238, 274n13
- Jupiter 33, 35n44, 53, 73–74, 77–78, 79n24, 89–90, 191, 209, 238, 270, 273
- Kristeva, Julia 5–11, 13–17, 19, 21, 44–46, 52, 54, 63, 70, 78, 99, 103–104, 130, 143n25, 158n54, 159n58, 167, 207, 209–210, 229, 245n41, 251n51, 262, 302n2, 304–305
- Lacan, Jacques 6, 10, 11n49, 16
- Laius, king of Thebes 294, 297–298
- Latinus, king of Laurentum 29, 60–62, 68, 237, 266n96, 294
- Laurentum 29, 58, 64, 68, 90, 131–133, 170, 219
- Lavinia 28n21, 29–32, 40–41, 60, 63, 225n143, 237, 290, 298
- Law of the Father 10, 13, 37, 161, 224
- Livia 149, 255n62
- Livy 15n60, 23n3, 28, 29n26, 37n46, 38n47, 48, 64n109, 110n85, 135–136, 140n20, 176n31, 234n11, 12, 236m9, 20, 238, 253–255, 258–259, 271n7
- Lucretia 38–39, 268, 285
- Marcia, wife of Cato 15, 19, 144–148, 150–152, 158–159, 162
- Marcia, wife of Regulus 158–162
- Mars (*includes*: Ares, Mavors, Gradivus) 35n40, 56n95, 65, 81, 117–118, 151, 173, 190, 195–196, 198, 200, 215, 241–242, 264
- Medea 17, 28, 31n31, 86–89, 164, 181–182, 188, 194–195
- Megaera 43n59, 60, 44n62
- Menoceus 100–103, 118–119
- Mercury 54, 286
- Minerva (*includes*: Athene, Pallas) 35, 75, 163n5, 185, 190, 196, 199–200, 203, 206–210, 212
- Mora* 102, 235–241
- Naevius 3, 269n5, 288n49
- Narrative  
 Kristevan definition 9, 262
- Narratology 5, 14, 228
- Neptune 91–92, 196
- Nero (*includes*: “Neronian”) 4, 39, 182, 202, 252, 255n62, 281n32
- Nefas* 9, 24n9, 31, 57, 64, 69, 79, 84, 91, 105, 108n80, 117–118, 152n46, 183–184, 186, 188, 195, 225, 233, 257, 259, 265, 296
- Octavia 37, 235–236, 240
- Octavian, *see* Augustus
- Oedipus 35n44, 43, 69–70, 100, 118n98, 125–127, 148, 233, 245, 255n63, 257n67, 260–261, 265, 291, 296–297
- Orientalism 51, 76, 169, 173, 178, 213, 280, 286–287
- Ovid 3, 14, 28n20, 39n50, 64n110, 75n15, 83n26, 85n27, 155, 172, 188n56, 226n144, 267n11
- Pallas, prince of Pallantium 227, 272, 277
- Paris 27, 30, 169n25
- Parthenopaeus 97, 116, 221–227, 230, 252n56
- Peleus, father of Achilles 95–96
- Pelias, king of Iolcus 104–106
- Pentheus 250
- Perusian War 34n57, 165
- Phaedra 289, 191–192
- Pharsalia, the battle of 136, 142, 150, 156
- Phenotext 8n32, 262
- Pietas* 114, 44, 78, 79n24, 80n25, 103, 113, 119, 122, 125, 183n52, 200, 236, 242, 246, 251n52, 257, 266, 271, 274
- Plato 7, 10, 88n36

- Plutarch 28n22, 37n46, 38n47, 42, 54n86, 57n97, 135n8, 138–142, 144, 149n36, 165, 197n82, 215n127, 234n11, 12, 235, 238, 282, 287n46, 291n54, 293n66
- Polynices 34–36, 40, 69–70, 108, 120, 122, 243–249, 252–259, 265, 295, 304
- Polyxena 39n50, 267n1, 285
- Polyxo 185–189, 263n80
- Pompey, Gn. Magnus 19, 24, 37–38, 76, 78n22, 108–109, 121n104, 136–137, 141–148, 150, 156, 159, 162, 182, 197, 198n84, 200, 238–240, 263–264
- Porcia, wife of Brutus 138–142, 144
- Priam, king of Troy 75n16, 84–85, 237n21
- Procre 64n110, 164, 188
- Pudicitia* 15n60, 42, 43n58, 62, 78, 80, 131, 137–138, 146
- Punic Wars 24, 49–50, 56, 57n97, 135, 158, 176, 233, 267, 289
- Rape (*includes*: “sexual violence”) 27–32, 38, 73–81, 95–98, 105, 188, 216, 268, 283
- Regulus, M. Atilius 158–162
- Relicta* 83, 105, 154–157, 161
- Rubicon 22n2, 74–75
- Sabine women  
the rape of 28, 32  
as mediators 20, 38–40, 64, 232, 234, 236n19, 238–240, 243, 264, 266
- Saguntum, the battle of 44, 57n97, 74, 76n17, 121, 124, 134, 212, 216
- Sallust 42, 110n12, 176n31, 233n6
- Scelus* 24n9, 66, 171, 183–184, 187–188, 251
- Scipio, P. Cornelius 79–80, 138n16
- Scyros 96, 151, 167, 224
- Seneca the Younger 14, 15n60, 28n20, 78n21, 147, 188, 243, 251n52, 252n54, 257, 267n1, 291n54, 296, 297n75
- Signifying practice 6, 9, 211, 262, 305
- Signifying process 6–7, 9, 11
- Sophocles 39n50, 108, 289, 291, 296
- Speaking subject 7, 10–11, 13, 50, 70, 305
- Stoicism 13, 15, 79–80, 83, 88n36, 130, 144n26, 145–148, 302
- Suetonius 25n15, 164n9, 166n17, 178n43, 197n82, 83, 252, 255n62, 291n54
- Sychaeus, husband of Dido 278
- Tacitus 25n15, 135n9, 140n19, 149n38, 164–165, 177n38, 178, 210n12, 252n54, 255n62, 291
- Teikhoscopia* 84–86, 88n36
- Theron 116–117
- Theseus 83n26, 214n125, 215, 233
- Thetis 90n45, 91–103, 106, 114, 119, 124, 160, 224
- Thrace 30n29, 183–186, 190, 193–194, 213
- Tiberius 149, 255n62
- Tisiphone 43–44, 69–70, 121
- Triaria 164–165
- Turnus 29, 58, 60, 63, 65–70, 121n103, 169, 173, 185, 202–206, 213, 226, 227n147, 232, 237–238, 250n50, 263–264, 266n96, 267, 290, 292–293, 295–296, 304
- Tydeus 17, 34, 163n5, 248, 304
- Velleius Paterculus 37n46, 38n47, 43n57, 137, 165, 197n83, 233n6, 235, 291n54
- Venus (*includes*: Aphrodite) 20, 30, 35n44, 47, 76, 89–91, 92n53, 93, 97, 102, 173–174, 183–185, 189, 191, 193, 195–201, 241–243, 263–264, 266, 269n5, 273
- Verginia 38–39, 268, 285
- Veturia 64, 234, 236n19, 243, 249, 253–254, 258–259
- Virtus* 1, 15n60, 17, 24n12, 33, 44, 151, 163, 169n24, 171, 174, 178n43, 197–198, 303–305
- Vulcan 35n44, 90, 180, 189, 241