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HERCULES AND THE CENTAURS: READING STATIUS WITH VERGIL AND OVID

RUTH PARKES

IT ALMOST SEEMS EASIER to steal the club of Hercules than to dare to join the league of critics writing about him.¹ The last few decades have seen a proliferation of studies on this mythological hero, whose fame and varied actions rendered his political, philosophical, and literary appropriation so attractive to the ancients. In particular, the representation of Hercules in Flavian Latin epic has attracted interest of late, following on studies of Hercules in Vergil's *Aeneid*.² The exact function of references to Hercules differs from text to text, but the Flavian poems share tactics in common that can also be detected in the *Aeneid*: although Hercules tends to feature on the sidelines of the action, more frequently referred to than seen, he is used as a standard by which to assess other figures in the poem who may be seen as inferior or successful followers.³ Comparison is not, however, necessarily straightforward: there may be various candidates vying for the part of Hercules or questions over how the role may fit.⁴

Statius' unfinished epic, the *Achilleid*, illustrates this comparative strategy well. As part of a progress report on Achilles to Thetis, Chiron recalls the time he encountered the young Hercules: *olim equidem, Argoos pinus cum Thessala reges / hac veheret, iuvenem Alciden . . . vidi— / sed taceo* ("Once indeed, when the pine of Thessaly carried the princes of the Argo this way, I saw the youthful Hercules—but I say no more," *Achil.* 1.156–58). The arrival of Achilles prevents Chiron from finishing his sentence, but the implication is that the boy matches up to or surpasses the hero in some sense. It seems likely that the point of comparison would have been Achilles'

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1. To adapt Vergil's alleged dictum (Suet. *Life of Vergil* 46).

2. See esp. Ripoll 1998, 86–163, on Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, Silius Italicus' *Punica*, and Statius' *Thebaid*; also Billerbeck 1986, 345–52; Edwards 1999.

3. So Jason is measured against Hercules in Valerius' *Argonautica* (see, e.g., Feeney 1991, 327 n. 46; Ripoll 1998, 91–94), while candidates for Hercules' mantle in the *Punica* include Regulus, Fabius, Scipio, and Hannibal (Bassett 1955, 1966; Ripoll 1998, 112–32; Williams 2006, 74–76). On the true and false Hercules types in the *Thebaid*, see Ripoll 1998, 146–59; Brown 1994, 37–38; and further below.

4. So, for instance, in the *Punica*, the reader is drawn into assessing the different ways in which Regulus, Fabius, and Scipio match up to Hercules and pondering how far the enemy Hannibal can be regarded as a follower of the hero.

potential to achieve great deeds. At *Achilleid* 1.148–49, Chiron notes that Achilles' *vis festina* ("precocious energy") is preparing *nescio quid magnum* ("something great"). Furthermore, it is clear from Achilles' song at 1.189–90 that the Centaur has been grooming his charge for like stardom, instructing him in Hercules' labors. We are not actually told, however, and the curtailment of Chiron's words invites speculation as to the ways in which Achilles might be like this hero. Perhaps he bears similar youthful good looks or strength. Or perhaps the parallel lies in relations with Centaurs: Chiron has just been relating Achilles' skirmishes with these creatures,⁵ and Hercules was famed for his Centauromachies. Indeed, one Centaur fight, that with the Lapiths, often associated with Hercules by Statius' predecessors,⁶ has already been brought to our attention. In an effort to distance Chiron from the other Centaurs, the narrator refers to the conflict at the wedding of Pirithous and Hippodamia: in Chiron's cave were *nec truncae bellis genialibus orni / aut consanguineos fracti crateres in hostes* ("no ashes broken in a wedding brawl or mixing bowls shattered upon kindred enemies," *Achil.* 1.113–14). We may also note that a parallel between Achilles' behavior and that of a participant in the Centaur-Lapith battle has previously been drawn in Thetis' observation that Achilles *Lapitharum proelia ludit* ("plays at the battles of the Lapiths," *Achil.* 1.40). Thus various connections present themselves once the reader has been alerted to potential equivalence between the two. Further links become clear as the poem progresses. In his assumption of female garb at Scyros, Achilles recalls Hercules' cross-dressing stay with Omphale.⁷ There are, of course, also differences between the two. The struggle at the Lapith wedding arose from debauched Centaur behavior, whereas in the *Achilleid*, Achilles is the aggressor. How like Hercules is he really?

This paper examines Hercules and Centauromachy in Statius' earlier epic, the *Thebaid*. Specifically, it treats the *Thebaid's* relationship with Vergil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁸ The first part looks at the use of

5. *Achil.* 1.152–55: *ipsi mihi saepe queruntur / Centauri raptasque domos abstractaque coram / armenta et semet campis fluviisque fugari, / insidiasque et bella parant tumideque minantur* ("The Centaurs themselves often complain to me of plundered homes and cattle dragged away before their eyes and themselves driven from fields and rivers. They prepare ambush and war and utter furious threats").

6. For the variant tradition of Hercules' involvement, cf. *Ov. Met.* 12.536–38: *haec inter Lapithas et semihomines Centauros / proelia Tlepolemus Pyllo referente dolorem / praeteriti Alcidae . . . non pertulit* ("As Nestor related this fight between the Lapiths and half-human Centaurs, Tlepolemus could not restrain his resentment that Hercules had been passed by"); *Sen. Hercules Furens* 778–79, when the hero appears in the underworld: *tum victa trepidant monstra, Centauri truces / Lapithaeque multo in bella succensi mero* ("then the monsters he had conquered are fearful, the savage Centaurs and the Lapiths who were inflamed to fight by much wine"; *succensi mero* indicates the wine-fueled wedding brawl rather than Hercules' separate fight with the Lapiths as told at *Diod. Sic.* 4.37.3 and *Apollod. Bibl.* 2.7.7); *Valerius Flaccus* 3.65–67: *qualis in Alciden et Thesea Rhoetus iniqui / nube meri geminam Pholoen maioraque cernens / astra ruit* ("even as Rhoetus, clouded by an excess of wine and seeing Pholoe double and the stars as larger, rushed to attack Hercules and Theseus").

7. Thetis makes the comparison explicit in her attempts to persuade her son: *si Lydia dura / pensa manu mollesque tulit Tiryntius hastas* ("if Hercules took in his rough hand Lydian wool and effeminate spears," *Achil.* 1.260–61). Achilles also follows Hercules in his use of female disguise to avoid battle (*Plut. Mor. Quaest. Graec.* 304d).

8. Until recently critics have overlooked Statius' use of the *Metamorphoses* in favor of the *Aeneid*. Studies such as Feeney 1991, 337–91; Keith 2002a; Newlands 2004; and Lovatt 2005 are beginning to redress the balance.

Hercules as a benchmark for the other characters: while Statius' employment of Hercules as heroic gauge has been well discussed,⁹ little attention has been paid to his engagement with previous literary examples of this strategy. Not only does Statius draw on the comparative tactics employed by Vergil and Ovid in their inclusion of Hercules, he also systematically mines and combines relevant passages from the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses*. The second part focuses on the *Thebaid*'s references to the Centaur-Lapith battle. It will be argued that Statius draws upon the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* in his allusions to the fight and, in the process, manipulates our reading of these texts.

I

A. Hercules as Model in Vergil and Ovid

Before we can make a case for the *Thebaid*'s engagement with the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses*, we must investigate the figure of Hercules in these texts. At the time of the *Aeneid*'s narrative action, Hercules is a god but features only as a bit player, unable to help as Pallas calls on the ties of *hospitium* (Verg. *Aen.* 10.460–65). However, the legacy of his mortal achievements is still strong,¹⁰ and the frequent references to Hercules' deeds invite us to see him as the standard by which to judge other characters in the epic. Thus at Verg. *Aen.* 6.801–3 Augustus' achievements are directly compared with those of Hercules: *nec vero Alcides tantum telluris obivit, / fixerit acripedem cervam licet, aut Erymanthi / pacarit nemora et Lernam tremefecerit arcu* ("nor indeed did Hercules visit so much earth, although he pierced the bronze-footed deer, brought peace to the groves of Erymanthus and caused Lerna to tremble at his bow"). The text also encourages us to assess figures against Hercules indirectly. We wonder how Hercules' son, Aventinus, wielder of a Hydra-adorned shield (*Aen.* 7.657–58) and wearer of lion skin (7.666–69) matches up, and whether Cisseus and Gyas follow their father's companion in more than choice of weapon (10.317–22). Here the strongest links are those constructed between Hercules and Aeneas.¹¹ Connections are established early on, as Aeneas encounters traces of Hercules' journey from Spain to Italy¹² and follows his path down to Hades in Book 6.¹³ However, it is in the *Salii* hymn of Book 8 that the correspondences are particularly tight and systematic.¹⁴ A variety of links are immediately evoked by the first part of the paean,

9. Ripoll 1998, 145–59.

10. So Aeneas passes by Tarentum, one of his foundations (Verg. *Aen.* 3.551), sees the boxing gloves worn by Eryx in his fight against Hercules (5.410–14), hears the story of his deeds (6.392–93, 8.185–305), and encounters his comrade Antiores (10.778–82).

11. For parallels between Hercules and Aeneas, see Henry 1873, 188–95; Buchheit 1963, 119–32; McGushin 1964, 232–42; Gilmartin 1968; Galinsky 1972a, 132–46; Zarker 1972; Gransden 1976, 18–20; Feeney 1986, 66–79; Lyne 1987, 28–35; Heiden 1987.

12. See n. 10 above.

13. On Hercules' trip to the underworld as an important precedent for Aeneas' own, see Buchheit 1963, 120–22; Galinsky 1972a, 134–35. Aeneas holds the hero up as an example at *Aen.* 6.123; so too does Charon, 6.392–94 (less positively: the Sibyl is forced to defuse his worries, 6.399–401). Cf. also 6.285–91, where Aeneas tries to attack some of the creatures or types of creatures Hercules had conquered: the Hydra, Geryon, Centaurs, and, in the case of Briareus, an Olympian-fighting giant.

14. See, e.g., Buchheit 1963, 122–24; Galinsky 1972a, 143.

related in indirect speech (8.288–93): the endurance of labors, persecution under Juno, military prowess, love and broken promises as motives for war. The second section (8.293–302) reminds us of a previous descent to Hades (8.296–97), and showcases the reward for labors: deification (8.301: *decus addite divis*).¹⁵ Above all, Hercules is extolled as a monster conqueror: references to his snake-strangling childhood and defeat of Cacus frame the insert of hymnic song listing some famous victories (Centaur, the Cretan bull, the Nemean lion, Cerberus, Typhoeus, and the Hydra). This is a role that Aeneas also adopts—and the fights seem carefully chosen for their (metaphorical) parallelism within the text.¹⁶

Now Augustus trumps Hercules in his civilizing achievements, whereas Cisseus and Gyas fail to live up to their hero's example inasmuch as their *Herculis arma* (*Aen.* 10.319) do not ensure their survival. The success of other emulations is far harder to assess. In his willingness to fight Aeneas and his allies, Aventinus seems to be following his father, a fearless warrior and former enemy of Troy (8.290–91). Aventinus appears to be a true heir, another monster killer, prepared to best a potentially ever-increasing number of enemies, just as Hercules cut down the self-replenishing Hydra heads.¹⁷ Yet there is a contradiction: Books 6 and 8 set up detailed correspondences between Hercules and Aeneas, while in the catalogue of Book 7, it is an enemy of Aeneas—Aventinus—who adopts the mantle of Hercules. Have we been mistaken in our interpretations of Aeneas? Or are Aventinus' pretensions false? Does the Hydra emblem in fact indicate that he is the type of Herculean monster whom Aeneas must conquer?¹⁸

We have faced uncertainty over how to read Aventinus' Herculean legacy right from the start. Consider his victorious return from chariot racing (*Aen.* 7.655–56): has he inherited his father's skill (suggested by his involvement in the Nemean and Olympic games)? Or, more disturbingly, his horses, which once belonged to the Thracian Diomedes? Nicholas Horsfall rejects the possibility ("the horses . . . were famed for cannibalism, not speed"),¹⁹ but Statius at least seems to have considered it: note the horses of Chromis, son of Hercules, in the games, *Thebaid* 6.346–49. The conflicting symbolism, coupled with the lack of further references to Aventinus, makes clear adjudication impossible.²⁰ Such ambiguity is surely deliberate. The kind of conflict Aeneas

15. For Aeneas' future immortality, see Verg. *Aen.* 1.259–60.

16. See Buchheit 1963, 122–31; Putnam 1970, 411 (a discussion of the reappearance of underworld creatures in Book 7). Hercules crushes the *geminos* . . . *anguis* sent by Hera ("twin snakes," *Aen.* 8.289); Aeneas battles with enemies maddened by a snake-bearing Fury at the orders of the same goddess (note esp. the *geminos* . . . *anguis* waved at Turnus, 7.450). His lion-skin seat (8.177) and caparison (8.552–53) suggest the undertaking of his own Nemean labor (8.295). Specific opponents include the Centaur-like Catillus and Coras (7.674–77; cf. 8.293–94), Aventinus with his Hydra shield (see below), and Mezentius and Turnus, contemporary Cacus- and giant-types (Buchheit 1963, 126–31; Galinsky 1966, 26–42; Clausen, 1987, 71–72; Hardie 1986, 97, 112–19, 155). Aeneas has already matched Hercules' conquest of *Cresia* . . . *prodigia* ("Cretan monsters," 8.294–95) through his treatment of Dido (cf. the Cretan deer simile, 4.68–73); he may repeat the experience in his defeat of Turnus, another Dido figure (cf. 12.750 *cervum*), who is twice compared to a bull (12.103–6, 715–22).

17. See Hardie 1992, 63.

18. See Putnam 1970, 411.

19. Horsfall 2000, ad loc.

20. Contra Feeney 1986, 69–70, who decides in favor of Aeneas.

and Aventinus are engaged in is both heroic and a travesty of heroism. While Aeneas may be right to defend his divinely ordained settlement by force, the Italians' suppression of a perceived alien threat can also be justified. Both sides show valor and military prowess. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise: the two forces will go on to unite and raise Italy to glory. But this fact of future bonding makes the current dispute even more unsettling. The fighting, then, can be seen as evidence of and first steps toward future Roman greatness or as a quasi-civil war. The unstable nature of the conflict necessarily leads to unstable perceptions: the titles of monster and hero are there to be assigned.

The *Aeneid*'s inclusion of characters who are implicitly or explicitly set against Hercules is picked up by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Apparent substitutes for the hero appear at regular intervals. First, there is Hercules' great-grandfather (and half-brother),²¹ Perseus. Alison Keith has noted how his visit to the garden of Hesperides and rescue of a maiden from a sea monster sets him up as a "Herculean hero."²² We might add that Perseus fights at a wedding feast in defense of a bride (*Ov. Met.* 5.1–235), just like Hercules in Book 12,²³ and that both heroes specialize in the defeat of snaky beasts.²⁴

Another potential Hercules, the peace-bringing²⁵ monster killer Theseus, enters the narrative at *Metamorphoses* 7.404. Links between Hercules and Theseus had developed in antiquity,²⁶ but Ovid makes a special effort to link the two. A digression on Medea's poison (*Met.* 7.406–19), telling of Hercules' descent to Hades (7.409–13), brings the hero to mind. The fact that Callimachus' tale of Hercules' stay with Molochus is one of the intertexts behind the story of Baucis and Philemon's hospitality listened to by the guest Theseus²⁷ may also encourage us to compare the two.

Most important, the celebration in song of Theseus' monster-killing exploits (*Met.* 7.432–52) looks to the *Carmen Saliare* of *Aeneid* 8.287–305. The details of Theseus' victory over the Cretan bull (*Met.* 7.434) and *Vulcani . . . prolem* ("offspring of Vulcan," *Met.* 7.437) prompt us to think of Hercules' capture of the Cretan bull and defeat of Cacus related in that paean (*Aen.* 8.294–95; 8.303–4).²⁸ Verbal parallels strengthen the link.²⁹

21. Like Hercules, Perseus is a son of Jupiter (*Ov. Met.* 4.610–11).

22. Keith 2002b, 240. The tale of Perseus' visit to the Hesperides reminds us of Hercules' later visit: Atlas assumes Perseus is the son of Jupiter destined to steal his golden apples (*Ov. Met.* 4.644–45; cf. 9.190). Rescue from a sea monster: cf. *Met.* 4.670–739 with 11.211–17.

23. Although Nestor fails to mention him, his participation in the Centaur-Lapith fight is implied by *Ov. Met.* 12.536–38 (cited above).

24. Perseus is *Gorgonis anguicomae superator* ("conqueror of the snaky-haired Gorgon," *Ov. Met.* 4.699) and victorious over a monster that is likened to a snake (*Ov. Met.* 4.714–20); Hercules' conquests include the snakes in his cradle, the Hydra, and Achelous in serpent form (*Ov. Met.* 9.67–69).

25. *Ov. Met.* 7.405 *qui virtute sua bimarem pacaverat Isthmon* ("who had brought peace to the Isthmus between two seas by his valor"); cf., e.g., *Aen.* 6.802–3; *Erymanthi l pacarit nemora* ("he brought peace to the groves of Erymanthus").

26. See Pollmann 2004 on *Stat. Theb.* 12.575; Ripoll 1998, 156.

27. See Colace 1982, 141–42.

28. There is another parallel deed, unmentioned by the *Carmen Saliare*: Theseus' hurling of Sciron into the sea (*Met.* 7.443–47) may remind us of Hercules' treatment of Lichas (*Met.* 9.211–29). Both victims bestow their names on rocks (*Met.* 7.447, 9.229).

29. See, e.g., the repetition of the second person singular (cf. *Met.* 7.433 and 436 with *Aen.* 8.293, 294, 296–99); *Met.* 7.451–52: *consonat . . . l regia* ("the palace resounds") with *Aen.* 8.305; *consonat omne nemus* ("the whole grove resounds").

The next Hercules figure to appear is Hercules himself, in the story of his fight with Achelous (*Met.* 9.1–88). Ovid's conscious adoption of Vergil's comparative strategy is shown up by echoes of the *Aeneid* in this scene.³⁰ Ovid turns on its head Vergil's construction of Aeneas as a second Hercules: here Hercules is seen as a second Aeneas fighting against the Turnus-like Achelous.³¹ Once Hercules has appeared in Ovid's deflating narrative,³² his position of ideal model crumbles. Rather than being held up as an exemplum, he becomes merely the first in a list of heroes to win apotheosis, an inferior prototype of Augustus. Of course, here Ovid is again looking toward Vergil's tactics in the *Aeneid*.³³

B. Hercules as Model in Statius

After surveying the presentation of Hercules in the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses*, we may finally turn to the Statian Hercules. Allusions to the hero occur throughout the *Thebaid* but it is not until Book 4, when the Argive army musters and departs for Nemea, that his presence is really felt.³⁴ The catalogue of Argive soldiers at *Thebaid* 4.32–308 is structured around the seven warriors who were traditionally prominent in the attack against Thebes. But some hundred lines into the catalogue, the text takes an unexpected turn. Statius includes as leader of a contingent a figure who is alien to the tradition: Hercules. The troops from Tiryns and, we later learn, those from Nemea and Cleonae³⁵ are led by the city's most famous alumnus and ancestor: *suus exciit in arma / antiquam Tiryntha deus* ("their own god rouses ancient Tiryns to arms," Stat. *Theb.* 4.146–47). We might assume men who dwelled in and around the Argolis would fall under the control of Hippomedon, the leader who has just been described as commanding troops from this area. At the least we expect one of the usual set. The involvement of a newcomer, operating from on high, appears to be a puzzle.³⁶

However, there are epic precedents for references to Hercules in catalogues.³⁷ Vergil's description of the Italian Aventinus, son of the hero, seems

30. Galinsky 1972b, 95–98.

31. Galinsky 1972b, 96–97. Hercules also recalls Vergil's Turnus and Hercules (95–98).

32. Hercules' glorious deeds are consistently sidelined: cf., e.g., *Met.* 9.134–35, 12.539–46. Instead of receiving a paeon as in the *Aeneid*, Hercules is forced to narrate his own deeds (*Met.* 9.182–99)—and in humorously quick succession with his dying breath, as if in realization that this will be his only chance to memorialize them. On the debunking of Hercules, see Galinsky 1972b; Feeney 1991, 206; Keith 1999, 223.

33. See Verg. *Aen.* 6.801–3 (cited above).

34. For earlier references, cf. *Theb.* 1.384–85, 485–87. The import of the Argives' stay at Nemea, the *conscia laudis / Herculeae dumeta* ("thickets aware of Hercules' excellence," *Theb.* 4.646–47), lies outside the scope of this paper. See Brown 1994, chap. 2.

35. *Theb.* 4.159–60: *dat Nemea comites, et quas in proelia vires / sacra Cleonaei cogunt vineta Molorch* ("Nemea provides comrades and the hallowed vineyards of Cleonae Molorchus give the might they muster for battle").

36. Klinnert (1970, 79 n. 2) argues for interpolation, a theory rightly dismissed by Schetter 1972, 230.

37. Following Hom. *Il.* 2.653–70, where Tlepolemus, son of Heracles, is leader of the Rhodian contingent: cf. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.122–32 (Heracles himself); Verg. *Aen.* 7.655–69 (Aventinus); Luc. 3.177–78: *liquit / . . . Herculeam miles Trachinius Oeten* ("the soldier of Trachis left behind Oeta famed for Hercules"); Sil. *Pun.* 3.262–64 (descendant of Antaeus); 3.357: *Cerretani, quondam Tirynthia castra* ("the Cerretani, who once fought for Hercules"); 4.224: (dwellers at Tibur) *sub Herculeis . . . muris* ("under the walls of Hercules").

the most resonant of these. Aventinus glories in his descent, flaunting the relationship through his lion-skin apparel (*Aen.* 7.666–69):

tēgimen torquens immane leonis,
terribili impexum saeta cum dentibus albis
indutus capiti . . .
horridus Herculeoque umeros innexus amictu.

swinging a huge lion's skin matted with terrifying bristles that he wore with its white teeth
on his head . . . a fearsome figure with the Herculean garb fastened about his shoulders

With similar pride the Tirynthians bear their *gentilis honos* ("national ornament," *Stat. Theb.* 4.155): *flavae capiti tergoque leonum / exuviae* ("on their heads and backs are tawny lion-skins," *Theb.* 4.154–55).³⁸ Another passage drawing on Vergil's portrayal of Hercules follows shortly. At lines 157–58, the Tirynthians laud Hercules: *Herculeum paeana canunt vastataque monstis / omnia* ("they sing a paean of Hercules and the annihilation of monsters from everywhere"), thus reprising the actions of the Salii, *qui carmine laudes / Herculeas et facta ferunt* ("who relate in song the glories and deeds of Hercules," *Aen.* 8.287–88). Vergil's eighteen lines detailing the content of the song (8.287–304) may be compressed into one and a half, but these encapsulate the spirit of the hymn: praise of the hero for his beneficent labors.

We have seen how the Vergilian passages raise issues about what it means to be an *alter Hercules*, which in turn force us to consider the nature of the war. Through engagement with the *Aeneid*, the Statian text may bring up the same questions, even if it guides us to different answers.

We are similarly encouraged to assess the Tirynthians' claims of succession. It seems as though the contingent is living up to its leader: Tiryns is *non fortibus . . . / infecunda viris*.³⁹ *famave inmanis alumni / degenerat* ("not barren of brave men nor degenerate from the renown of her awesome son," *Theb.* 4.147–49). There are, however, niggling criticisms. After announcing that the city has not lapsed from the fame of Hercules, Statius adds: *lapsa situ fortuna, neque addunt / robur opes; rarus vacuis habitator in arvis / monstrat Cyclopum ductas sudoribus arces* ("her fortune was fallen through age; nor does wealth give might; the rare dweller in the empty fields shows the walls raised by the sweat of the Cyclops," *Theb.* 4.149–51). Tiryns is suffering some decay: the population is dwindling, its riches are gone. The city's decline in fortune seems accompanied by decline in structures. The language of *lapsa situ fortuna* hints at physical ruin.⁴⁰ Perhaps the Cyclopean

38. Cf. their arms of club and bow (*Stat. Theb.* 4.155–56), which trump the weaponry of Aventinus' men in authenticity (*Verg. Aen.* 7.664–65).

39. Although this fertility turns out to be restricted (*Stat. Theb.* 4.152: *dat . . . iuvenum tercentum pectora*, "she gives three hundred manly hearts"), the company is, paradoxically, a *vulgus / innumerum bello* ("a countless multitude in war," 4.152–53): i.e., their valor is so great that it compensates for their limited numbers.

40. The translation "physical deterioration" for *situ* (*OLD* 2) is evoked by its combination with *lapsa* (*OLD*, s.v. *labor* 6b): cf. 4.356–57: *ipsa vetusto / moenia lapsa situ* ("the walls themselves have fallen from long deterioration").

walls are crumbling. Certainly they are no longer regarded as a conceivable feat but pointed out as a thing of wonder, a sign of a greater age. This is part of a worrying tendency in the troops to bask in the past glory of others: the inhabitants of Cleonae similarly show off the location of Hercules' stay as guest of Molorchus (*Theb.* 4.162–64):

parvoque ostenditur arvo,
robur ubi et laxos qua reclinaverit arcus
ilice, qua cubiti sedeant vestigia terra.

in the small field it is shown where he laid his club, by which oak he put down his unstrung bow, and where on the ground traces of his elbow remain.

Perhaps we need to reassess what is meant by *fama* in line 148. Men from Tiryns may not fall short of the *fama* of Hercules, his reputation, at least in their own eyes. *Fama* is a value they seem to cherish and they glory in their connections with the hero. However, of what nature or use is this renown? Some degeneration has clearly taken place in the city: perhaps they have the fame without the substance. In reality they do not share Hercules' strength. The Tirynthians carry pine clubs in emulation of their leader's weapon but they are hardly comparable to the real thing:⁴¹ the mere imprint of Hercules' club is enough to draw the tourists at Cleonae (*Theb.* 4.163).⁴² Such arms will not save them in the coming Argive defeat.⁴³ Nor will they share their hero's fate of immortality. As Hercules lingers on Mount Oeta (4.158), site of his apotheosis, the warriors march towards their death. Merely rehearsing the labors of their ancestor in song (4.157–58) will not earn them his reward.

So, as in the Vergilian passages, we weigh the warriors against their Herculean model: the intertexts arguably help guide us to this comparative process. Moreover, as in the *Aeneid*, the results are ambiguous. While there are signs of the contingent's worthiness, we also perceive their failure to attain the ideal. Now the Statian analysis differs from the Vergilian: doubts about the troops are raised more explicitly, through the passage and later reference to the fate of the contingent; the *Thebaid* also includes the new idea of a world in decline. However, some of our uncertainty over how to read the Hercules contingent is due to the nature of the conflict in which they are engaged, just as in the *Aeneid*. From their perspective they are fighting for a just cause, the restoration of Polynices' rights: the Thebans are monsters who must be defeated. Another view of the conflict, one promoted heavily by the *Thebaid*'s narrative, focuses on the ugly heart of the war, a quarrel

41. It may be another sign of their degradation that they use this type of wood, which was notorious for breaking, rather than follow Hercules by choosing a club made from the sturdy olive (*Theoc. Id.* 25.207–8).

42. The decline in circumstances is made apparent by verbal play on *robur*. This word recurs three times in twenty lines, each time with a different meaning: at 4.145 it describes the troops (*robora*); at line 150, it signals that they lack the "might" (*robur*) provided by wealth; finally, at 163, it is used of Hercules' legendary club, a *robur* no longer available to the city.

43. Confirmed by 11.45–48: *expirat late pubes Tirynthia, alumni / exuvias imitata dei; trux maeret ab astris / Amphitryonides Nemeaea in sanguine terga / et similes ramos similesque videre pharetras* ("The Tirynthian youth who imitate the spoils of their native god, perish far and wide; the stern son of Amphitryon mourns from the stars to see the Nemean skins and the clubs and the quivers like his own drenched in blood").

between brothers, which warps and prevents any flowering of *virtus*. We realize that the troops cannot replicate Hercules' deeds. They have to look back to the past. Glory cannot be gained in kin/civil strife;⁴⁴ the monsters that appear to be other turn out to be on the same side. And without the possibility of beneficent labors, there is no hope of immortality.

So far we have explored the ways in which the figure of Hercules is used to reflect on characters who are closely attached to him. In fact, this assessment process pervades the catalogue of Book 4: the warriors' heroic pretensions coupled with a series of allusions to Hercules' deeds⁴⁵ make comparison irresistible. The role of the Tirynthian-Nemean section here is crucial. As well as serving as a clear local instance of the strategy, it draws our attention to two aspects of Hercules' life that the *Thebaid* wishes to highlight: the hero's vanquishing of monsters and his deification, his reward for such struggles. These are not only explicitly referred to by the text;⁴⁶ they are also indirectly evoked by the compressed echo of the Salii hymn that celebrates these very events. As we shall see, such signs of Hercules' *virtus* are set against the actions of the Argive chieftains, much in the way that the Vergilian Hercules' deeds are juxtaposed to Aeneas'. The *Thebaid* is not only invoking the *Aeneid*'s general strategy by the allusions, it arguably wishes us to recall the particulars. Although we do not learn the details of the Tirynthian paean, the text seems to use the reference to Vergil's hymn as a kind of shorthand. We are expected to remember the contents of the Salii's song and then seek external parallels. For, if we move our attention away from the Tirynthian troops to look at the other warriors, we find a surprising number of correspondences between the labors of Hercules and the actions of the Argive princes. They come, however, with a twist.

The most obvious parallel involves the vanquishing of monsters. We know that the Tirynthians sang of *vastata . . . monstris / omnia* (*Theb.* 4.157–58). We think back to Hercules' monster-killing labors, specifically through the medium of Vergil's hymn. The first victory listed in the direct speech of the Salii is his defeat of the Centaurs Hylaeus and Pholus. We have had reference to one of these Centaurs in Statius' catalogue less than twenty lines previously: the sight of Hippomedon on horseback prompts a comparison with Hylaeus.⁴⁷ One can readily pick up the point of correspondence between a

44. Ripoll 1998, 144.

45. As well as the description of the Herculean contingent, cf. 4.106–9, 168–72, 297–98.

46. For monster killing, cf. 4.157–58: *vastataque monstris / omnia*; allusions to the Nemean lion at 154–55 and 161–64; for deification, cf. 147: *deus*; 158: *frondosa longum deus audit ab Oeta* ("the god hears from afar from leafy Oeta").

47. *illum Palladia sonipes Nemeaeus ab arce / devehit arma pavens umbraque inmane volanti / implet agros longoque attollit pulvere campum. / non aliter silvas umeris et utroque refringens / pectore montano duplex Hylaeus ab antro / praecipitat: pavet Ossa vias, pecudesque feraeque / procubuerunt metu; non ipsi fratribus horror / afuit, ingenti donec Peneia saltu / stagna subit magnumque obiectus detinet amnem* ("A Nemean steed bears him down from the citadel of Pallas, fearing his arms; it fills the fields with a monstrous flying shadow and raises the plain with a long trail of dust. Not otherwise, crashing through the woods with his shoulders and either breast, does two-formed Hylaeus rush headlong from his mountain cave. Ossa dreads his path; cattle and wild beasts fall in terror; even his brothers are not without fear, until he enters the waters of Peneus with a great leap and dams the great river with his bulk," *Stat. Theb.* 4.136–44).

man on horseback and a half-male, half-equine figure, particularly when seen from the perspective of a shadow (*Theb.* 4.137). But are there any other similarities? At first it seems not. The picture of Hippomedon riding brings out the etymology of his name: "horse-master."⁴⁸ He appears in control, a far cry from the Centaur breed, whose bestial side dominates. Furthermore, we are told his horse is from Nemea, a place without link to the creatures except through the figure of the Centaur-killing Hercules, who slew a lion in this valley.⁴⁹ Perhaps we are meant to see Hippomedon as an *alter Hercules*, to appreciate the irony in his comparison to creatures conquered by his predecessor.

This may be the impression Hippomedon would foster, but the reader sees through it. We realize that the "horse-master" is hardly in charge: he is being carried downward at high speed by a frightened animal (*Theb.* 4.136–37). The effect and course of his descent is illustrated only obliquely by the simile, but it is hard not to read some of the uncontrollable, wanton violence of the centaur back into the prince. A negative reading seems confirmed by the text's close engagement with the *Aeneid*. It draws mainly on the centaur simile describing Catillus and Coras, enemies of Aeneas, found in Vergil's Book 7 catalogue of the Italians,⁵⁰ but it also takes the name Hylaeus from the Salii hymn (*Aen.* 8.294). Through this combinatory allusion the epic flaunts its adoption of Vergilian strategy. As we have seen, the *Aeneid* exploits links between passages in Books 7 and 8 in order to present Aeneas as a Hercules figure set the task of defeating Herculean monsters, his Italian opponents. The *Thebaid* brings the passages together to highlight a similar comparative process and a dissimilar outcome: instead of being like Hercules as we are led to expect, Hippomedon is an antitype of the hero, more like one of the monsters he killed.⁵¹

So Hippomedon fails to fit the Hercules role. But what of the other princes? The third exploit⁵² in the fragment of the Salii hymn is Hercules' vanquishing of the Nemean lion (*Aen.* 8.295). We have noted how the *Aeneid* draws parallels between Aeneas and Hercules through the use of a lion skin for Aeneas' seat and horse.⁵³ Polynices seems to bear yet closer connections to the hero: in his catalogue description he is actually dressed in lion hide (*Teumesius implet l terga leo*, Stat. *Theb.* 4.85–86), the same clothing he wore when he first arrived in Argos some three years previously. If we think back to that scene, our memory jogged by the recurring epithet "Teumesian,"

48. See Collard 1975, ad Eur. *Supp.* 884–87.

49. Cf. *Silv.* 4.6.58, 5.2.48–49; *Theb.* 2.377–78, 4.159, 646–47, 832–35, 6.368.

50. *Aen.* 7.674–77, as in the case of Hippomedon describing *Argiva iuventus* ("Argive youth," *Aen.* 7.672). Statius again uses the simile for Hippomedon's course at *Theb.* 9.220–22.

51. In case we have been lazy readers, the text draws our attention to Hylaeus' fate through a further reference in Book 6. The prize for winning the chariot race is a bowl once owned by Hercules on which the hero had portrayed his victory over the Centaurs in their battle with the Lapiths, *Theb.* 6.538–39. See further below.

52. The second feat, capture of the Cretan bull (*Aen.* 8.294–95), appears to have no equivalence in Statius' catalogue. Adrastus is compared to a bull (*Theb.* 4.69–73), but detailed correspondences are lacking. For a possible candidate for the bull conqueror, see below.

53. See n. 16 above.

the links become explicit. There his lion skin is compared to one gained by Hercules from a Teumesian lion (Stat. *Theb.* 1.485–87):⁵⁴

illius in speciem quem per Teumesia tempe
Amphitryoniades fractum iuvenalibus annis
ante Cleonaei vestitus proelia monstri.

in the appearance of that which the son of Amphitryon in his youth broke in the valley
of Teumesos and clothed himself with before his battle with the monster of Cleonae.

The reader is guided to make a connection between the two figures, and it is one that Polynices would wish to be made. Hercules was bound to Thebes as well as to Argos: it was the land of his conception and childhood. Polynices parades his links with the hero, hoping to seem a worthy descendant. However, although Polynices may wish to be viewed as a second Hercules, the model is a poor fit. He is setting off to kill his fellow citizens rather than save them from danger. Bent on Theban devastation, he is more like the Teumesian lion, Hercules' prey.⁵⁵

The next deed celebrated by the Salii is Hercules' abduction of Cerberus from Hades (*Aen.* 8.296–97). Amphiarus is another figure destined to visit the underworld: he is shown driving down at the end of Book 7, an act foreshadowed by the catalogue's stress on his chariot and horses from Taenarus.⁵⁶ With intertextual predictability, Dis complains about the frequent invasion of his home: *temptat. . . / me ferus Alcides tum cum custode remoto / ferrea Cerbereae tacuerunt limina portae* ("fierce Hercules provoked me, then when the iron threshold of Cerberus' gate fell silent, its guard removed," *Theb.* 8.54–56). In reply, Amphiarus disclaims any wish to steal Cerberus.⁵⁷ We have already heard similar remarks from the Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6, in response to Charon's concerns,⁵⁸ but we have particular reason to believe Statius' protagonist. Unlike Hercules and Aeneas, Amphiarus has no way of coming back: he cannot fetch the hell-hound. When the earth opens, he rides down to his doom.

The last two monsters referred to in the excerpt of the Salii's paean, the giant Typhoeus and the Lernaean Hydra, are linked to the chieftain Capaneus. A giant-figure tops his helmet (*Theb.* 4.175–76), while his shield shows the Hydra: *ramosa / . . . Hydra recens obitu* ("the branchy Hydra fresh in death," 4.168–69). Rather than being a killer of giants or a Hydra, in the manner of Hercules or, on a metaphorical level, Aeneas, he appears on a par with these monsters.⁵⁹ The gigantomachic associations of Capaneus run right through

54. This legend of Hercules' pre-Nemean conquest of a lion from Teumesos, a mountain near Thebes, may well be a Statian invention designed to link the hero with the Theban Polynices (see Caviglia 1973, ad 1.485–87): an earlier fight is usually placed at Cithaeron.

55. The lion skin also furthers his identification with the human-faced, lion-bodied Sphinx (his sword emblem, 4.87): Polynices' precursor as destroyer of the city (Ahl 1986, 2880).

56. Cf. 4.214: *Taenariis . . . celsus equis* ("high on Taenarian horses"); 219–21. For Taenarus as a legendary entrance to Hades, cf. 1.96, 2.48–54.

57. *Theb.* 8.95, 97–98.

58. See n. 13 above.

59. His gigantic nature is suggested by his vast stature (cf. 4.165, 173; Harrison 1992, 251).

the epic, culminating in his hubristic climb up the walls of Thebes in defiance of gods and men, and subsequent death by thunderbolt.⁶⁰ Statius even specifically links Capaneus with the very giant named in the Salii's hymn, saying of heaven's response to his gigantomachic ascent: *victam supera ad convexa levare / Inarimen Aetnae putes* ("one would think that fettered Inarime or Aetna was being lifted to the heights above," *Theb.* 10.916–17). Inarime and Aetna were volcanoes placed over the giants Typhoeus and Enceladus, respectively, at least in the tradition that Statius seems to have used.⁶¹ Similarly, later events bear out our suspicions that Capaneus has more in common with the monstrous Hydra than its conqueror, despite first appearances. In killing the snake that has struck Opheltes in neighboring Nemea, Capaneus appears to echo the deed of Hercules.⁶² Yet the creature turns out to be sacred to Jupiter: the so-called hero has been committing sacrilege.⁶³ Again, when Capaneus climbs Theban battlements with a torch that lights up his shield,⁶⁴ he seems akin to Hercules, who through his friend Iolaus cauterized the decapitated heads of the Hydra with fire to keep them from multiplying. However, it is Capaneus who is the one burned, by the thunderbolt of Jupiter (*Theb.* 10.927–30), and who therefore falls in the role of monster.⁶⁵

Intertextuality with *Aeneid* 8 brings out how far short of the traditional heroic ideal the warriors fall. They cannot successfully replicate Hercules' monster-beating behavior: instead, they act out warped versions of his labors, for instance, by managing the first half of his trip to the underworld, or taking the role of his monstrous victims. Unsurprisingly, the princes also fail to achieve Hercules' reward of immortality, the last achievement celebrated by the hymnic excerpt. Death in battle is the fate of all the Argive Seven (with the exception of Adrastus, whose end is postponed until another epic): indeed, the means of destruction are foreshadowed in the details of the catalogue.⁶⁶ Tydeus, constantly striving to gain fame as a hero, had seemed the likeliest bet to transcend his human limits. In the catalogue of Book 4 he is compared to a snake that has just shed its skin: *ceu lubricus alta / anguis humo verni blanda ad spiramina solis / erigitur liber senio* ("as a slippery snake rises from the deep earth at the coaxing breath of the spring sun, freed of its old age," *Theb.* 4.95–97). Although the simile's immediate relevance to the narrative

60. Cf. references to giants or Titans at 6.753–55, 10.849–52, 909–10, 915–17, 11.7–8, 12–17. See Klinnert 1970, 27; Franchet d'Espèrey 1999, 198–200; Lovatt 2005, 131–36.

61. First extant in Vergil; cf. *Aen.* 9.715–16: *tum sonitu Prochyta alta tremet durumque cubile / Inarime Iovis imperiis imposita Typhoeo* ("then lofty Prochyta trembles at the sound, and Inarime's hard bed which was laid on Typhoeus by Jupiter's command"); see Williams 1962, ad Verg. *Aen.* 3.578f. For Aetna, see Stat. *Theb.* 11.8.

62. Note the setting, *cognatae stagna . . . Lernae* ("swamp of kindred Lerna," *Theb.* 5.579); cf. *Silv.* 2.1.181–82: *in anguiferae ludentem gramine Lernae / . . . Opheltes* ("Opheltes playing in the grass of snake-bearing Lerna").

63. Vessey 1973, 188; Harrison 1992, 248–49. The defeat of the snake is usually attributed to Amphiaras or the group as a whole. For another flawed imitation, see *Theb.* 8.749–50 with Vessey 1973, 292–93.

64. *Theb.* 10.843–44: *multifidam quercum flagranti lumine vibrat; / arma rubent una clipeoque incenditur ignis* ("he brandishes a flaring torch of splintered oak: at the same time his armor glows red and a fire is kindled on his shield"); the phrase *clipeoque incenditur ignis* may remind us of the shield device.

65. Klinnert 1970, 27; Harrison 1992, 249.

66. Parkes 2002, 9–10.

is to stress that Tydeus has recovered from the wounds he received in the ambush of Book 2, it also suggests his immortal desires. Since the snake regularly shed its coating, it could act as a symbol of rebirth and renewal in the Roman poetic tradition.⁶⁷ In Book 8 it seems as though Tydeus' wishes will come true. His patron goddess Pallas is granted the boon of immortality from Jupiter and comes to bestow it on him as she had done on Hercules. However, she sees him gnawing Melanippus' head and flees.⁶⁸ The catalogue entry had already prepared us for this loss. Tellingly, the snake simile continues: *a miser, agrestum si quis per gramen hianti / obuius et primo fraudaverit ora veneno* ("unhappy the farmer who meets its gaping mouth in the grass and robs its fangs of their new venom," *Theb.* 4.99–100). Tydeus' similarity to the snake actually rests on its bite.⁶⁹

The *Aeneid* is clearly the main intertext employed by Statius in his symbolic use of Hercules. However, the *Thebaid* also engages with the *Metamorphoses*. We have seen how Ovid encourages us to twin Hercules and Theseus; Statius similarly guides us towards comparing the two. Theseus is the bull conqueror we have been waiting for.⁷⁰ He is a far more convincing Hercules replica than the Argive princes: a Centaur-fighting (*Theb.* 12.554), underworld-braving (8.53–54) benefactor of mankind, a houseguest⁷¹ and a protégé of Athena (12.583), whose reward will be deification.⁷² Moreover, Statius draws on the *Metamorphoses* in this pairing of the heroes. Evadne's celebration of Theseus' deeds at *Thebaid* 12.575–86 picks up the song praising Theseus' deeds at Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.432–52⁷³ and foregrounds Ovid's tactics by explicitly referring to Theseus' similarity to Hercules: *nec sacer invadeat paribus Tirynthius actis* ("nor may the divine Hercules envy your equal exploits," *Theb.* 12.584).

II

We have so far seen how Statius draws on Vergil and Ovid in his use of Hercules as a heroic standard against which he can measure the characters in his epic. The second part of this paper examines how Statius engages with Vergil and Ovid in his depiction of Centauromachies. As we might expect,

67. Knox 1950, 380. So Ovid uses it at *Met.* 9.266–70 to describe Hercules' reception of immortality while on the pyre.

68. Stat. *Theb.* 8.758–64.

69. Kytzler 1969, 229. Compare the use of the Achelous myth (*Theb.* 4.106–9). Tydeus, practitioner of wrestling *Achelouia circum / litora* ("around the banks of Achelous," 6.832–33), replays the Hercules/Achelous fight in his struggle with Melanippus (cf. too his defeat of Agyllus, 6.826–910, which also looks to Hercules' victory over Antaeus: 6.893–96): see Vessey 1973, 198 n. 3. While Tydeus seems to copy Hercules in overcoming his foe, it is a botched imitation. Not only is he fatally wounded but, as a result of the excessive disfiguring of his enemy (contrast Achelous' *turpatus . . . vultus*, "marred looks," at 4.106, due to a missing horn), he loses his chance of immortality. For Tydeus/Hercules parallels, see Vessey 1973, 109, and references there; Dominik 1994, 51–52; Ripoll 1998, 147–49; Lovatt 2005, 207–8.

70. Cf. *Theb.* 12.581–82 (the Marathonian bull) and 12.668–71 (Minotaur).

71. Cf. *Theb.* 12.582 for a reference to Theseus' stay with Hecale.

72. On these and other parallels, see Vessey 1973, 313; Ripoll 1998, 156–58.

73. Four of the six deeds listed by Evadne occur in the Ovidian song: the defeat of Sinis (*Theb.* 12.576; *Met.* 7.440–42); Sciron (*Theb.* 12.577; *Met.* 7.443–47); Cercyon (*Theb.* 12.576–77; *Met.* 7.439); Marathonian bull (*Theb.* 12.581; *Met.* 7.434).

given the relative number of references to Centaurs in the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses*,⁷⁴ the latter is the text more heavily drawn upon. In particular the *Thebaid* has a sustained relationship with Ovid's portrayal of the Centaur-Lapith fight at *Metamorphoses* 12.210–535, the only full description of this incident extant in Latin poetry.

The first example of interplay comes in the ambush scene of *Thebaid* 2. At *Thebaid* 2.559–61 Tydeus throws part of a mountain at his attackers: *saxum ingens, quod vix plena cervice gementes / vertere humo valeant et muris inferre iuvenci, / rupibus avellit* ("he wrenches from the rocks a huge boulder which groaning bullocks with full strength could scarce move from the ground and carry within the walls"). Rock hurling was a notorious feature of the Centaur-Lapith fight,⁷⁵ and Statius goes on to highlight the connection by a simile that explicitly alludes to this conflict, substituting the boulder for another infamous missile used in the tussle, the mixing bowl: *qualis in adversos Lapithas erexit inanem / magnanimus cratera Pholus* ("as great-hearted Pholus lifted an empty mixing bowl against the Lapiths opposite," *Theb.* 2.563–64). Here Statius engages with Ovid's version of the Centaur-Lapith fight. He specifically looks to the description of Theseus' bowl hurling at *Metamorphoses* 12.235–37: *forte fuit iuxta signis exstantibus asper / antiquus crater, quem vastum vastior ipse / sustulit Aegides adversaque misit in ora* ("nearby there chanced to be a huge ancient mixing bowl embossed with protruding figures, which Theseus, who was himself more enormous, raised on high and sent into the face opposite"). However, the intertext spills out into the rest of the passage. Tydeus receives no answer when he questions the armed men about their intent at *Thebaid* 2.535: *nec reddita contra / vox* ("no words were returned in reply," 2.536–37). Instead Cthonius starts the ambush by casting a spear (2.538–40), and Tydeus hurls the rock, described by the *crater* simile, in defense. This corresponds to Ovid's description of the beginnings of the wedding fight. Ignoring Theseus' questioning (*ille nihil contra*, "he said nothing in reply," *Met.* 12.232), Eurytus rushes to the attack. Theseus hurls a *crater* in reply (*Met.* 12.235–37, cited above). What is more, several of the ambushers share names borne by the Ovidian participants in this battle: Cthonius, Dorylas, Chromis, and Periphas.⁷⁶

A second simile drawn from the Centaur-Lapith battle occurs at *Thebaid* 5.261–64 in the narration of the slaughter at Lemnos:

74. On Centaurs in the *Aeneid*, see below. *Metamorphoses*: as well as the Centaur-Lapith battle (12.210–535), see 2.630–77 and 6.126 (references to Chiron); 9.101–33 and 9.153 (references to Nessus); 9.191, 12.540–41, 15.283.

75. Cf., e.g., Ov. *Met.* 12.341–42; Stat. *Theb.* 6.537. Putnam (1990, 564 n. 9) comments on the torture of Ixion and Pirithous at *Aen.* 6.602–3 (*quos super atra silex iam lapsura cadentique / imminet adsimilis*, "a black boulder is poised above them that is now about to slip and like a falling stone"): "Virgil . . . alters tradition by allotting to the Lapiths the prime ingredient traditionally associated with the weaponry of the bestial Centaurs." A punning allusion to the wedding fight in this punishment, normally allocated to Tantalus, seems likely: tortured by the prospect of falling rocks, the Lapiths seem forced to replay their race's experiences on earth (cf. Putnam 1990, 564–65, on the disrupted feast).

76. Cthonius: Ov. *Met.* 12.441; Stat. *Theb.* 2.538; Dorylas: Ov. *Met.* 12.380; Stat. *Theb.* 2.571; Chromis: Ov. *Met.* 12.333; Stat. *Theb.* 2.613; Periphas: Ov. *Met.* 12.449; Stat. *Theb.* 2.631. The inclusion of a Phylleus (Stat. *Theb.* 3.173) may be meant to recall Caeneus' epithet *Phylleus* (Ov. *Met.* 12.479).

gelida non saevius Ossa
luxuriant Lapitharum epulae, si quando profundo
Nubigenae caluere mero: vix primus ab ira
pallor, et impulsis surgunt ad proelia mensis.

not more fiercely do the feasts of the Lapiths run riot on icy Ossa, when the Cloud-born ones grow hot with plentiful wine: scarce has anger's first pallor come but, overthrowing the tables, they rise to battle.

The naming of the Centaurs as *Nubigenae* and the detail of overturned tables hark back to the *Metamorphoses*.⁷⁷ Again, Ovidian echoes resonate outside the simile: the preceding description of the Lemnian women slaughtering their sleeping husbands at the table, causing blood and wine to flow back into their wine cups, recalls the attack on the Centaur Aphidas as he is sunk in drunken sleep.⁷⁸ Additionally, two of the victims' names are found in the Ovidian passage.⁷⁹

A third passage that draws on this scene from the *Metamorphoses* occurs in the description of the prize bowl won by Amphiaraus for the chariot race. On the *crater* is shown the Centaur-Lapith fight (*Theb.* 6.535–38):

Centauros habet arte truces aurumque figuris
terribile: hic mixta Lapitharum caede rotantur
saxa, faces (aliquae iterum crateres); ubique
ingentes morientum irae.

it has fierce Centaurs, skilfully wrought, and gold that inspires terror by its shapes. Here amidst the slaughter of the Lapiths are discharged stones, torches (and again other mixing bowls); everywhere is the mighty anger of the dying.

Helen Lovatt has convincingly argued that the shared list of weaponry (rocks, torches, bowls) signal an Ovidian intertext.⁸⁰

So Ovid's description of the Lapith wedding brawl is an important intertext for Statius. It is evoked in key scenes: the ambush against Tydeus is of symbolic significance as the first engagement with the enemy in the epic, Lemnos is a microcosm of the civil violence raging in the fraternal conflict, and the games have been shown to reflect indirectly on the war.⁸¹ The Centaur-Lapith fight thus appears to serve as a paradigm for the Argive-Theban conflict. Why might this be? The battle was a famous example of barbarity and savagery and as such a suitable parallel for the Argive-Theban war. It was also a fight between two races linked by kindred ties, as Ovid's

77. Cf. *Met.* 12.211: *nubigenas . . . feros* ("cloud-born creatures"); 12.222: *eversae . . . mensae* ("overturned tables").

78. Cf. *Theb.* 5.256–57: *iugulis . . . modo torrentis apertis / sanguine commixto redeunt in pocula Bacchum* ("wine mixed with blood returning like a torrent to the goblets from severed throats") with *Ov. Met.* 12.325–26: *pleno . . . e gutture fluxit / inque toros inque ipsa niger carchesia sanguis* ("from his full throat black blood flowed onto the couch and into the very wine cup").

79. Elymus at *Met.* 12.460 and *Theb.* 5.207 (if we follow Kohlmann 1884; Hill 1996 reads *Helymus*); Crenaeus at *Met.* 12.313 and *Theb.* 5.221.

80. Lovatt 2002, 78.

81. For the use of the games to foreshadow the forthcoming war, see, e.g., Vessey 1973, 212–29; Lovatt 2005.

introduction to the scene reminds us. The Lapith Ixion, father of Pirithous, was an ancestor of the Centaurs by Nephele, an image in cloud form: Pirithous is having a family wedding.⁸² As in the counterpart scene in *Metamorphoses* 5, the celebration turns into a brawl between relatives. Through allusion to Ovid's presentation of the myth, therefore, Statius may draw attention to the kin-killing aspect of the Argive-Theban war. Of course, Statius' reading of this Ovidian passage is tendentious: the relationship between the sides is just one aspect of Ovid's interest but key in Statius' employment of the myth. Statius here seeks to manipulate our view of Ovid's epic. His repeated reference to the Ovidian scene encourages us to see in the *Metamorphoses* an important precedent for using the myth to exemplify kin strife.

Finally, let us turn to Statius' use of the *Aeneid* in his deployment of the Centaur-Lapith motif. The depiction of Hercules' defeat of Hylaeus at *Thebaid* 6.538–39 (*tenet ipse furem / Hylaeum et torta molitur robora barba*, "he himself holds the raging Hylaeus and, after gripping him by the beard, wields his club"), coupled with some verbal similarities, have led critics to recognize engagement with the hymn of the Salii in *Aeneid* 8.⁸³ However, we may push our investigations further.

Centaurs figure explicitly in the *Aeneid* on five occasions: as inhabitants of Hades (*Aen.* 6.286); in a simile illustrating the descent of Catillus and Coras (7.674–77); as victims of Hercules (Hylaeus and Pholus, 8.293–94); and twice as the name of ships (of Sergestus, 5.122, and Cupavo, 10.195). As we have seen, the first three cases are thematically brought together through the figure of Aeneas, the new Hercules, Centaur-slayer for his generation. The last two appear to stand in a set of their own, as ships allied to Aeneas' cause.

However, a connection can be made between the two groups. Although not stated, the mythical background behind Hercules' defeat of Pholus and Hylaeus at *Aeneid* 8.293–94 seems to be the Centaur-Lapith battle.⁸⁴ The Centaur figurehead on one of the Etruscan ships is figured in the act of throwing a rock: *filius . . . / ingentem remis Centaurum promovet: ille / instat aquae saxumque undis immane minatur / arduus* ("his son propels the huge Centaur with oars: it leans over the water and threatens the waves from on high with a vast rock," *Aen.* 10.194–97). As we have observed, the missile hurling of the Centaurs was notorious on one particular occasion: the Lapith wedding

82. Ov. *Met.* 12.210–11: *duxerat Hippodamen audaci Ixione natus / nubigenasque feros . . . / . . . discumbere iusserat* ("bold Ixion's son had married Hippodamia and bid the cloud-born creatures to recline").

83. Von Stosch 1968, 151; Lovatt 2002, 78, 88 n. 37.

84. So Eden 1975, ad Verg. *Aen.* 8.293ff. Other theories have been put forward, for instance, that the Peloponnesian Centauromachy is meant (Arrigoni 1984, 732; Heiden 1987, 668). Admittedly, Hercules fought the race on more than one occasion (see, e.g., Eur. *HF* 181–82 and 364–74 for conflicts in Arcadia and Thessaly; Ov. *Met.* 12.540–41), and Theseus is the conventional hero of the Centaur-Lapith struggle. However, the naming of Hylaeus and Pholus supports the Lapith context. For Hylaeus in this fight, see Verg. *G.* 2.456 (paired with Pholus); Hor. *Carm.* 2.12.5–6; Ov. *Met.* 12.378 (Hyles, possibly a shortened form); the sixth-century B.C.E. François Vase, Beazley 1956, 76 (the tradition that he was killed by Atalanta forms a separate legend). For Pholus' participation, see Verg. *G.* 2.456; Valerius Flaccus 1.336–38. Pholus does appear in Hercules' Arcadian Centauromachy but as an ally not enemy, a version that has no place in the Salii's victory hymn.

feast.⁸⁵ Following this reading, another cross-reference involving Hercules, Aeneas, and Centaurs emerges, only this time, instead of being a Hercules figure siding with the Lapiths as in Book 8, Aeneas is linked with the enemy Centaurs from the same battle. This familiar problem of monster/hero categorization fits plausibly into the context. While they adopt an aggressive figurehead to intimidate foes, in the minds of the Etruscans it is their enemy, Mezentius, who is the monster. At the same time, they are on their way to kill their neighbors—not just other inhabitants of Italy, but even their fellow citizens.⁸⁶ Links with their savage figurehead may be uncomfortably close.

It may justly be argued, however, that this reading is latent in the *Aeneid*. Vergil hardly advertises the mythical background of *Aeneid* 8.293–94, nor does he include any explicit references to the notorious brawl: in his catalogue entry of 7.674–77, the context is the Centaurs' mountain habitat, not their disruption of the Lapith wedding as readers of Homer and Apollonius might have expected.⁸⁷ However, the *Thebaid* may push us toward spotting play with this legend in the *Aeneid*. Statius' naming of Hylaeus and Hercules in the Lapith fight, combined with the reference to Pholus in this battle at *Thebaid* 2.563–64, retrospectively illuminate the mythological context of *Aeneid* 8.293–94, the Centaur-Lapith tussle. Again Statius is involved in tendentious reading, again he figures an earlier text as a precedent for his application of the Centaur-Lapith motif to civil war. By bringing to the fore what are at best rather coy Vergilian "further voices,"⁸⁸ the *Thebaid* aims to prepare us for its own use of the legend.

In this article I have hoped to establish the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses* as important intertexts in Statius' portrayal of Hercules and Centauromachy. In particular, I have aimed to illuminate the subtleties of Statius' relationships with his literary predecessors. The *Thebaid* does not merely contain echoes of these epics: it also engages with their complex comparative strategies. Furthermore, through careful selection and manipulation of certain passages from the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses*, Statius seeks to gain authority for his use of the Centaur-Lapith battle as a paradigm for civil war.

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85. See n. 75 above; Harrison 1991, ad Verg. *Aen.* 10.196.

86. See, e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 7.652–53 and 10.183 (the inhabitants of Caere fight on both sides).

87. Cf. Hom. *Il.* 2.742–44; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.40–44, 57–64.

88. The phrase is from Lyne 1987.

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