

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.¹ 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.² When regulated by reason, violence both manifests and strengthens the *virtus* of a warrior.³ On the other hand, *virtus*—aggressive, masculine, warlike courage—is also a virtue that can come dangerously close to *furor*.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Besides Agrippina, a certain Triaria, wife of Lucius Vitellius, gets her share of the blame.¹¹ Tacitus calls her *ultra feminam ferox*,¹² 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.¹³

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?¹⁴

Fulvia's prominent role in the Perusian war is reported by Velleius Paterculus, Plutarch, and Appian too.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ There are some, however: in Virgil's,

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*²⁰—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.²¹ 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.²²

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.²³ 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.²⁴ 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 madentis.

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.²⁵

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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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:²⁹

*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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³² 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.³³ 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*).³⁴ 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*).³⁵

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.³⁶ 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.³⁷

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*).³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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.⁴² 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".⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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

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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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*”:⁵¹ 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*.⁵² 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'.⁵³

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*)⁵⁴ 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 Euhan:/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*).⁵⁵ 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:

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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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’.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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".⁶⁶ 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,⁶⁷ 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

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.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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,⁷³ 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*).⁷⁴ 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?*).⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷

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.⁷⁸ 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*).⁷⁹

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.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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.⁸² 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.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ The same idea is evident in the tradition of worshipping Venus Genetrix in the temple of Mars Ultor during the reign of Augustus.⁸⁶ It therefore seems that during the Augustan period, the maternal side of the goddess did not exclude associations with the military sphere too.⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸ 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 replisset/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 Hypsipyle relates, "Venus is mingling everywhere unseen, Venus wields their weapons, Venus stirs their anger" (*fallit ubique/mixta Venus, Venus arma tenet, Venus admovet iras*).⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹ 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.⁹² 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

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.⁹³ 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*).⁹⁴ 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.*⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ Diana herself, in her role as a secondary narrator, characterises Camilla as "dear to me beyond all others" (*cara mihi ante alias*).¹⁰² 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.¹⁰³

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 cuspidem 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.¹⁰⁴ 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*.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁷

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.¹⁰⁸ 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*).¹⁰⁹ 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*).¹¹⁰ 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.¹¹¹ 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.¹¹² 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

¹¹² 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.¹¹³ This kind of religion-based lifelong celibacy obviously means a rejection of the normative life course prescribed for a woman in Roman society.¹¹⁴ 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 Asbyte, a Numidian princess who fights and falls on Hannibal’s side in the battle of Saguntum. Asbyte’s entrance to the war clearly recalls Virgil’s first remarks about Camilla.¹¹⁵ While Camilla is described as *proelia virgo/dura pati*, Asbyte is *audax in bella*.¹¹⁶ And while Virgil depicts Camilla as *bellatrix, non illa colo calathisve Minervae/femineas adsueta manus*, Silius characterises Asbyte as *non calathis mollita manus operatave fuso* (“never did the wool-basket soften her hand, or the spindle keep her busy”).¹¹⁷ Moreover, echoing Camilla’s celebrated speed, Asbyte, too, “urged on her smoking chariot at furious speed” (*fumantem rapidis quatiebat cursibus axem*).¹¹⁸ 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 Asbyte 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”.¹¹⁹ As Uccellini points out, the Romans associated female military activity not only with the Orient, but with Northern Africa too.¹²⁰ Accordingly, the emphasis on Asbyte’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, Asbyte’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 Asbyte*. 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.¹²¹ 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.¹²² 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*).¹²³ 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.¹²⁴ 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.¹²⁵ 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.¹²⁶ 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.¹²⁷ As the hero is starting for Thebes, he leaves behind the conquered Amazons, now stripped of their warlike strength by marriage and motherhood.¹²⁸ Statius mentions Hippolyte, in particular, stating that:

*isset et Arctoas 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.¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰ 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

¹³⁰ 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.¹³¹ 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

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 agency¹³²—she, like the Italy that she stands for, is a plenipotentiary 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.¹³³ 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.¹³⁴ 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 bissenos 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

¹³⁴ 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*.¹³⁵ 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).¹³⁶ 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.

¹³⁵ Verg. *Aen.* 11.583.

¹³⁶ 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,¹³⁷ 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.¹³⁸ 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.¹³⁹ In this sense, these characters bear a strong resemblance to the desirable *puer delicatus* archetype often discussed in the studies of ancient sexuality.¹⁴⁰ 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.¹⁴¹ 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

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

and gets in touch with his innate manliness and love of war.¹⁴² 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.¹⁴³ 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.¹⁴⁴ 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.¹⁴⁵ 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.¹⁴⁶ 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".¹⁴⁷ 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.¹⁴⁸ 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”.¹⁴⁹ 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*.¹⁵⁰ 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.¹⁵¹

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”.¹⁵² 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.¹⁵³ 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,

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.