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Statius' Nemea / paradise lost

Jörn Soerink

Introduction

- 1 In the fourth book of Statius' *Thebaid*, the expedition of the Seven against Thebes is stranded in Nemea. Tormented by thirst – Bacchus has caused a drought in Nemea in order to delay the expedition against his favourite city – the Argives encounter Hypsipyle nursing Opheltes, son of Lycurgus and Eurydice, king and queen of Nemea. In order to guide the soldiers as fast as possible to the one remaining spring, Langia, Hypsipyle places her nurseling on the ground. When the Argives have quenched their thirst, Hypsipyle (re)tells them the story of the Lemnian massacre, which takes up most of the following book (5.49-498). In their absence, the infant Opheltes is accidentally killed by a monstrous serpent sacred to Jupiter (5.534-40).
- 2 The death of Opheltes nearly plunges Nemea into war. When Opheltes' father Lycurgus hears of his son's death (5.638-49), he wants to punish Hypsipyle for her negligence and attempts to kill her, but the Argive heroes defend their benefactress; without the intervention of Adrastus and the seer Amphiaraus, this violent confrontation between the Argives and their Nemean allies doubtless would have ended in bloodshed (5.650-90). Moreover, when the vanguard of the Argive troops, which have already arrived in Nemea town, hear false rumours that Hypsipyle has been (or is about to be) killed, they angrily begin to attack Lycurgus' palace; only the intervention of king Adrastus prevents the situation from getting out of hand (5.690-709). Without Adrastus and Amphiaraus, then, readers of the *Thebaid* would have witnessed full-scale fighting long before the Argives' arrival at the gates of Thebes.
- 3 In Statian scholarship, this aspect of the Nemean episode has received little attention. Most critical energy has been invested in Statius' intertextual engagement with Euripides' tragedy *Hypsipyle*,¹ Hypsipyle's narration,² and especially the Callimachean features of the Nemean episode.³ In his 2007 monograph Charles McNelis has argued that, in the *Thebaid*, there is a strong tension between, on the one hand, the martial epic poetics that propels the narrative forwards to the *fraternas acies* that are its theme

and *telos*, and, on the other, the Callimachean poetics that diverts and delays this epic project. Nemea, in his interpretation, looks back primarily to Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices*; it is a Callimachean locus which 'deflects the narrative away from martial themes'.⁴ McNelis expands on the ideas of Joanne Brown and François Delarue, who similarly argues that in the Nemean episode 'tout est fait [...] pour laisser croire que la guerre contre Thèbes, sontes *Thebas*, et à plus forte raison le conflit des fils d'Œdipe [...] sont oubliés'.⁵ However, in the *Victoria Berenices* Opheltes scarcely plays a role: the Alexandrian poet is concerned with Hercules rather than Opheltes, which makes McNelis' claim that Statius' story of Opheltes is 'a Callimachean action for the Nemean games'⁶ highly problematic. We may also point out that in Statius' version Opheltes' father is called Lycurgus as in Euripides, not Euphetes as in Callimachus; and Statius suppresses the element of wild celery, which plays such an important role in the *Victoria Berenices*. McNelis, however, persists that 'Callimachus [...] is the Greek author upon whom Statius draws for this action'.⁷ In his eagerness to make Nemea as Callimachean as possible, he also plays down the more epic elements of Statius' Nemea, such as Hypsipyle's narrative about the Lemnian massacre, the Nemean serpent and its death at the hands of Capaneus, the near outbreak of war, and the games.

- 4 In this article, it will be argued that the Nemean episode does *not* deflect the narrative away from martial themes. Admittedly, Nemea is introduced as a peaceful, pastoral, Callimachean world, but with the arrival of the Argives it is brutally swept along in the poem's maelstrom of *fraternas acies*. I will focus on the elements of civil war and the violent (epic) destabilisation of Nemea's peaceful (pastoral) world. First I will lay bare the disturbing allusions to Lucan and Vergil in the aforementioned scenes (5.650-709). Then I will show how Nemea's peace and quiet is disrupted by the incursion of the Seven against Thebes. Finally I will discuss Statius' engagement with two Vergilian creations which, in my interpretation, are crucial for our understanding of the Nemean episode: the Calabrian water-snake in the third *Georgics* and the prodigious child of the fourth *Eclogue*. Statius' Nemean episode, I believe, can be read as a pessimistic inversion of Vergil's optimistic fourth *Eclogue*, suggesting the impossibility of an Augustan Golden Age in the Flavian poem's world of fraternal strife.⁸

Near civil war in Nemea

- 5 It is made abundantly clear that we are to understand the hostilities between Argives and Nemeans in book 5 in terms of civil war – even though, strictly speaking, war between Argos and Nemea might not count as such. When Amphiaraus intervenes, he speaks as follows (5.669-71):⁹

Amphiaraus † ait: 'ne, quaeso! † absistite ferro,
unus auum sanguis, neue indulgete furori,
tuque prior.'

- 6 The words *unus auum sanguis* ('the blood of our ancestors is one') state unambiguously that Lycurgus and the Seven have the same blood running through their veins. Armed conflict between Argives and Nemeans, the seer warns them, would thus be an instance of *bella plus quam ciuilia*. Ironically, of course, Amphiaraus' words are equally applicable to the Argives' expedition against Thebes, not only because Eteocles and Polynices have *unus sanguis* (cf. 4.398 *unusque ... sanguis*), but also because Argos and Thebes have *unus sanguis*, namely Jupiter's (cf. 1.224-6, reworking *Aen.* 8.142).

- 7 I used the Lucanian phrase (*Bellum ciuile* 1.1) on purpose. As scholars have observed,¹⁰ Amphiarus' speech is modelled on *Aen.* 6.832-5, where Anchises calls upon Caesar and Pompey to cease their civil war – Caesar first of all (*Aen.* 6.832-5) :

ne, pueri, ne tanta animis adsuescite bella
neu patriae ualidas in uiscera uertite uiris ;
tuque prior, tu parce, genus qui ducis Olympo,
 proice tela manu, sanguis meus !

- 8 In addition to the verbal echoes (underlined), the passages correspond in that both Amphiarus and Anchises have knowledge of the future. The allusion suggests that the near violence between Argives and Nemeans is like the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.¹¹
- 9 For the observant reader, the allusions to Caesar and Pompey need not come as a surprise. The passage under consideration begins with the heavily ironic exclamation *fides superum* ! (5.650) : the gods have shown *fides* in that the dreadful oracle about Opheltes' death (5.647) has now become reality. The phrase *fides superum* is an allusion to Lucan's *Bellum ciuile* (2.16-7 *quantis sit cladibus orbi / constatura fides superum*), where the gods show similar *fides* in that the portents they have sent are indeed followed by disaster. The allusion aligns the death of Opheltes with the *prodigia* in Lucan's epic and, by implication, the Theban War to come with Rome's civil war.¹²
- 10 Another unmistakable indication that the conflict between Lycurgus and his Nemean peasants versus the Seven and their Argives is to be understood as an upsurge of civil war, is found in the speech of Lycurgus, in reaction to Tydeus' taunts (5.683-4) :¹³

pergite in excidium, socii si tanta uoluptas
 sanguinis, imbuite arma domi.

- 11 The phrase *socii ... / sanguinis* again reminds us that Argives and Nemeans are more than allies. Consciously or subconsciously, Lycurgus' words are of course heavily ironic, since the expedition of the Seven is the result of lust for *socius sanguis*. Following *sanguinis*, the words *imbuite arma domi* are an unmistakable allusion to the outbreak of the civil war in the *Aeneid* (7.554 *sanguis nouus imbuat arma*, 541-2 *sanguine bellum / imbuat*). The allusion will be noticed easily, as the whole scene – Argive heroes confronting Lycurgus and his peasants (5.667 *agrestum ... manus*) – is reminiscent of the outbreak of war between the Trojans and the Latin peasants in *Aeneid* 7.505-39.

The epic disruption of Nemea's pastoral world

- 12 That Nemea will not be safeguarded from the epic's narrative of *fraternas acies*, is signalled right at the beginning of the Nemean episode, when Bacchus makes his appearance (4.652-79).¹⁴ The god brings war to Nemea, as the first line unambiguously states : *marcidus edomito bellum referebat ab Haemo / Liber* (4.652-3). Significantly, the god is not accompanied by satyrs or maenads, but by the grim personifications *Ira*, *Furor*, *Metus*, *Virtus* and *Ardor* (4.661-3).¹⁵ Bacchus' drought implicates Nemea in the Theban War, as it leads not only to the death of Opheltes, an event which inaugurates the Seven's doomed expedition against Thebes,¹⁶ but also, as we have seen, to the near outbreak of civil war in Nemea itself (5.650-709). The very Anger (*Ira*) that accompanies Bacchus, we may note, was also involved in the production of Harmonia's necklace (2.287), which, as Charles McNelis has shown, 'symbolises the evil, interfamilial

passions that drive the narrative'.¹⁷ If we consider the Nemean episode as *mise en abyme* of the epic as a whole, Bacchus plays the role that Mars will play in book 7.¹⁸

- 13 The disruption of Nemea is also figured in the metamorphosis of the landscape. In *Thebaid* 4, when the Seven against Thebes – and their readers – arrive in Nemea, they wander into an idealised landscape, which recalls not only 'des paysages dits "idylliques" largement répandus dans la peinture romaine',¹⁹ but also the landscapes of pastoral poetry, Vergil's *Eclogues* in particular. The atmosphere contrasts starkly with the grim landscapes of the preceding books and especially with the horrid scene of the necromantic ritual at Thebes earlier in the same book (4.406-645). When the narrator introduces Nemea and invokes Phoebus to tell the Nemean interlude (4.646-51), he immediately evokes its greeneries (4.647 *dumeta*) and its pleasant coolness (4.646 *gelidam Nemeen*).²⁰ We find refreshing waters – springs, streams and lakes (4.683-96)²¹ – and there is repeated reference to Nemea's woods (e.g. 4.727 *nemus*, 4.746 *siluas*).²² Nemea is even called *siluarum ... longe regina uirentum* (4.832). As Brown has pointed out, to a Roman audience the very name Nemea would suggest woods (cf. *nemus*).²³ This idealised world is typically inhabited by demigods, such as Nymphs and Fauns (4.684, 696, 5.579-82, 6.95-6, 110-3).²⁴ In short, the Nemean landscape is essentially pastoral, in stark contrast with the bleak landscapes of the first part of the epic.²⁵
- 14 With Bacchus' intervention and the arrival of the Argives, however, this landscape changes dramatically. Langia, the pure Callimachean spring, is muddied when the epic Argive soldiers plunge *en masse* into her gentle stream (4.823-30).²⁶ As a result, the female nymph (4.726 *deae*) becomes a swollen masculine river (4.837-50), characterised with the participle *tumens*, which is often used to describe the 'swollen' style of epic poetry. In order to stress the point, the Argives that drink from Langia's stream are compared to an army plundering a city (4.828-30). Thus Nemea's Callimachean stream becomes the site of epic warfare.²⁷
- 15 Brown and Newlands have connected the pastoral landscape of Nemea with the idyllic landscapes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in particular. Brown writes that '[w]oods so dominate the Ovidian landscape that on entering Nemea, the reader of the *Thebaid* is arguably obliged to recall the topography of Statius' Augustan predecessor; the woodland setting for Bacchus' advent in *Metamorphoses* III and IV proves especially relevant'.²⁸ Newlands points out that in Ovid the *locus amoenus* often sets the scene for horror and violence – one might think of Actaeon, Callisto or Salmacis. Indeed, in Ovid this pattern figures so frequently, that an idyllic wooded landscape *qualitate qua* forbodes violence and death. In the *Thebaid*, too, 'the landscapes [...] provide a vivid canvas on which Statius displays the spreading evil of a civil war'.²⁹ But Statius, Newlands rightly observes, goes one step further: in the *Thebaid* the idyllic landscapes not only provide the background for violence, the landscape itself falls victim to violence. Thus, she concludes, Statius presents 'the dissolution of that Ovidian paradise'.³⁰ In Statius' *Thebaid* the violent destruction of an idyllic landscape symbolises the cost and suffering of civil war.
- 16 Later in the Nemean episode, in book 6, the pastoral landscape is again brutally destroyed, as the Argives cut down the Nemean woods in their *lignatio* for the funeral pyre of the serpent (6.84-117).³¹ In their eagerness to 'Callimacheanise' the Nemean episode, critics have suggested that the destruction of woods is an element taken from Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices*: Brown speculates that 'possibly the poem features the transformation of the landscape around Cleonae, as Herakles enables Molorchus to cut

down the thickets to gather firewood'.³² It has also been suggested that *ueteres incaedua ferro / silua comas* (6.90-1) parallels Callimachus' phrase δρεπάνου γὰρ ἀπευθέα τέρχν[ε]α (*Suppl.Hell.* 257.25 'shoots unacquainted with the pruning hook').³³ That might be true, but that does not mean that the action itself – cutting down a sacred grove – is also Callimachean. In my view, the whole point of the passage is the very destruction of the pastoral – Callimachean if you like – world of Nemea. Not coincidentally, the trees in the passage are largely taken from Vergil's pastoral world.³⁴ The pastoral Nymphs, Fauns and birds that live in the sacred grove have to flee, as do the equally pastoral gods Pales and Silvanus.³⁵ The trees that are cut down become *flammis alimenta supremis* (6.100). Even if the phrase should be an allusion to Callimachus' πυρὶ δ[ε]ῖπνον (*Suppl.Hell.* 257.23),³⁶ Statius uses it quite differently: the pastoral trees of Nemea become fuel for the funeral pyre of the epic serpent! Other trees end up as spears that will drink blood in war (6.102-3). And again there is a simile, comparing the destruction of the grove to the capture of a city, while the final line of the passage – *minor ille fragor quo bella gerebant* (6.117) – hammers down the message that the cutting down of the grove mirrors war. In their very attempt to expiate their killing of the Nemean serpent, the Argives commit yet another sacrilegious crime.³⁷

- 17 Thus the trees of Nemea end up as spears and firewood – which brings to mind Statius' use of fire imagery in the episode.³⁸ Martial Bacchus, as we have seen, is accompanied by heat personified (4.662 *Ardor*).³⁹ And at the beginning of the Nemean episode, the Argives' desire to destroy Thebes is described as *ardor* (4.648-9 *iam Sidonias auertere praedas, / sternere, ferre domos ardent instantque*).⁴⁰ As they are tormented by thirst (4.730-45), their shields become *ardentes* too (4.730 *ardentes clipeos*)⁴¹ and the fire of their weapons even inflames the sun.⁴² Bacchus' intervention delays the Argives' expedition against Thebes, but at the same time, it seems, the god's *ardor* only increases their warlike *furor* (cf. 4.671 *recalet furor*). On a poetic level, the Seven's *ardor* may also be connected with the *calor* that figures in the proem of the *Thebaid*, as a metaphor for the poetic frenzy that propels the narrative forward (1.3 *Pierius menti calor incidit*).⁴³ In any case, the heat and fire of both Bacchus and the Seven bring destruction to cool and moist pastoral Nemea.⁴⁴
- 18 While its waters and woods are transformed into a landscape of martial epic, Statius' Nemea also becomes the site of quintessentially epic events. Before the near outbreak of civil war (5.650-709 discussed above), there is the 'Drachenkampf' with the Nemean serpent (5.554-78), which is flagged as a thoroughly epic passage with an unmistakable echo of the incipit of Vergil's *Aeneid* (5.557 *armorum ... uirorum*). We may also point out that the reunion scene towards the end of book 5 is not simply a happy end, as Euneus and Thoas are disturbingly reminiscent of Eteocles and Polynices,⁴⁵ while their mother Hypsipyle is connected with Vergil's Latinus awash with civil war and Mezentius under attack from the Etruscans.⁴⁶ The games in honour of Opheltes in book 6 also belong to the world of martial epic rather than Callimachean poetry. Helen Lovatt calls them 'a Callimachean celebration of the small, for the death of a baby, not a hero',⁴⁷ but it should not be forgotten that this Callimachean child has been killed by an epic monster, and that the funeral games that sink him to his grave are quintessentially epic, reworking above all *Iliad* 23 and *Aeneid* 5, and intimately connected with the Theban War – as Lovatt herself has convincingly shown.⁴⁸ Perhaps the games in book 6 contain an allusion to the *Victoria Berenices*;⁴⁹ at the same time, however, Statius suppresses the wild celery, which is central to the Hellenistic poet's ἄλτιον, in favour of

the epic prizes that Callimachus says will *not* be awarded in the Nemean Games.⁵⁰ The games in book 6 are clearly epic, not Callimachean.

- 19 Finally we may point to Hypsipyle's epic narrative about the Lemnian massacre. It is absolutely astounding to see how various scholars, in their eagerness to 'Callimacheanise' Statius' Nemea, attempt to read Hypsipyle's narrative as a Callimachean episode. Delarue even suggests that Statius' Lemnian episode is modelled directly on Callimachus, who 'avait raconté la légende dans une pièce lyrique' – a claim which he bases on nothing but one little fragment (fr. 226 Pf. ἡ Λῆμνος τὸ παλαιόν, εἴ τις ἄλλη) from a work that in all likelihood was not even about the Lemnian massacre (witness the title Πρὸς τοὺς ὠραίους).⁵¹ McNelis' argument that the Lemnian massacre is spurred by Venus and therefore opposes the poem's martial poetics (Vulcan and his necklace) does not convince either.⁵²
- 20 In book 4, the Argives enter an idyllic world, but in book 7 they leave behind a barren landscape. As Newlands puts it, '[t]he Nemean spring and grove represent a pastoral order that is sullied by the advent of war'.⁵³ One should not *Aonium tingere Marte nemus*, Propertius writes (3.3.42), but that is precisely what Statius does in his Nemean episode.⁵⁴ The *locus amoenus* almost becomes a *locus horridus*. The arrival of the Argives, in combination with Bacchus' intervention, sweeps Nemea along in the maelstrom of civil war. The pastoral dream of Nemea is transformed into an epic nightmare.
- 21 In this respect, Statius' Nemea looks back to the pastoral world of king Evander and his Arcadians in the *Aeneid*.⁵⁵ The woods, the humble peasants, and the presence of Jupiter are reminiscent of Pallanteum and the Arcadians in book 8.⁵⁶ It is significant that Lycurgus, who loses his beloved son to the expedition of the Seven against Thebes, is intertextually modelled on king Evander, who similar loses his son Pallas to the war between the Trojans and the Latins⁵⁷ – Pallas also being the key model for Statius' Arcadian *puer* Parthenopaeus, whose *mors immatura* lies at the heart of the *Thebaid*.⁵⁸

Nemea as paradise lost : Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*

- 22 The monstrous serpent's killing of the innocent child Opheltes inverts the more optimistic scenario in which promising babies are said to be safe from snakes, such as Iamos in Pindar's sixth *Olympian* (*Ol.* 6.43-63) or the Horatian *puer* in the fourth Roman Ode (*Carm.* 3.4.17-8 *ut tuto ab atris corpore uiperis / dormire*), or even conquer snakes, as does the infant Hercules in Pindar's first *Nemean* and Theocritus 24.⁵⁹ Most importantly, I believe, the death of Opheltes is an inversion – or perhaps annihilation – of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*, which famously heralds the birth of a prodigious child and the death of the evil serpent.
- 23 Since babies are rare in classical literature, Statius' remarkable description of Opheltes playing around in the idyllic Nemean landscape (4.793-803) immediately brings to mind the most famous *puer* of Latin literature : the 'Wunderkind' of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*, who inhabits a similar landscape, the symbolic landscape of the Golden Age.⁶⁰ The connection is reinforced by the emphasis on nourishment and flowers, as well as the intimate connection between child and earth, *puer* and *tellus*.⁶¹ The allusion to Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* is underscored by the emphasis on Nemea's *silvae* ('woods'). Whereas Brown connects Nemea's *silvae* with Statius' *Silvae*⁶² – which, between brackets, had not yet been published under that title before 92 AD⁶³ – in my view the Nemean woods, in

combination with other pastoral buzzwords such as *agrestis*, primarily serve to evoke the pastoral landscapes of Vergil's *Eclogues*, which are symbolically represented as *silvae* by Vergil himself.⁶⁴ The word figures most prominently at the beginning of the fourth poem, *Ecl.* 4.3 *si canimus siluas, silvae sint consule dignae*. The end of book 4, with Opheltes in the idyllic landscape (4.793-800), surely recalls Vergil's prophetic child (cf. esp. *Ecl.* 4.18-25). Vergil mentions the death of the serpent (4.24 *occidet et serpens*), chthonic creature *par excellence* and symbol of the powers that threaten the peaceful and prosperous world which the poem prophesies. In the Golden Age there is no place for snakes.⁶⁵ Statius pointedly inverts Vergil's scenario, as the serpent brings death to the child.⁶⁶

- 24 That the *Thebaid* engages the poetic discourse on the Golden Age need not come as a surprise.⁶⁷ The poem's central theme, the *nefas* of fraternal strife, is one of the most prominent symbols of the degeneration of the Golden Age. As such it figures prominently in the finale of Catullus' epyllion (64.399 *perfudere manus fraterno sanguine fratres*), where there is also mention of the incestuous relationship between mother and son (cf. 64.403 *ignaro mater substernens se impia nato*), which cannot fail to recall Theban myth. In Ovid's narrative of decline we find fraternal strife too, as characteristic of the Iron Age (cf. *Met.* 1.145 *fratrum quoque gratia rara est*).⁶⁸ And in Hesiod's account the expedition of the Seven against Thebes and the Trojan War mark the beginning of the Heroic Age (*Op.* 161-3).⁶⁹ In *Thebaid* 11, when Pietas leaves the earth and Jupiter turns his eyes away, we may be reminded of the climactic moment in the story of Atreus and Thyestes,⁷⁰ but there is also an allusion to Astraea and the gods' departure at the end of the Golden Age.
- 25 The allusions to Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* can be seen to have a political dimension. In Augustan ideology serpents and giants often represent the powers that threaten the Pax Augusta, which itself is often figured as a return to the Golden Age.⁷¹ In the bleak world of the *Thebaid*, however, the optimistic *aurea aetas* prophesied in *Eclogue* 4 is utterly impossible: in the golden dream of the fourth *Eclogue* there is no place for the evil serpent, in Statius' nightmarish epic there is no place for the innocent child.⁷² Thus, on a political level, the death of Opheltes can be connected with the *Thebaid*'s 'rupture with Augustan optimism' after Rome's traumatic relapse into civil war in 68-69 AD.⁷³ Statius' Nemea, too, is affected by the horrors of civil war; it is a paradise lost.⁷⁴

Statius' Vergilian plot : *Georgics* and *Culex*

- 26 We have seen that Nemea, inhabited by an infant reminiscent of the symbolic *puer* of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*, is associated with the Golden Age world. On closer inspection, however, it soon becomes clear that Nemea is not really a paradisaal world. It is inhabited by shepherds and farmers, who do not belong to the Golden Age,⁷⁵ for instance, and it harbours an enormous serpent (contrast *Ecl.* 4.24 *occidet et serpens*). In Vergil's pastoral world, we may note, serpents are not entirely absent, witness the proverbial *anguis in herba* (*Ecl.* 3.93-4). Perhaps Statius recreates Vergil's pastoral world? On even closer inspection, I would argue, Statius' Nemea recreates neither the Golden Age world of the fourth *Eclogue*, nor the idealised world of pastoral poetry generally, but the complex world of Vergil's *Georgics*.
- 27 In the first place, the Nemean serpent is sacred not to Saturn, but to his son Jupiter, who presides over Nemea (cf. 5.511 *Inachio ... Tonanti*) as he presides over the post-

lapsarian world. In the first book of the *Georgics* Jupiter famously puts an end to the Golden Age of his father Saturn, in order that men should employ their skills and labour (*Geo.* 1.118-46); the god's very first action is to 'add evil poison to dark snakes' (1.129 *ille malum uirus serpentibus addidit atris*). This venomous Jovian serpent seems to underlie the Jovian serpent that looms dangerously in Statius' Nemea. In the *Georgics*, as elsewhere, these dark snakes are the symbol *par excellence* of the calamities that threaten mankind, of the dark forces of nature that we must attempt to overcome – often in vain – with our toilsome *labor improbus*. And the clear allusion to Molochus in 4.159 not only points to Callimachus, but also to the second proem of the *Georgics* (3.19).

- 28 Secondly, the very plot of the Nemean episode realises a scenario from Vergil's *Georgics*. The death of Opheltes, who falls asleep in the meadow and is killed by the thirst-maddened serpent, looks back to Vergil's Calabrian water-snake (*Geo.* 3.425-39):⁷⁶ as long as streams gush forth from their sources, as long as the earth is moist, the Calabrian snake lives peacefully, lingering on river banks and feeding on fish and frogs; when the snake is tormented by thirst, however, it changes into a lethal monster. The passage ends with the explicit warning not to fall asleep when that serpent is around (3.435-9). These lines certainly inform the death of Opheltes in the second half of *Thebaid* 5. Like its Calabrian counterpart, the Nemean serpent normally lives peacefully, dwelling on the river banks (5.514-7); when tormented by heat, however, it becomes ferocious (5.518-28).⁷⁷ In Statius, Vergil's worst case scenario becomes reality: Opheltes, or rather his nurse Hypsipyle, does not heed Vergil's warning, and the innocent child falls asleep – and falls victim to the serpent. The structural and thematic parallels are reinforced by verbal echoes.⁷⁸ It is also worth noting that the didactic poet advises to kill the snake with rock and with wood (*Verg. Geo.* 3.420-2), a scheme that we also find in Statius (Hippomedon's rock and Capaneus' spear in 5.558-74). On the brink of death, the snake flees away (3.422-4), something we also find in Statius (5.574-8). We may point out that in the remaining fragments of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* there is nothing that suggests that the serpent that kills Opheltes is maddened by thirst, nothing that suggests that Opheltes has fallen asleep. These two elements are taken directly from the *Georgics*.
- 29 The *Georgics* is an immensely complex poem, and one should be careful not to reduce it to a simple moralistic message. Yet if there is one lesson to be learnt from Vergil's didactic poem, it is that human life is fragile, that human existence is an everlasting struggle with the hostile powers of nature, against which men – and animals – are ultimately powerless. One of the most important passages, in this respect, is the poet's discourse on diseases and the poignant description of the plague that concludes the third book (*Geo.* 3.440-566). And it is precisely this most somber episode to which the description of the Calabrian serpent forms a prelude. From a didactic perspective, the passage instructs farmers how to keep snakes away from their flocks and herds; on a symbolic level, however, the Calabrian serpent can be read as a powerful symbol of the disastrous forces of nature that dominate the remainder of *Georgics* 3. The Nemean serpent in the *Thebaid*, as I have argued elsewhere, does the same.⁷⁹
- 30 Statius' engagement with *Georgics* 3 also seems to involve the pseudo-Vergilian *Culex*. The *Culex* does not figure prominently in discussions of the *Thebaid* or any other post-Vergilian poem: for modern readers the *Culex* is not Vergilian and therefore not important. We should remember, however, that Statius and other poets of the late first century AD regarded the *Culex* as an authentic Vergilian poem.⁸⁰ The plot of the *Culex* – a

dangerous snake threatens to kill a sleeping goatherd – is clearly inspired by *Georgics* 3, where Vergil's didactic persona warns his pupils not to fall asleep when a dangerous snake is around.⁸¹ Moreover, the serpent in the *Culex* also seems to represent the forces that threaten the idyllic pastoral world described at length in the first part of the poem: Janka plausibly suggests that in this respect the *Culex* looks back to *Eclogue* 4: 'Die Schlange als Symbol der Depravation, Falschheit und Gewalttätigkeit hat der CD [Culex-Dichter] vielleicht aus der Prophetie der vierten Ekloge übernommen [...] Die großartige Vision vom neuen, paradiesischen Goldzeitalter würde so zum scherzepischen Schlangentod verflacht.'⁸²

- 31 That Statius has in mind the *Culex* as well as *Georgics* 3 is suggested by some striking verbal echoes in the description of the Nemean serpent.⁸³ Other points of contact are the death of the *Culex*' minuscule protagonist and the erection of an elaborate funeral monument which concludes the poem.⁸⁴ When Opheltes falls asleep, he seems to play the role of the goatherd, but in the somber *Thebaid* there is no mosquito to save his life. Later, Opheltes rather plays the role of the little insect: as the death of the mosquito saves the life of the goatherd, so the death of Opheltes saves the lives of the Argives. It is tempting to see a further connection in that the *Culex* presents itself as a prelude vis-à-vis Vergil's *Aeneid*, while the Nemean episode acts as a prelude to the Theban War in the second half of the *Thebaid*.⁸⁵

Conclusion

- 32 We have seen that Statius' Nemea does not 'deflect the narrative away from martial themes', as McNelis has argued. Although Nemea is introduced as an idyllic world, as a result of Bacchus' intervention its peace and quiet is brutally disrupted by the incursion of the Seven against Thebes. The epic Argives destroy Nemea's pastoral streams, woods and coolness. The death of Opheltes destabilises Nemea, as it deprives the king of Nemea of his heir and leads to near bloodshed. Allusions to Lucan and Vergil underscore that these (mythical) hostilities are to be understood in terms of (historical) *bella plus quam ciuilia*. Statius' Nemean episode takes its plot from Vergil's Calabrian water-snake in *Georgics* 3 (and the *Culex*): Vergil's didactic persona had warned not to fall asleep when such a dangerous snake is around; in Statius' somber universe, this warning is not heeded, which results in the death of Opheltes. The death of this innocent child not only plunges Nemea in near civil war, it is also a pessimistic inversion of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*. On a poetic level, we witness the epic dissolution of Nemea's pastoral world. On a political level, the Nemean episode seems to suggest the impossibility of an Augustan Golden Age in the Flavian poem's disturbing universe of *nefas*.

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NOTES

1. Aricò 1961, Vessey 1970, Brown 1994 : 57-93, Soerink 2014a.
2. Nugent 1996, Gibson 2004.
3. Brown 1994 : 30-56, Delarue 2000 : 123-40, McNelis 2007, Soerink 2014b : 47-56.
4. McNelis 2007 : 77.
5. Delarue 2000 : 135.
6. McNelis 2007 : 12 ; cf. 128 with n. 9.
7. McNelis 2007 : 91.
8. This article builds on chapter 5 of my dissertation, Soerink 2014b : 57-67.
9. Most editors read *Amphiaraus ait* : 'ne, quaeso ! absistite ferro'. Although there are parallels for *quaeso* in Latin epic (e.g. 3.389, 6.171, 12.305, *Aen.* 8.573, 12.72-3, *Val.* 7.478, 8.280), the elliptical 'ne, quaeso !' is extremely awkward and without parallel. In an attempt to produce one fluent sentence, Hall conjectures *adsistite* : 'Do not, I pray, make your stand with the sword'. However, *ne ... adsistite* is extremely unlikely in the light of *Aen.* 11.307 (Latinus speaking) *nec uicti possunt absistere ferro* (Deipser 1881 : 27 notes the parallel) ; cf. also *Aen.* 6.259 *totoque absistite luco*, *Val.* 3.451 *absistite bellis*. In my opinion, the text is corrupt. In addition to the awkward 'ne, quaeso !', the word *ait* cannot stand : like *inquit*, *ait* is always inserted after the commencement of the speech (for Statius' speeches with *ait* see Dominik 1994 : 342-6). An alternative to *ait* does not easily present itself. There seems to be no other *uerbum dicendi* that fits the hexameter. Sometimes Statius omits the *uerbum dicendi* (see Dominik 1994 : 19 ; cf. e.g. 4.832) : could that be the case here ? In some MSS we find *agit*, which does not make sense. Perhaps *adit* (cf. 10.205) ? That seems unlikely after the preposition *inter* (667). *ne* seems to be warranted by *neue* in the following line (and by the Vergilian intertext).
10. Deipser (1881 : 30 ; cf. Parkes on 4.836).
11. The Vergilian passage also underlies 4.401 *tu peior, tu cede* (a few lines after 4.398 *unusque ... sanguis* mentioned above), where a maenad foresees a fight between two bulls (i.e. Eteocles and Polynices), aligning the *fraternas acies* of the poem with Roman civil war.
12. In 5.588-604 Statius reworks *Luc.* 2.20-8, which again puts the Theban War in the *Thebaid* on a par with the civil war in *Lucan's Bellum ciuile*. See Soerink 2014b *ad loc.*
13. My interpunction follows Shackleton Bailey and Hall ; others punctuate *pergite in excidium socii, si tanta uoluptas, / sanguinis*. However, the enjambment and an oxymoronic combination of *uoluptas* and *socii sanguinis* seems congenial to Statius ; cf. the conditional clauses in 10.431-2 *regem si tanta cupido / condere* and 11.433 *sceptri si tanta cupido est*, where we find similar features : postponed *si*, enjambment, and a genitive or epexegetic infinitive that specifies *cupido* (cf. also 7.22 *ferrique insana uoluptas, 10.266-7 uoluptas / caedis*).
14. Brown has argued that the god's entrance can also be read metapoetically as an indication that the following episode will be in tragic fashion, as the Nemean episode takes its plot from Euripides' *Hypsipyle* (Brown 1994 : 57-9 ; cf. Soerink 2014a : 177-8).
15. Critics have been troubled by these companions, 'more suited to the entourage of Mars, a god who also might be expected to arrive from Thrace', than to Bacchus (Parkes on 4.661-3). Parkes

solves the problem by saying that 'Statius emphasizes the martial aspect [...] in order to build up to the anticlimactic refusal of the god to use these forces' (Parkes *ibid.*). Delarue even argues that Bacchus, despite everything, is a Callimachean figure, because the Mimallones (4.660) in his train are also mentioned in a fragment of Callimachus (Delarue 2000 : 127-8 ; cf. Callim. fr. inc. 503 Pf.). The one-sided emphasis on Nemea's Callimachean aspects has blinded critics to the obvious : Bacchus brings war.

16. Soerink 2014b : 72-8.

17. See McNelis 2007 : 50-75 ; the citation is from Newlands 2012 : 86.

18. On the Nemean episode as *mise en abyme* see Soerink 2014b : 68-84.

19. Taisne 1972 : 358.

20. Brown's argument that *gelidam* 'casts a mysterious chill over the scene, recalling Eteocles' ghastly *lucus*' (1994 : 21-2) does not convince. Admittedly, the word also occurs in Statius' description of the bleak Theban forest, but cold is not something 'sinister' (*ibid.* 17) in itself ; it takes its associations, positive or negative, from the context. And in the description of Nemea, as in other descriptions of idyllic landscapes, words like *gelidus* clearly refer to the pleasant coolness of shade (cf. e.g. *Aen.* 8.159 *Arcadiae gelidos ... finis*, *Ov. Met.* 2.455 *nemus gelidum*).

21. Bacchus' speech (4.684-96) is notable for its variation in 'water words' ; we find *fluuiorum*, *fontibus*, *amnes*, *stagna*, *riuos*, *liquor* and *gurgite*.

22. Cf. 5.10, 6.91, 113, 155 etc. In the *Siluae* Nemea is given the epithet *frondens* (1.3.6).

23. Brown 1994 : 9 with n. 56. In Σ Pind. Nem. hypoth. c we find two Greek etymologies : the name should derive either from the nymph Nemea, daughter of Zeus and Selene, or ἄπὸ τῶν βοῶν τῶν ὑπὸ Ἄργου γεμομένων ἐν τῷ χωρίῳ.

24. See Fantham 2009 : 181-4.

25. Elsewhere Statius employs the ideal *locus amoenus* to emphasise the horrors of the underworld. When Laius is leaving the underworld, an anonymous shade cries : *heu dulces uisure polos solemque relictum / et uirides terras et puros fontibus amnes, tristior has iterum tamen intrature tenebras* (2.23-4) ; cf. also 1.89-90 *inamoenum Cocyton*. Later in book 2, when Statius describes the *locus horridus* of the Sphinx, he calls attention to the very absence of Fauns and Dryads (2.521-2).

26. See McNelis 2007 : 87-8 ; Brown 1994 : 202 ; Parkes 2012 : xxiii 'We may read this pollution as a signal of the narrative's return to traditional martial epic', with her note on 4.824-7. The source of muddied rivers as symbols of epic poetry is Callim. *Ap.* 108-12.

27. The epic character of the scene also appears from its being echoed in Hippomedon's fight with the river in 9.225-569.

28. Brown 1994 : 12.

29. Newlands 2004 : 133.

30. Newlands 2004 : 134.

31. See Brown 1994 : 199-203 ; Newlands 2004 : 144-5 ; Ganiban 2013 : 260-1.

32. Brown 1994 : 50, in her extensive discussion of Callimachus' poem, not making the connection with Statius.

33. Colace 1982 : 148 ; Brown 1994 : 45, 200 ; McNelis 2004 : 272. However, Statius may have in mind Ovid rather than Callimachus, cf. *Am.* 3.1.1 *stat uetus et multos incaedua silua per annos*, *Fast.* 2.435-6 *multis incaeduus annis / Iunonis magnae nomine lucus erat*, and esp. *Met.* 3.28 *silua uetus stabat nulla uiolata securi*. Cf. also *Silv.* 5.2.69-70 *nescia falcis / silua*.

34. In addition to its primary model *Aen.* 6.179-82, where the Trojans hew down a primordial Italian grove for Misenus' pyre (a passage with clear metapoetic overtones ; see Hinds 1998 : 11-4), the catalogue of trees recalls *Ecl.* 6.1-8, 7.61-8 (Brown 1994 : 24, 202), while the destruction of the grove also looks back to *Luc.* 3.399-452 ; see Ganiban 2013 : 260-1 with references.

35. On the Italian deities inhabiting the Greek grove see Fantham 2009 : 181-4, Newlands 2012 : 34 ; cf. Ganiban 2013 : 261.

36. Colace 1982 : 147-8 ; cf. Brown 1994 : 45 and 200, McNelis 2004 : 272. In all likelihood, however, Statius took his inspiration from some Latin predecessor, e.g. Ov. *Met.* 14.532 *alimentaque cetera flammae* (see further Fortgens *ad loc.*).
37. Ganiban 2013 : 261. On the sacrilegious aspects of deforestation see Frazer on Ov. *Fast.* 4.751, Hollis on Ov. *Met.* 8.741-2 and esp. Leigh (1999). It may be worth noting that, before they were conquered by Theseus, the Amazons also used to fell trees (12.526).
38. Although biographical approaches are no longer in vogue, it is possible that Statius' description of the scorched landscape is connected with the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in 79 AD, on which his father was writing a poem when death overtook him (see *Silv.* 3.5.72-4, 4.4.178-86, Nauta 2002 : 195-6, 199).
39. This personification is probably a Statian innovation (Parkes *ad loc.*).
40. The destructive plague of Apollo is also described in terms of fire, cf. 1.634-5 *ab aethere laevis / ignis*, 654 *ignique*, 662-3 *ardentem ... Letoiden*.
41. Parkes *ad loc.* notes that *ardentes* not only means 'flashing', but also 'conveys the hotness of the sun-baked metal shields'.
42. 4.665 *solem radiis ignescere ferri*, an extremely daring inversion ; see Parkes *ad loc.*
43. Newlands (2012 : 59-60) nicely observes that the poem's closure is associated with water, as the *Thebaid* reaches its harbour (12.809). For the narrator's poetic *furor* cf. also 12.808 *nouus ... furor*.
44. Statius is not the first to assimilate the destructiveness of war to fire ; the metaphor has a long literary history ; see Harrison on *Aen.* 10.405-11, Tarrant on *Aen.* 12.521-6 and cf. e.g. *Il.* 11.153-7, 15.605-6, 20.490-2, *Ap.Rh.* 1.1026-8 ; Ross 2007 : 24 points out that the *Georgics* too 'returns again and again to the opposition of fire and water, the destructiveness of war opposed to civilizing progress'.
45. The passage has always been read as an illustration of familial *pietas*, the loving brothers Thoas and Euneus contrasting with the sons of Oedipus (e.g. Vessey 1973 : 190, Brown 1994 : 218 n. 123, Lovatt 2005 : 26, McNelis 2007 : 92-3). Yet their brotherly *pietas* is seriously contaminated by some disturbing intra- and intertextual echoes. The description of the embrace (5.721-2 *matremque avidis complexibus ambo / diripiunt alternaque ad pectora mutant*) is troubled by the violent *diripiunt*, while *avidis* seems to have erotic overtones, esp. after *causa uiae genetrix* (5.715), which echoes Ov. *Met.* 10.23 *causa uiae est coniunx* and thus aligns Euneus' and Thoas' search for their mother with Orpheus' quest for Eurydice, suggesting oedipal desires (often suggested for Eteocles and Polynices, see Hershkowitz 1998 : 271-82, 4.88 with Parkes, 7.499 *teris* with Smolenaars). We may also remember that the twins have been raised by Lycaste (a name that might echo Acaste, nurse of Argia and Deipyle, cf. 1.529-31), who killed her twin brother (cf. 5.226-35, 467). Most importantly, the phrase *alternaque ad pectora mutant* cannot fail to recall Eteocles and Polynices (cf. e.g. 1.138-9, 2.444, 10.800-1). Perhaps Hypsipyle's sons, eager to hold and unable to share, are not so different from Eteocles and Polynices after all ?
46. Statius' simile in 5.723-4 clearly echoes Vergil's in *Aen.* 7.586-90 and 10.693-6. See Soerink 2014b *ad loc.*
47. Lovatt 2005 : 13. Cf. Brown 1994 : 54, who sees Callimachus' influence 'in the "magnification" of the tiny and domestic at the expense of the huge and heroic'. McNelis argues that the Nemean Games are essentially Callimachean, with reference to Prop. 2.34.37-8, where according to McNelis 'Propertius singles out Archemorus' funeral games as part of the Theban story that is appropriate for a Callimachean' (2007 : 19) ; these controversial lines, however, may well express the very opposite idea (see Fedeli on Prop. 2.34.33-40).
48. Lovatt 2005 : 29, *passim* ; cf. most explicit 6.456-9.
49. 6.438-9 *prior Hippodamus fert ora sequentum, / fert gemitus multaque umeros incenditur aura* (cf. 6.603-5) may recall *Suppl.Hell.* 254.8-10 ἔθρεξαν προ[τέρω]ν οὐτινας ἡνιόχων / ἄσθματι χλι[αίνοντε]ς ἐπωμίδας 'they ran nor did they warm with their breath the shoulders of anyone in

front of them' (Colace 1982 : 144 ; cf. McNelis 2004 : 272). However, as Colace 1982 : 144 points out, 'l'identità della situazione e l'impiego della medesima immagine basterebbero a garantire la presenza diretta del testo callimacheo alla memoria del poeta latino, se un'analisi di tutta la sezione della *Tebaide* relativa ai giochi non rivelasse altri preziosi echi tratti dalla *Victoria Berenices*', and the phrase could also derive from *Il.* 23.380-1 πνοιῇ δ' Εὐμήλοιο μετάρφρονον εὐρέε τ' ὦμα / θέρμετο (which underlies Callimachus ; cf. Colace *loc. cit.*) and *Geo.* 3.111 *umescunt spumis flatuque sequentum* (which looks back to Homer and, perhaps, Callimachus ; see Thomas *ad loc.*) ; see Pavan on 6.438-9 (who does not even mention Callimachus).

50. Despite *Aet. fr.* 58 Harder ἄξονται δ' οὐχ ἵππον ἄέθλιον, οὐ μὲν ἐχῆνον / βουδόκον ('and as a prize they will receive no racing-horse, no cauldron able to contain an ox'), in Statius we find a horse (6.644 *equum*) and a Herculean bowl (6.531-2 *cratera ... Herculeum*).

51. Delarue 2000 : 131.

52. McNelis 2007 : 90-1. Cf. also Augoustakis' claim that 'the middle of the *Thebaid* is transformed into an extensive *Herois*' (2010 : 32), which similarly denies its epic nature.

53. Newlands 2012 : 52.

54. Cf. *Ach.* 1.10 *Aonium nemus*, where it refers to the grove of the Muses as well as the *Thebaid*.

55. Cf. Parkes 2012 : xxxiii n. 90 'in some respects the interlude at Nemea is also evocative of the pastoral delay of *Aeneid* 8 (cf. the stories of Hypsipyle in *Theb.* 5 and Evander in *A.* 8)'. Brown 1994 : 53-4 connects *Thebaid* 4-6 and *Aeneid* 8 in that both episodes look back to Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices*, which underlies the theme of 'theoxenic aetiology' as well as Hercules' presence in *Aeneid* 8.

56. Cf. *Aen.* 8.102-89, 306-69, 454-585 ; woods e.g. 8.104 and 125 *luco*, 8.108, 345 and 351 *nemus*, 314 *haec nemora*, 342 *lucum ingentem*, 348 *siluestribus ... dumis*, 350 *siluam* ; humble lifestyle 8.100 *res inopes*, 105 *pauper*, 176 *gramineo ... sedili*, 178 *solio ... acerno*, 360 *pauperis Euandri*, 455 *humili tecto*, 543 *paruosque penatis* ; presence of Jupiter 8.351-4 ; there is also mention of nymphs, *Aen.* 8.314, 336, 339.

57. Conspicuous echoes include 5.638-9 ~ *Aen.* 11.139-40, 5.651-2 ~ *Aen.* 11.145-6.

58. For the connection between Nemea and Arcadia cf. also *Aen.* 12.517-9 *et iuuenem exosum nequiquam bella Menoeten, / Arcada, piscosae cui circum flumina Lerna / ars fuerat pauperque domus etc.* and *Val.Fl.* 1.35-6 *olim Lerna defensu ab angue / Arcas*.

59. Brown 1994 : 137-42 discusses the 'Wunderkind' in the two Pindaric odes ; later (144-5) she also mentions *Hor. Carm.* 3.4.9-20. Strikingly, the Horatian *puer* falls asleep *ludo fatigatumque somno* (3.4.11), which parallels 5.502-4, while the poem also features a nurse (3.4.10 *nutricis*). Another example, we may note, is Glaucias in *Silv.* 2.1.48-9 *cui sibila serpens / poneret*.

60. Vessey 1973 : 105 'One is reminded of Virgil's fourth *Bucolic* in which the birth of an infant is said to herald a new Golden Age ; in the *Thebaid*, the death of two babies [Opheltes and Linus] portends doom'. Brown 1994 : 133 develops the idea. In scholarly discussions of the *Thebaid*, however, Vergil's *Eclogues* hardly play a role. Statius' engagement with the *Eclogues*, according to silent *communis opinio*, occurs in his *Siluae*, not in his epic poetry : 'The title [*Siluae*] also surely refers to Virgil's programmatic use of the word *siluae* in the *Eclogues*. The connection with the *Eclogues* gives an attractive symmetry to St[atius]'s poetic corpus ; in his *Thebaid* he acknowledges the importance of the *Aeneid* (*Theb.* 12.816-7), and in the *Siluae* he makes literary homage to the *Eclogues* which, like St[atius]'s poems, strikingly intermingle naturalism and artifice, fantasy and politics' (Newlands 2012 : 6-7).

61. Opheltes is called *puer* in 4.793, 5.539 ; Vergil uses the same word in *Ecl.* 4.8, 18, 60 and 62. Cf. *Theb.* 4.788 *floribus aggestis* (with Parkes' note) and *Ecl.* 4.23 *ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores*. For *tellus* cf. *Ecl.* 4.14 *terras*, 19 *tellus*, etc. Brown 1994 : 133 connects 4.796 *renidens* with the child's smile in *Ecl.* 4.60-3.

62. Brown 1994 : 22-9. One of her central arguments is that, as the Nemean episode in the *Thebaid* delays the epic expedition of the Seven, so Statius' *Siluae* delay his epic project (cf.

1.5.8-9) ; and the many *ecphrases* in the *Siluae*, she ventures, have their counterpart in Hypsipyle's narrative, 'itself a form of narrative *ecphrasis*' (28).

63. See Nauta 2002 : 249-50. On the possible relevance of Lucan's *Siluae* nothing can be said.

64. Cf. *Ecl.* 1.2 *siluestram ... musam*, 6.2 *nostra nec erubuit siluas habitare Thalea*. Newlands 2012 : 9 n. 54 'The Augustan poet uses *siluae* as a collective image for his *Eclogues*'. We may add that *siluae* also represents the *Eclogues* in the false (but ancient) proem to the *Aeneid*, 1.1b *egressus siluis*. On the title *Siluae*, which not only looks back to Vergil's *Eclogues*, but also carries associations with Greek ὕλη, speedy composition and (perhaps) variety, see Nauta 2002 : 252-4, Newlands 2011 : 6-7 with references.

65. Cf. Alfred Tennyson *To Virgil* 'summers of the snakeless meadow'. For the serpent as symbol of the powers that threaten peace and prosperity, we may also compare the *laudes Italiae* in the second book of the *Georgics*, where Vergil also mentions the absence of snakes : *nec rapit immensos orbis per humum neque tanto / squameus in spiram tractu se colligit anguis* (*Geo.* 2.153-4). For snakes as symbols of evil cf. also *Aen.* 7.753-5, *Hor. Ep.* 16.52 *neque intumescit alta uiperis humus*.

66. Statius' emphatically enjambed *occidis* (5.538) might even echo *Ecl.* 4.24-5 *occidet et serpens, et fallax herba ueneni / occidet*.

67. Cf. McNelis 2007 : 174.

68. Where the preceding phrase, *Met.* 1.145 *non socer a genero* [sc. *tutus*], could be applied to Adrastus and Polynices.

69. Cf. also the extensive account in [Sen.] *Oct.* 391-434.

70. Cf. Sen. *Thy.* 249 (*Pietas*), 1021, 1035-6, 1070. Statius refers several times to Atreus and Thyestes, cf. 1.325, 2.184, 3.308-10, 4.308, 6.280, 284, 11.127-9.

71. See McNelis 2007 : 47-8 with references.

72. Cf. Ganiban 2013 : 258 'Perhaps we might also recall description of the Golden Age, such as in *Eclogues* 4.23-4, wherein flowers will form cradles (*cunabula*), and the *serpens* will die. The deaths of Statius' Opheltes and Linus both would then suggest the opposite of a Golden Age.'

73. The phrase is borrowed from Newlands 2012 : 3-4.

74. In the previous section we have seen that the dissolution of pastoral in favour of epic looks back to the second half of the *Aeneid*. Statius' engagement with the fourth *Eclogue* and the poetic discourse of the Golden Age can also be connected with the *Aeneid* : in Thomas' reading of the poem (Thomas 2004-2005), the primitive world of the Italians is a 'golden' Saturnian world, which the arrival of the Trojans and the following war corrupts into an 'iron' Jovian world. For a brief discussion and references see Lovatt 2005 : 147 n. 12.

75. Cf. e.g. 4.715 *pastorum*, 5.512 *agricolae*, 667 *agrestum ... manus* and also 4.681 *aruis*, 702-4 *seges ... culmi ... pecus ... armenta*.

76. To my knowledge, only Cazzaniga 1959 : 127 n. 4 has noted the parallel. Vessey 1986 : 2981-3 points to the relevance of the Calabrian water-snake for the snake simile in 2.410-4, but is silent on its connection with the Nemean serpent.

77. *Theb.* 5.520 *saeuior* and *Cul.* 175 *acrior* mark the second stage.

78. E.g. 5.538 *extremae caudae* < *Geo.* 3.423 *extremae ... caudae*. See further Soerink 2014b *ad loc.*

79. See Soerink 2014b : 82-4.

80. See S. 1 praef. *et Culicem legimus et Batrachomyomachiam etiam agnoscimus*, 2.7.73-4 (Lucan) *haec primo iuuenis canes sub aeuo, / ante annos Culicis Maroniani*, *Mart.* 8.55.19-20, 14.185-6. See Seelentag 2012 : 9-11.

81. See Seelentag 2012 : 144 'Dieses Szenario dient unserem Dichter als Grundlage'.

82. Janka 2005 : 40 n. 27.

83. See Soerink 2014b on 5.505-33.

84. Pavan on 6.242-8 notes the relevance of the *culex*' tomb for Opheltes' *tumulus*, also pointing to the correspondence between 5.558-67 and *Cul.* 192-7 (the killing of the serpent).

85. On *ludus* and *praeludere* see Janka 2005, Lovatt 2005 : 8-10.

ABSTRACTS

This paper examines the Nemean episode of Statius' *Thebaid* (4.646-7.104). It is argued, against recent interpretations, that the episode is not simply a Callimachean digression from martial themes: the hostilities between Argives and Nemeans recall the *bella plus quam ciuilia* between Caesar and Pompey; the incursion of the Argives violently destroys Nemea's pastoral landscape; and Nemea becomes the site of quintessentially epic events. The snake that kills Opheltes looks back to Vergil's Calabrian water-snake in *Georgics* 3 (and the *Culex*): Vergil's didactic persona had warned not to fall asleep when dangerous snakes are around. The death of the child can also be read as a pessimistic inversion of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*. On a poetic level, we witness the epic dissolution of Nemea's pastoral world. On a political level, the Nemean episode seems to suggest the impossibility of an Augustan Golden Age in the Flavian poem's disturbing universe of *nefas*. Nemea is Statius' paradise lost.

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Keywords: Callimachus, epic, Golden Age, intertextuality, Lucan, pastoral, Statius, Vergil