A Perfect Murder: the Hypsipyle Epyllion

> … to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to
> the comprehensive and sagacious expedient
> of not attempting to conceal it at all.
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> – E. A. Poe, "The Purloined Letter"

Over the course of the fifth book of Statius' *Thebaid*, Hypsipyle inhabits a remarkable variety of female roles.[1] When we meet her in Nemea, she is a wet-nurse and a slave; then she tells the story of her past on Lemnos, first as a queen and daughter, later as Jason's spurned mistress; back in Nemea, she becomes mourner of the dead; finally, at the end of the book, she is redeemed from slavery and is transformed into a mother once again. Hypsipyle does not experience these transformations passively; as interlocutor and narrator she constructs and re-constructs her own self-fashioning. At the emotional climax of the book, King Lycurgus of Nemea goes so far as to accuse her of being a habitual creator of utter fictions (*fabula, mendacia*, 5.658–9) with respect to her own past.[2] In this article, I focus on the way Hypsipyle's self-conscious narrative interventions intersect with the expectations of literary genre, as I believe that this is an important means by which she takes control of her own destiny.

At the start of *Thebaid* 5, Hypsipyle is powerless and childless, in servitude to Lycurgus and his wife Eurydice, whose child Opheltes she nurses and cares for. At the end of the book, Hypsipyle is no longer powerless or childless; it is Lycurgus and Eurydice who are both childless and powerless (to punish her). At the start of the book, the Argives do not know who Hypsipyle is (*o quaecumque es*, 20). At the end, they know a great deal about her, but they do not know (or much care) who King Lycurgus is (*quisquis es*, 664). The symmetry created by this utter reversal of roles between Hypsipyle and the king and queen of Nemea marks out Book 5 as a self-contained narrative unit within the *Thebaid* as a whole. Furthermore, this narrative unit belongs to a particular genre, the epyllion, whose relevance has not been fully

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[1]In 2010, a preliminary version of this paper was presented at a workshop in Nottingham organized by Helen Lovatt; a much revised version was presented at the conference in St Andrews from which this volume has developed. After I had submitted a draft of this article, I received a copy of Soerink's excellent 2014 PhD thesis. As Soerink responds to some of the ideas I had presented in Nottingham, I have made some revisions in order to take his views into account.

[2]The text of the *Thebaid* used is Hill 1983; the translations are adapted from Shackleton Bailey 2003.

appreciated. The story of Hypsipyle is not "an epic within an epic", as Vessey called it, but an epyllion within an epic.[3]

This is not to deny the importance of epic and tragic models in *Thebaid* 5, which have been the main focus of scholarly attention. But I think the structure of the book and its relationship to the wider narrative can be elucidated in some important ways by comparing a different set of texts. I will start from McNelis' demonstration that Statius uses "Callimachean Nemea" to provide a "counterpoint" to the martial epic of the rest of the *Thebaid*.[4] But I will argue for a more specific dependence upon the plot of one particular Callimachean text, the *Hecale*, and the Latin literary tradition it helped to spawn. Once we read *Thebaid* 5 as an epyllion, we can properly appreciate the self-aware way Hypsipyle takes charge of her own destiny.

The Hypsipyle Epyllion

It might seem controversial to consider one book of the *Thebaid* as a self-contained unit, carefully constructed with reference to the generic tradition of which the *Hecale* was the founding text. The very validity of the category of "epyllion" has been the subject of skepticism.[5] While it is true that this is not an ancient term, it is nevertheless a convenient label for a distinct ancient tradition; or perhaps, for several related traditions. The absence of an ancient label or even of a stable and consistent set of characteristics is not a real issue: poets tended to express generic affiliations in terms of concrete poetic models rather than of generic abstractions and absolute philological definitions. For my purposes, I take "epyllion" to be a dynamically evolving Latin tradition that took Callimachus' *Hecale* as its first landmark. As Hollis put it, " Roman poets who composed works such as Catullus 64 or the pseudo-Virgilian *Ciris*—not to mention lost poems like Cinna's *Zmyrna* or Calvus' *Io*—must surely have believed that they were using a recognizable form inherited from the Greeks".[6] That formulation usefully frames the genre in terms of the relationships between specific poems rather than as a laundry-list of characteristics, but it is too static and passive. Conte has taught us that ancient literary genres are not trans-historical, "simple, immobile abstractions", but matrices of relationships between specific models that change when new texts are added.[7] The failure to see that the set of expectations we call the genre of "epyllion"

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[3]Vessey 1970, p. 44.

[4]McNelis 2007, pp. 76–96; see also Parkes 2012, pp. xxii–xxiii, and, for a revisionist view, Soerink 2014b, 47–56.

[5]See Allen 1940, updated by Trimble 2012.

[6]Hollis 1990, p. 25, quoted skeptically by Trimble 2012, p. 65.

[7]See Conte 1994, pp. 105–28 (quote, p. 127).

was evolving over time, taking a new direction at Rome, is what lies behind the persistence of the skeptical view.[8]

With respect to Statius' poetic project in *Thebiad* 5, the two most important epyllia to consider as intertexts are the *Hecale* and Catullus 64, which are the prime examples of the genre in Greek and Latin respectively. But, as always in the *Thebaid*, Virgil cannot be ignored, and the second half of the fourth book of Virgil's *Georgics* is also a significant model. More surprisingly, we may also detect the influence of the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex*, which Statius was willing to regard as authentic and written by Virgil, at least for the purposes of his own self-justifying rhetoric in the preface to the first book of *Silvae*, where, having recently completed the *Thebaid*, he deploys it as an example of a great poet turning his hand to a lesser genre. The example of Virgil's Aristaeus/Orpheus epyllion should serve to mitigate the objection that it makes no sense to extract one book of the *Thebaid* to consider it alongside short autonomous texts. The *Georgics* provides an explicit model for integrating a single epyllion into a larger work of a very different character, and there could be no better authority for Statius' practice in the *Thebaid* than Virgil.[9]

The salient features of the particular branch of the epyllion tradition within which Statius is working in *Thebaid* 5 are: a shorter, complex mythological narrative in which sub-heroic, usually female and romantic or domestic, experience is juxtaposed with the heroic; an extended digression that offers a pointed contast to the main narrative; and swift reversals of fortune in both frame and digression which happen in inverted counterpoint. There are a number of specific aspects of the plot of *Thebaid* 5 which have suggestive links with epyllia. As in the *Hecale*, Statius gives us a hero/heroes on their way to a heroic exploit, who encounter an aged nurse who offers them hospitality. As in Catullus 64, there is an inset story about a female figure who goes from happiness to the depths of despair until she is rescued by Bacchus. As in *Georgics* 4, there is an inset story about a woman named Eurydice who suffers great loss due to the thoughtlessness of another person who inadvertently causes a death due to a snake. As in the *Culex*, there is a heroic battle with a snake who is the guardian of a stream, and it ends with the death of a tiny creature who is given a memorial out of all proportion to his size.

Given that all of these features of the myth were present in the literary tradition about Hypsipyle that Statius inherited, is their combination significant? In a thoughtful response to a preliminary articulation of my argument, Soerink finds the parallels I adduced with the Hecale "attractive", but is not convinced by the others.[10] He has two objections, one of which is potentially serious. We need not be worried

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[8]Trimble 2012 offers a much more nuanced take on that position than Allen 1940, but ultimately shares the same static, essentializing view of literary genre.

[9]This is a separate matter from the generic status of works like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that might be considered as tapestries of epyllia.

[10]Soerink 2014b, p. 54.

by the fact that Statius' allusions to the epyllion tradition are never pure, but contain mixtures from other genres. So the allusion to a famous line from Catullus 64 discussed below is not contradicted by the presence of allusions to the *Aeneid* in that same passage.[11] The technique of multiple reference is standard for the tradition in which Statius is writing. Soerink's other objection requires a more robust response. He claims that the name of Eurydice has nothing to do with epyllion in this context, because "the name is simply dictated by tradition". This is the disease of the commentator: reducing a poet to a mechanical reproducer of themes found elsewhere. It is true that Eurydice is the name for Opheltes' mother found in Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, but it is also true, as Soerink himself has shown, that Statius departs from that model when it suits him. The name Eurydice inevitably had very different associations for Statius' Roman readers than it did for Euripides. If Statius found that resonance unwelcome, the tradition provided alternative names: Creusa, or if a name entirely without Virgilian connections was needed, Amphithea.[12] Or he could have suppressed the name entirely. None of the individual elements of Statius' story are invented; that would be breaking the rules of the game. It is in the selection and arrangement of these elements that Statius' profound originality lies. The drought, the snake, the death and the memorial are all parts of the traditions around Nemea, but Statius rearranges them in the light of epyllion. The identification of traditional elements is the first task of the commentator, but that is where interpretation begins, not ends. Statius was much more than a technically accomplished versifier of stories dictated by tradition. Rome rushed to hear Statius recite the *Thebaid* because something exciting was happening.

From the point of view of structure, the most important feature of the epyllion is the way one or more inset narratives, usually as ecphrasis or reported speech, contrast pointedly with the framing story. These inset narratives often contain reversals of fortune, or double reversals, which pointedly contrast with the reversals or double reversals of the frame. In the framing heroic narrative of the *Hecale*, Theseus is at first forlorn and without shelter, but he goes on to triumph against the bull of Marathon; then he is disappointed by the sudden death of Hecale. In the inset domestic narrative, the poor Hecale is suddenly honored by the surprise visit of her noble guest, who promises future benefits, but she dies before she can enjoy them. In the heroic frame of Catullus 64, Peleus is honored by the gods with a marriage to the immortal Thetis, but we know that shortly after the end of the poem she will abandon him. In the ecphrasis, Ariadne is abandoned by Theseus, but is rescued by Bacchus and is honored with a marriage to the immortal god. In the agricultural framing story of *Georgics* 4, Aristaeus loses his bees, but then gets them back again. In the romantic inset narrative, Orpheus loses Eurydice, gets her back and then loses her again. In the framing story of the *Thebaid*, the expedition of the Argives begins proudly but ends in despair, whereas in Book 5 Hypsipyle begins as a slave, is plunged into despair, but ends as a queen. Within the frame of Book 5, her

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[11]See below on Cat. 64.55 and 61.

[12]Soerink 2014b, p. 16.

autobiographical narrative occupies a further level of nesting in which fortunes are contrasted, for on Lemnos she begins as a queen and ends as a slave.

If we situate *Thebaid* 5 in the context of the epyllion tradition, this will help to explain how Statius deploys a number of important features which derive from the high epic tradition. Many scholars have emphasized Hypsipyle's characterization as an epic poet in her own right.[13] They have shown that her account of the Lemnian massacre and its aftermath is heavily indebted to Aeneas' tale of the fall of Troy in *Aeneid* 2.[14] Both internal narrators tell of saving their father and of their own escape from a destroyed city which has been abandoned by the gods. This is a crucially important feature of *Thebaid* 5, and I agree that Hypsipyle's characterization as a self-conscious poet and her emulation of Aeneas are key aspects of her self-presentation. But the epic tradition exemplified by Books 9–12 of the *Odyssey* and Books 2–3 of the *Aeneid*, in which the hero relates his wanderings, cannot on its own explain all of *Thebaid* 5. Hypsipyle does indeed want to present herself as a wandering heroine, but, unlike Odysseus and Aeneas, she is not the heroine of the larger epic. In other words, in the *Thebaid* her retrospective story is embedded as an inset within the Hypsipyle-drama of Book 5, and that drama is inserted as a separate and distinct story within the larger plot of the Seven against Thebes. This is where the epyllion tradition with its separate and contrasting embedded narratives can help.

Another way the epyllion can help to explain some features of the content of *Thebaid* 5 is in terms of the choices Statius made in following or departing from the particulars of the plot of Eurpides' *Hypsipyle*, of which substantial fragments survive.[15] Soerink has recently revisited the question of the relationship between that play and the *Thebaid*, convincingly demonstrating its fundamental importance for understanding Statius' narrative in Books 4 to 6. At the end of his discussion, Soerink identifies four particular points at which our poet appears to depart from Euripides in order to revert to the archaic form of the plot.[16] For three of these, he can provide good reasons for the change. In two cases, Statius can be seen to throw off the restrictions of the stage. Euripides must have Opheltes die off-stage, so Hypsipyle takes the infant with her to the stream, whereas Statius is able to show her leaving him behind. Likewise, Euripides had practical constraints on the number of actors and characters, so he makes Amphiaraus take a leading role, whereas Statius can share the dramatic duties more evenly among the Seven.[17] A more interesting change is the way Statius has Lycurgus act as the mouthpiece of anger

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[13]See Nugent 1996 and Gibson 2004, pp. 156–71.

[14]See Frings 1996 and Ganiban 2007, pp. 71–95.

[15]See, most recently, Collard and Cropp 2009, vol. 2, 250–321.

[16]Soerink 2014a, pp. 186–91 (= Soerink 2014b, pp. 23–37).

[17]Soerink 2014a, pp. 186–8.

against Hypsipyle, instead of his wife Eurydice, as in the play. Soerink makes some interesting points about this modification as a critique of Euripides.[18] I would add that this change of adversary is also important for highlighting the extent of Hypsipyle's self-transformation from slave to queen: she defeats not a fellow woman, but a fellow royal sovereign.

The remaining one of these apparently archaizing changes to Euripides' plot is the most sweeping in its consequences, but for this choice Soerink is not able to provide an equally compelling motivation.[19] In the *Hypsipyle*, Amphiaraus knocks on the door of Lycurgus' house because he is looking for water, presumably no more than a jug-full, to perform a sacrifice. In the *Thebaid*, of course, the need for water is greater and more pressing. Statius has Bacchus create a drought of cosmic proportions, and, by leading them to water, Hypsipyle saves the Argive army from destruction. It is probable, but not certain, that the drought was already part of the pre-Euripidean epic tradition.[20] Statius must have had a good reason to reject the Euripidean version, as he did in the other places he diverged from his primary model. I believe that he chose to revert to the drought-version in order to set up the epyllion of Book 5.

By creating a parched landscape and a army in serious need, Statius sets up the situation as a witty inversion of the dramatic pretext for the encounter between Theseus and Hecale. In Callimachus' poem, the hero is caught in a violent thunderstorm while traveling from Athens to Marathon and gets soaked.[21] He seeks refuge with Hecale, who makes a fire, offers him a tattered blanket and enables him to dry off. Statius has arranged the plot of his epic so that a clever inversion of this scene plays out in Nemea. The Argive army is oppressed not by an excess of water

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[18]Soerink 2014a, pp. 188–91, with discussion of earlier scholarship. Statius sets up the expectation that Eurydice will confront Hypsipyle, as in Euripides: *contra subit obvia mater* (5.651), only for Lycurgus to take over, at least for the duration of this book.

[19]Soerink 2014a, p. 186.

[20]See Soerink 2014a, p. 186 and Parkes 2012, xxix and 282. The first line of the Cyclic *Thebaid* is preserved and it refers to "thirsty Argos" (Ἄργος … πολυδίψιον). If that does refer to a drought at Nemea, which is by no means certain, it suggests that it was an important theme of that epic. The Pindaric scholia preserve some references to Hypsipyle relieving the thirst of the Argive army at Nemea (the start of the second and fourth hypothesis to the Nemean Odes: οἱ ἑπτὰ ἐπὶ Θήβας παραβαλόντες τῇ Νεμέᾳ διψήσαντες συνέτυχον Ὑψιπύλῃ…); the texts are give by Bond 1963, p. 148. The intersection of Hypsipyle with the story of the Argives at Nemea is usually held to be a Euripidean innovation; if so, these scholia cannot be reporting the Cyclic version. Perhaps they are looking to the *Thebaid* of Antimachus of Colophon; see Matthews 1996, p. 137.

[21]Storm: F18 (Hollis) 8–16; dripping cloak: F28.

but by an insufficiency. The landscape is parched rather than soaked, but they likewise find refuge with an old woman who was once prosperous but who has fallen on hard times. She revives the heroes not by drying them off, but by showing them a stream into which they promptly plunge en masse (4.816–30). In both poems, the unlikely encounter between the heroic sphere and the humble and domestic world, and the inversion of roles whereby an old woman becomes the unlikely savior of a hero, is precipitated by the weather.

Callimachean Nemea

The expectation that Hypsipyle will recapitulate the role of Hecale at Nemea has been carefully prepared. During the catalogue of Argive army in Book 4, the participation of Nemea is signaled with an extended reminiscence of the fact that this was where Hercules, on his way to fight the Nemean lion, found hospitality in the humble hut of Molorchus (4.159–64).[22] The most famous literary treatment of this episode in antiquity was in the *Victoria Berenices* at the start of the third book of Callimachus' *Aetia*, which narrated the initial foundation myth for the Nemean games.[23] That text also adumbrated the second, re-foundation of the games in memory of Opheltes/Archemorus, the episode which is narrated at length in Book 6 of the *Thebaid*. The Molorchus episode in the *Aetia* and the *Hecale* were duplicate treatments by Callimachus of the theme of a lowly peasant giving hospitality to a great hero on his way to confront a monster.[24] As readers, we can treat the Molorchus story as the model for the pattern Hecale follows, since it comes first in mythological time, even though it is not certain which text Callimachus wrote first.

Just before the Argive army arrives in Nemea, Statius has prepared the reader to view it as a place of Callimachean pedigree, where a character of lowly station gives hospitality to a great hero. That hospitality gave rise to an initial founding of the Nemean games. In other words, Statius found in Callimachus two distinct ideas of repetition connected with Nemea. First is the duplication by Hecale of Molorchus' hospitality scene. Second is the duplication of foundation myths for the Nemean games, first by Hercules and then by the Seven. Statius neatly ties these repetitions together by creating a third repetition of the hospitality scene in which Hypsipyle recapitulates the role of Hecale, but does so in the precise location where Molorchus

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[22]See McNelis 2007, 84 and 92 on Molorchus and also p. 86 on the influence of the *Hecale* on the topography of Statius' catalogue more generally. It is likely that Book 5 of the *Thebaid* of Antimachus contained a major hospitality scene as well, a banquet at the palace of Adrastus; see F 18–28 Matthews.

[23]According to the reconstruction of Parsons 1977. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the foundation of the games may merely have been foretold in the *Victoria Berenices*; see Soerink 2014b, pp. 12–14.

[24]See Hollis 1990, pp. 344–5 and Ambühl 2004.

had provided the original model of that kind of encounter. What makes this third, Statian elaboration of the Callimachean theme sublimely clever rather than merely slavish and derivative automatism is that it thereby ties together the first founding of the Nemean games with the second: both are now, thanks to Statius, the product of Callimachus' hospitality *topos*. There is one crucial difference, however, between these two treatments of the theme: all ends well for both Hercules and Molorchus, whereas Hecale dies on the occasion of Theseus' victory.[25] As we will see, Hypsipyle knows this and understands the consequences.

Now that we can identify the Callimachean pedigree of the drought-episode which dominates Books 4–6 of the *Thebaid*, we are almost ready to look in detail at the way Book 5 engages with the *Hecale* and its Latin literary progeny. But first, one important aspect of Callimachus' text needs to be clarified. Since Hypsipyle is transformed over the course of that book from a nurse into a mother, it is clearly important to know which of these female family roles was embodied by Callimachus' heroine. Unfortunately, the surviving fragments are equivocal on this point. She clearly was responsible for the upbringing of two boys who died prematurely. It seems very likely that they were killed by the brigand Cercyon, whom she complains about and whom we know Theseus has already killed (F49 Hollis). This would provide a neat parallel with Molorchus, who has suffered a similar loss to the Nemean lion whom his guest Hercules goes on to destroy.[26] Statius continues the pattern by having the Argives kill the snake who has killed their hostess' foster-child, Opheltes.

Was Hecale a nurse or a mother? It used to be assumed on the basis of a statement in Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* that she never married. The discovery of papyrus fragments (F 47–9 Hollis) in which she recalls fondly how she raised two boys has inclined recent scholarship to assume that she was married and had a family. But that runs against the grain of the Ovidian passage; it is anachronistic sentimentalism to infer that Hecale must have been the mother of the boys whom she raised and loved. Indeed Statius' depiction of the relationship of Hypsipyle and Eurydice to Opheltes is a demonstration of the routine fact that in the ancient world a nurse would be closer to an infant than his mother in a wealthy household. We can reconcile the evidence of Ovid and of the papyrus by positing that Hecale never married but was nurse to the boys she raised. Incidentally, Theseus addresses

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[25]On the contrast between the *Hecale* as tragic and the *Victoria Berenices* as comedy, see Ambühl 2004, pp. 29–32. Parkes 2012, *ad* 4.161–4 notes that the reference to Molorchus stands in contrast to the other examples of hospitality in the book with less happy outcomes.

[26]Thus Ambühl 2004, 29, n. 34. The lion has devastated the countryside, and the Statian scholia (ad *Theb*. 4.160) add that it had killed Molorchus' son.

Hecale as μαῖα (F 40 and 80 Hollis), which is how Odysseus addresses his aged nurse, Eurycleia.[27]

In order to argue that Hecale was a mother, one has to put a very odd interpretation upon the passage in the *Remedia Amoris* where Hecale is used, along with the beggar Irus from the *Odyssey*, as an example of why poor people do not attract lovers:[28]

Cur nemo est, Hecalen, nulla est, quae ceperit Iron?
  Nempe quod alter egens, altera pauper erat.

Why is there no man who picked Hecale? Why no woman who picked Irus? Because, in fact, the latter was a beggar and the former was a pauper.

Hollis comments: "But perhaps *Rem.* 747–8 by no means proves that Hecale never married. Ovid merely says that nobody would have her *in her impoverished state*; it remains quite possible that in her earlier and more prosperous years she married and produced children".[29] But that is not in fact what Ovid says; he makes an absolute statement: no man wanted Hecale. He then gives poverty as a reason for that fact, not as a limit on the scope of his previous general claim. Poverty is not the only reason the widowed Hecale might fail to attract lovers: in the scanty fragments she is repeatedly and emphatically called an old woman. She even walks with a stick (F 66 Hollis). Did Ovid really mean that Hecale, after marrying, bearing two sons, raising them to adulthood, being widowed, and losing her children, would have been attractive to men if only she had some money? Any joke is possible with Ovid, but the merry widow is a character-type alien to Greek myth, where the lives of women do not, as a rule, have second acts. The disastrous consequences for those few that try to remarry, such as Jocasta and Dido, prove the rule. It is a much less forced interpretation of the currently available evidence to suppose that Hecale lost her fortune when young and entered into service as a wet-nurse. So, for the sake of argument, I will presume that in Callimachus' poem, Hecale was a nurse to her two boys but not their mother. This is a crucial point, for it means that she is precise literary model for Hypsipyle as we encounter her at the start of Book 5. If, on the other hand, a new papyrus were found that proves that Hecale was a mother, then my arguments below could still stand, but would have to be modified to emphasize that Hypsipyle rejects the role of Hecale not because she wishes to present herself as a mother rather than a nurse, but because she still holds out hope that her two sons are not dead but alive.

Let us now look at how Book 5 starts (*Theb.* 5.1–2):

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[27]On the links between Hecale and Aeneas' nurse, Caieta, see Skempis 2010 and McNelis 2003, p. 161.

[28]*Rem.* 747–8.

[29]Hollis 1990, p. 189, accepting the arguments of Barigazzi 1958, pp. 456–7.

Pulsa sitis fluuio, populataque gurgitis alueum
agmina linquebant ripas amnemque minorem;

Thirst quenched by the river, the army was leaving its ravaged bed and banks—a smaller stream.

This is a Callimachean metapoetic metaphor. The muddy, massive river was associated with bad poetry at the end of Callimachus' Hymn to Apollo, and here Statius plays on that theme. In the previous book, the Argive army, crazed with thirst, leaped into the river Langia, which normally ran clear (*modo lene virens et gurgite puro / perspicuus*, 4.824–5); the soldiers churn it into a muddy mess (*iam crassus caenoque et pulvere torrens*, 4.820). A number of scholars have noted the Callimachean resonance of this imagery; McNelis writes:[30]

The contrast between the pure, gentle stream (…) and the turbulence created by the soldiers (…) coheres with the water imagery that is often employed by Callimachean poets.

Later, at the start of Book 5, this same river is, for a while, diminished in volume (*amnemque minorem*). This is an elegant metaphor for the temporary contraction of the *Thebaid*, for the duration of Book 5, from high, heroic epic to the Alexandrian scale of the Hypsipyle epyllion. Like the Langia, Statius' poem will recover its grander scale again in time.

This Callimachean programmatic statement is reinforced a few lines later, in a simile which compares the Argive army, as it resumes formation, to a noisy flock of cranes flying north for the summer from Alexandria to Thrace. At first this seems an epic simile, derived from Homer's description of the marshaling of the Trojan forces at the start of the third book of the *Iliad* (3.3–6), by way of a Virgilian adaptation in the *Aeneid* (10.264–6). But McNelis has noticed that Statius made an important change:[31]

But this simile differs from the Homeric and Virgilian models in two ways: first, Statius' predecessors use the animals to accentuate the commencement of battle; second, their cranes fly south to avoid the winter and rain. In particular, the Iliadic birds fly against the Pygmies, who conventionally dwell along the Nile. Statius' birds invert thes models because they return for the summer and tolerate rain. In addition, Statius' birds reverse the Homeric course and fly away from Egypt to Thrace, the home of Mars. Significantly, their flight pattern follows the path taken by the cranes in Callimachus' *Aetia* prologue (1.1.13–14), where the birds, representing abhorrent poetry because of their ugly sounds, are banished from Egypt. In reversing the direction of the birds' flight, the *Thebaid* both limits the influence of these warlike birds to Thrace and proclaims the adoption of Callimachean sensibilities.

I would read this simile the same way, but with particular reference to the temporary narrowing of scope for the duration of Book 5 as a self-contained epyllion. For a time, the noisy birds of war have flown away from Alexandria and we can focus on a different kind of tale.

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[30]McNelis 2007, p. 88. See also Parkes 2012, xxii–xxiii and *ad* 4.824–7, and Soerink 2014b, p. 59.

[31]McNelis 2007, p. 89.

We have already had a glimpse of Hypsipyle and a taste of her story at the end of Book 4 when she guides the Argives to the river. The thirsting Adrastus first addresses her flatteringly as the goddess Diana (*diva potens nemorum*, 4.753). This puts us in mind of Odysseus' initial address to Nausicaa when he asks for her help (*Od*. 6.151). But Hypsipyle is quite evidently no maiden, as she is nursing a baby (*ad ubera Opheltes*, 4.748). Adrastus belatedly notices this fact, so he modifies his rhetoric accordingly, but in so doing he makes another mistake, referring again to Diana, but this time implying that the goddess may have brought her a husband and a child (4.756).[32] In her response, Hypsipyle is at pains to correct Adrastus' mistaken impression. She calls herself a bereaved nurse (*altricem … orbam*, 4.778) and makes it clear that the child she is holding belongs to someone else (*mandati … pignoris*, 4.778–9). She says that she does not know the fate of her own sons and drops some leading hints about her own royal background and noble father (*ingens pater*, 4.780) before leading them to the river. In other words, the question of whether Hypsipyle is a nurse or a mother is the very first point at issue when we meet her, and this is the matter upon which Book 5 will turn.

Host or Guest?

When the conversation is resumed in Book 5, Adrastus picks up on her earlier reference to a noble father (*dic quis et ille pater*) and asks her to give an account of her background.[33] He says that from her face he can see that she is of high birth, despite her present circumstances. At this point, we are still comfortably within the paradigm of the *Hecale*, for there was a conversation between Theseus and Hecale in which they both described their backgrounds, and there is a fragment in which the hostess tells Theseus that she was not always poor (F41 Hollis). But in her first words, Hypsipyle evokes a very different model (5.29–30):

> "inmania uulnera, rector,
integrare iubes …"

"Deep are the wounds, O prince, thou biddest me revive …"

As has been widely recognized, this is an unmistakable allusion to the first words of Aeneas narrative of his own back-story in the palace of Dido:[34]

Infandum, regina, iubes renouare dolorem …

Unspeakable is the grief, O queen, you bid me revisit.

These first words have a clear programmatic import: Hypsipyle's narrative of the destruction of Lemnos, a city abandoned by the gods, will be modeled upon Aeneas'

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[32]On the rhetorical fumbling of Adrastus here, see Parkes 2012, *ad* 4.753–60.

[33]Frings 1996, p. 150.

[34]*Aen*. 2.3. See Nugent 1996, pp. 49–51 and Ganiban 2007, p. 73.

account of the sack of Troy. But this does not mean that the *Hecale* disappears completely from sight. For Virgil's line is very likely contains an allusion to the words which Hollis has argued were the opening of Hecale's speech to Theseus:[35]

<div align="center">τί δάκρυον εὗδον ἐγείρεις;</div>

οὐ γάρ μοι πενίη πατρώιος, οὐδ' ἀπὸ πάππων
εἰμὶ λιπερνῆτις· βάλε μοι, βάλε τὸ τρίτον εἴη

Why awaken a sleeping sorrow? My poverty is not ancestral, my grandfathers did not make me poor: would to god, would to god I had one third …

Statius is therefore making a "window allusion" to both Virgil and to his source.[36]

Statius is doing more here than just making a cleverly simultaneous allusion to two different texts, for his window allusion also serves to highlight an important difference between them. The Callimachean *topos* of the humble peasant offering meagre but honest hospitality to a great hero derives ultimately from the Eumaeus episode in the *Odyssey*, whereas the Virgilian *topos* of the wandering hero who tells of his sufferings at extended length derives from the Phaeacian episode in the *Odyssey*. Hecale is a very different role-model to Aeneas. One way, therefore, of thinking about Hypsipyle's speech is to view it as a calculated effort to redefine the literary tradition to which she belongs. It is obvious that her rhetoric is carefully designed to induce her audience to view her as someone of importance and substance, much more than a slave and a nurse. Her success in self-redefinition is evident in the way the Argives refer to her in royal and even heroic terms at the end of her speech, when she is under threat from Lycurgus: *ducem servatricemque cohortis* (5.672), *inventrix fluminis* (5.703). What I want to examine here is the way in which Hypsipyle's invocation of a heroic model for her actions reacts against the Callimachean narrative framework in which she finds herself.

Apart from the differences in sex, the change in genre from epyllion to epic and the gulf of social status between Hecale and Aeneas, another major difference between these two literary models is in the guest/host relationship. In Callimachus' text, Hecale is the hostess, even though she lives in a hut. Her guest, Theseus, had come from Troezen to his father's palace at Athens, whence he has immediately escaped to avoid Medea's plotting. He is now traveling to Marathon. He may not have travelled as far as Odysseus or Aeneas, but he is just as homeless as they; he is the wandering hero and Hecale is his hostess. In the *Aeneid*, by contrast, the speaker is not female but male and is not the hostess but the wandering hero. In other words, in order to transform herself from Hecale into Aeneas, Hypsipyle has to change from hostess to guest. In this, Statius sets up the encounter with the Argives in such a way as to leave up in the air the question of who is the host and who is the wanderer.

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[35]Hollis 1982, p. 472 with Hollis 1990, 179 and 320.

[36]On the phenomenon of "window reference", see Thomas 1986, pp. 188–9.

Euripides' *Hypsipyle* opens with a scene at the shrine where Lycurgus is priest, and it immediately foregrounds the theme of hospitality. Two strangers arrive and ask Hypsipyle for shelter. It will turn out in the end that these are her sons, but she does not know that yet. Upon learning that Lycurgus is not present, the men seem to suggest that they should go elsewhere to find lodging. The text is fragmentary at this point, but it seems that Hypsipyle urges them strongly to come in, perhaps to ask her mistress, Eurydice. Not long after, Adrastus comes to the temple looking for water for sacrifice, and Hypsipyle shows him the stream. In other words, she acts very much as hostess, either in her own right, or on behalf of her master and mistress. Statius makes a subtle change to the setting, removing her from the house and temple, palace and town. She meets the Argives in the woods (*inter silvas … errantes*, 4.746–7; *umbra*, 5.45). The effect of this change is to make it entirely unclear who is the host and who the guest. Both are wandering through an alien landscape. After Hypsipyle tells her tale of adventure, it is easy to view her as the true wanderer. She has come across the sea from Lemnos, whereas the Argives are from the city just down the road. Thus Statius provides a setting in which Hypsipyle's self-redefinition from Hecale to Aeneas and thus from hostess to wandering guest is plausible.

Hypsipyle understands the literary context from which she needs to escape. She describes herself as a hostess when answering Adrastus' query about her parentage:[37]

o pater! illa ego nam, pudeat ne forte benignae
hospitis, illa, duces, raptum quae sola parentem
occului. quid longa malis exordia necto?

Ah father! For I am she, captains, lest perchance you be ashamed of your kindly hostess, she who alone snatched her parent away and hid him.

When she calls herself a kind hostess (*benigna hospes*), she not only recalls the Hecale-tradition in general terms, but also anticipates the word, hostess (*hospes/hospita*), used by Evadne to describe Hecale in her appeal to Theseus on behalf of the Argive women.[38] Evadne appeals to his record as a scourge of the lawless, and brings to mind the tears shed by Hecale, the old woman who was his hostess: *nec fudit uanos anus hospita fletus* (12.582). It is worth noting that the Latin word used by Hypsipyle (*hospes*) is in fact ambiguous, as it can mean either "host" or "guest". The rest of Hypsipyle's narrative pushes strongly back against the Argives' identification of her as a hostess. This is made most clear in the final line of her long narrative, when she briefly notes her capture by brigands and enslavement. She says that they brought her to *your* shores: *uestras famulam transmittit in oras* (5.498). In other words, I am a stranger in this place, Nemea, the Peloponnese, the Greek mainland; this is *your* home, not mine. At the end of the speech, Hypsipyle is no longer the aged hostess; she stands as the guest, the wanderer, the heroine.

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[37] *Theb.* 5.34–6.

[38] See also the end of Book 4, where the river Langia is invoked as *hospita* (4.849).

We can understand why it is that Hypsipyle wants to follow a narrative route different from the *Hecale*, as is clear when she herself alludes to that story. When she describes the landing of the Argo on Lemnos, she includes Theseus among the crew, which is not a standard part of the myth (5.431–2):

hic et ab adserto nuper Marathone superbum
Thesea

Here we see Theseus proud of Marathon lately freed.

One reason for this specific reference to the bull of Marathon is to specify that Theseus' participation as an Argonaut happened relatively early in his career, as it would have to in order for him to appear alongside the older generation of heroes, especially Hercules.[39] But for the reader of Callimachus, the reference to Theseus just after (*nuper*) that exploit must bring to mind the scene when he returns to the humble house of Hecale to share the good news and finds her dead. At that point, he institutes the rites in her memory. In other words, Hypsipyle tells us that she knows how the *Hecale* ends. It is not a happy prospect for her. If the *Thebaid* should carry on according to the Callimachean model, this is what will happen: the Argives will sack Thebes, return to Nemea and find Hypsipyle dead, whereupon they will re-found the Nemean games (after the first founding in memory of Molorchus) in her memory. Fortunately for Hypsipyle, there are a number of reasons this is impossible. The most important is that the expedition of the Seven is doomed to failure. The silver lining for Hypsipyle is that, by the iron law of the epyllion, the inset narrative must tell a contrasting tale with respect to the frame narrative. The overdetermined and fore-ordained disaster of the Argive mission means that her story can, and must, have a happy ending.

Digression and Counter-point

Returning again to the start of Hypsipyle's narrative, we can see how she turns to Virgil in order to push back against the *Hecale* model, and not only in her efforts to evoke Aeneas in Carthage. In the lines quoted above, she asks *quid longa malis exordia necto?* This is a clear recollection of a passage in the *Georgics* (2.25–6):

non hic te carmine ficto
atque per ambages et longa exorsa tenebo.

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[39]In fact, the inclusion of Theseus creates a chronological paradox. In the *Hecale*, the episode of the bull of Marathon happens when Medea is already in Athens; but the Argonauts have not even arrived in Colchis yet. Chronological paradoxes involving the young Theseus and the Argo are a feature of both epic and epyllion. Apollonius has Jason in Colchis tell Medea the story of Theseus' voyage to Crete, even though that should happen around the time Medea is in Athens. Catullus 64 likewise represents Theseus' voyage in the ecphrasis as chronologically prior to the voyage of the Argo in the frame narrative.

I'll not detain you here with idle song, through digressions and lengthy preludes.

In both cases the protestation against drawn-out beginnings (*longa exorsa/exordia* is patently insincere. Virgil has no intention of writing the straight-forward agricultural handbook he has promised, and his poem is full of these digressions, most notably in the second half of the fourth book, which has many levels of nested digressions away from the ostensible didactic theme. Likewise, Hypsipyle's intention is patently to delay the Argives with her tale, in order to redefine herself in their eyes from slave to queen; her offer to stop at the outset is nothing more than a tease.[40]

What is particularly noteworthy about this Virgilian allusion is that Hypsipyle takes over the words not of Aeneas or any other character, but of Virgil himself, speaking *in propria persona* to Maecenas. This is one of the few passages in which the greatest Latin poet himself speaks about his narrative strategies. I believe that this is not a coincidence; Statius means for us to notice that Hypsipyle is not passively adopting the Hecale-role into which the plot of *Thebaid* has been pushing her. She is taking charge of her own characterization, elbowing Statius out of the way, and constructing her own narrative. In this light, it is worth noting that in the lines quoted above, Hypsipyle identifies herself by means of the construction "I am the one … who" (*ille ego … quae*, 5.34–5). In isolation, one might dismiss the similarity with the alternative opening words of the *Aeneid* (*ille ego qui*) in which Virgil announces his theme as too slight to be meaningful. But in conjunction with the other allusion to Virgil's own voice, that resonance might be activated for some readers.[41]

Hypsipyle's willful adoption of Virgil's own poetic persona is not only motivated by her attraction to the model of Aeneas' tale of the sack of Troy. The fact that she adopts a programmatic statement from the *Georgics*, in which the poet speaks about his own digressions, shows an awareness of the development of Latin epyllion tradition after Callimachus. Hypsipyle cannot truly occupy the place of the hero Aeneas in this epic, so she begins her own epyllion by suggesting an alternative generic model to replace the *Hecale*. The *Georgics* is a text which integrates a sub-heroic digression, but the woman whose misfortune counterbalances the eventual success of the hero Aristaeus is not an old nurse but a younger woman named Eurydice. This is, of course, also the name of Hypsipyle's mistress, with whom Hypsipyle will trade places. In her first words Hypsipyle identifies herself as a "bereft nurse" (*altricem … orbam*, 4.778); this is the same adjective she applies again to herself (5.618) and also to her mistress after the death of Opheltes (*orbamque … Eurydicen*, 5.631–2).

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[40]Ganiban 2007, p. 74. On Hypsipyle's teasing, cf. Parkes 2012, *ad* 4.776–81, "she drops tantalizing hints that she has a riveting tale to tell".

[41]As suggested by Gibson 2004, p. 158.

In the confrontation as staged by Statius, Queen Hypsipyle is matched against King Lycurgus in a heroic confrontation and she comes away the victor. That is the high point of her self-redefinition as wandering queen. When Lycurgus threatens to put her to the sword, the Seven stand by her. In a remarkable passage, each is named in turn: Tydeus (*Oeneius heros*, 661), Capaneus (664), Hippomedon (665), Parthenopaeus (*Erymanthius*, 665), Adrastus (667), Amphiaraus (669). All are named, save Polynices. The effect of this mini-catalogue is to put Hypsipyle as a temporary substitute in the place of the son of Oedipus: this is not the Seven against Thebes, but the Seven against Nemea. Thus the inset narrative about Hypsipyle truly functions as a carefully inverted image of the framing plot.[42] In the main narrative, the six allies stand by Polynices and with disastrous result attempt to vindicate his half-claim on the throne of Thebes; in the inset digression, the six allies stand by Hypsipyle and successfully defend her from an apparently unwarranted death.

This inverted mirroring of the heroic main plot within a digression is a feature of epyllion. Theseus survives his encounter with the bull of Marathon, but Hecale dies. Aristaeus loses his bees and gets them back again; Orpheus loses Eurydice, gets her back and loses her again. Both of those epyllia have unhappy female inset narratives contrasting with successful heroic exploit in the frame. Hypsipyle has refused to play that role; she will not be Hecale; she has rebranded herself as not a humble nurse but a queen and mother. She therefore needs a different epyllion as a model for the narrative: an epyllion with an unsuccessful, or at least equivocal, heroic narrative as the frame, and a happy ending for the woman in the inset. The surprise at the end of *Thebaid* 5 is that the final epyllion to serve as model is not the *Hecale* but Catullus 64; and, for once, Hypsipyle is surprised, too.

One of the most distinctive features of Hypsipyle's long Lemnian narrative is her confidence as a narrator. She displays an almost Olympian knowledge of events on heaven and earth. She acts decisively and heroically, but in a way that leaves her free from any blame in the Lemnian massacre, despite her detailed narrative of individual murders. It is no wonder that Lycurgus and Eurydice think it is a pack of lies. The first phase of her story is the murder of the men of Lemnos, where, as noted, the model is Aeneas' tale of the sack of Troy. The next phase is the arrival of the Argonauts at Lemnos, where she shifts from playing the role of Aeneas to that of Dido, the tragic queen who invites a visiting hero into her home and kingdom.[43] But she is careful to represent herself as a blameless and anger-free version of that model. Her final act in the first phase of the narrative is to pile up a fake funeral pyre for her father, Thoas, whom she has secretly saved from the massacre (5.313–19). The extensive similarities with Dido's fake pyre for Aeneas mainly serve to highlight the extreme difference between to two women. Dido creates a fiction in order to enable her rage and madness to bring about her own suicide; Hypsipyle creates a

[42]For a different approach to the mirroring of frame and inset, see Vessey 1973, pp. 173–87.

[43]On this shift, see Ganiban 2007, p. 80.

fiction in order to save her life from the furious and insane women all around her. At the end of the second phase, when she watches Jason sail off into the distance, Hypsipyle is annoyed that he is abandoning his sons, but unlike Dido she does not overreact. Dido, like Hecale, is another type of the doomed hostess giving hospitality to a hero, which is precisely the role Hypsipyle is trying to evade at Nemea. When, later in the book, the people of Nemea momentarily think that Hypsipyle has been put to death by Lycurgus, the passage is modeled upon the reaction of the people of Carthage to the suicide of Dido.[44] But Hypsipyle is not dead; it is Lycurgus who is in danger. Hypsipyle is no more Dido than she is Hecale. The other woman she is careful to distinguish herself from is Medea: *alios, Colchi, generatis amores* (5.458).[45] Until the end of her speech, Hypsipyle is in complete control of the literary models she imitates.

After Hypsipyle's retrospective narrative ends, her narrative control ends, and her fortunes seem to take a turn for the worse as the snake attacks Opheltes. The snake is too large to fit comfortably in the miniature landscape of Nemea, having invaded from a larger epic world.[46] The Seven kill the monster in an echo of the feats of Hercules at Nemea and Theseus at Marathon. But the Argives belong to epic, not epyllion, and their ultimate mission is doomed; which means in turn that Hypsipyle must have the reciprocal fate; she will be saved. Meanwhile Hypsipyle is at her lowest point, mourning her surrogate son Opheltes, whose death she has caused by her negligence. On the point of being executed as a slave by Lycurgus, the fortunes of the former queen of Lemnos are at their lowest ebb when they change dramatically. She is accepted by the Argives as a queen and given armed protection. She reaps the reciprocal benefit of the hospitality she has shown to the heroes in a way Hecale could not. This is the reward of her self-redefinition from slave to queen, and she is the author of her own destiny to a remarkable degree. However, her final transformation from nurse of Opheltes to mother of Thoas and Euneos is accomplished not by her own narrative skills, but by the unexpected intervention of Bacchus, who has a different epyllion in mind.

That intervention is foreshadowed at the only point at which Hypsipyle is not in complete control of her own narrative. Until near the end, she has claimed to know a surprising amount about the malevolent agency of Venus and the Furies at Lemnos. We may justify that knowledge on the grounds that Bacchus appeared to her as she was escorting her father to his ship and revealed to them the role of the gods

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[44] Compare 5.691–8 with *Aen*. 4.666–71. I owe this point to Tom Shores.

[45]For Hypsipyle's jealousy and dislike of Medea, cf. Ovid, *Heroides* 6.75–164. On the Hypsipyle episode as a *Herois*, see Augoustakis 2010, p. 32.

[46]I owe this point to Laura de Glopper. See 5.513–7, esp. the metapoetic *tenuat* (515). As Vessey 1973, p. 187 points out, the description of the Nemean snake is strongly reminiscent of the Theban serpent in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.26–94). On the epic affiliation of the snake, see Soerink 2014b, pp. 57–67.

(5.271–84). When she herself flees Lemnos, she complains that Bacchus failed to make a second appearance and permitted her to be enslaved (*sed non iterum obvius Euhan*, 5.496). Throughout her long speech, she has modeled herself on Aeneas, but here, in her ignorance, she is perhaps most truly like him. One of the ironies of the *Aeneid* is that the hero complains about having been abandoned by the gods just when we know that he has been rescued. When Aeneas first identifies himself in Virgil's epic, he implicitly complains that his mother has abandoned him; he does not know that he is in fact speaking to her (*Aen.* 1.381–5). Just so, we know, but Hypsipyle does not, that at this very moment Bacchus is present and actively intervening on her behalf. It was he who created the drought (4.652–710) and it was he who contrived the meeting between Hypsipyle and the Argives (4.746). And we know that we will meet him again soon.

Happy Endings

The climax of Book 5 comes when Hypsipyle's luck suddenly changes: on the point of execution as a faithless nurse, she is reunited with her sons. The transition from slave to queen is accompanied by a transition in terms of her family relationships. The fact that she is longer a nurse but a mother underlines the way she has escaped the role of Hecale. This reversal of fortune is a classic example of dramatic peripeteia, derived from the recognition-scene at the end of Euripides' play. But Statius reinterprets the tragic peripeteia in terms of the sudden salvation or loss which is one important characteristic of epyllion.[47] As in Euripides' play, the sons of Hypsipyle had arrived at the house of Lycurgus earlier; but only now do they recognize their mother. A few letters preserved on papyrus tell us that Dionysus appeared *ex machina* at the end of the *Hypsipyle* to guarantee the happy ending; Bacchus plays the same role here (*tu, gentis conditor, Euhan*, 5.712).[48] But Statius once again reinterprets a Euripidean plot element through the medium of epyllion. When her sons rush to her side, Hypsipyle stands there in shocked astonishment (723–4):

illa uelut rupes inmoto saxea uisu
haeret et expertis non audet credere diuis.

She stays fixed like a stony rock, her eyes unmoving, not daring to trust the gods she has experienced.

This is an unmistakable echo of a famous phrase Catullus used to describe the shock of Ariadne upon discovering her abandonment by Theseus (64.55, 61):

necdum etiam etiam sese quae visit visere credit,
[…]

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[47]The peripeteia of the *Hecale* has likewise been viewed in the light of tragic models: Ambühl 2004, pp. 27–8.

[48]See Soerink 2014a, p. 179.

saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu,
prospicit …

Not yet does she believe what she is seeing … like a stone statue of a Maenad she looks out, alas …

Both women are compared to stones in their motionless disbelief, but in other ways they are opposites. Ariadne is like the statue of a maenad, but Hypsipyle is the one who is in danger of being torn apart by the eager embraces of her sons (5.721–2). Ariadne cannot believe her misfortune, whereas Hypsipyle cannot believe her luck.[49] Of course, the true relevance of Ariadne here is that her abandonment and mistreatment by Theseus is about to be compensated by her immortal marriage to Bacchus. This happy ending is adumbrated by famous description of the thiasos of the god as he arrives, at the end of the great ecphrasis in Catullus 64. The Hypsipyle digression comes to a conclusion with an allusion to that passage (5.729–30):[50]

addita signa polo, laetoque ululante tumultu
tergaque et aera dei motas crepuere per auras.

Signs were also manifest in heaven, cries of tumultuous joy and the drums and cymbals of the god crashed through the resonant air.

Like Ariadne, Hypsipyle has suffered great loss, but has been saved by Bacchus, not as a lover, but as a granddaughter. Like Ariadne, she is saved at the moment of her greatest despair, when she has lost all hope for herself. The *deus ex machina* at the end of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* is filtered through the medium of the contrasting ecphrasis/digression from the genre of epyllion.

So the Hypsipyle-epyllion begins in evocation of the *Hecale* but ends with the heroine finding a happier model in the Ariadne of Catullus 64, who also went from happiness to despair to happiness again. This confirmation of a happy ending for Hypsipyle provides the contrast required by the rules of the epyllion genre with the success of the framing narrative. In Catullus 64, the happy and eternal union between Bacchus and the mortal Ariadne contrasts with the union between Thetis and the mortal Peleus in the frame narrative, which we know is fated to have a bitter ending. The *Hecale* will not work as a model for *Thebaid* 5 in part because of Hypsipyle's unwillingness to occupy the role of aged nurse and hostess who dies in the course of the heroic narrative, but also because it would imply that the Argive expedition against Thebes will have a successful outcome like Theseus' expedition against the bull of Marathon or Hercules' against the Nemean lion. The over-determined, predestined disaster at Thebes requires a redemptive inset narrative.

[49]Soerink 2014b, ad 5.723–4 rejects this allusion, but the fact that there are also allusions to Virgilian similes here does nothing to diminish the self-evident presence of Catullus, both in the pleonastic *saxea* and in the context of female stunned disbelief, which is completely different from the contexts of the Virgilian passages.

[50]The signs in heaven also allude to the catasterism of Ariadne's crown, which in Ovid's telling immediately followed upon her rescue by Bacchus: *Met*. 8.177–82.

It is fitting that Book 5 comes to a formal end with a final reminiscence of Callimachus' *Hecale*, only with a different victim. Amphiaraus confirms the will of the gods that the child Opheltes was to die and states that enduring honours must be paid to him, which will keep his new name, Archemorus, alive forever. The diegesis of the *Hecale* tells us that Theseus returns from his successful exploit to find his hostess dead and he promises to name an Athenian deme after her and to found the precinct of Zeus Hecaleus. The ending of Callimachus' text does not survive except in scraps, but the influence of this kind of paradoxically grand memorial as a closural gesture in the genre of epyllion can be seen in the parodic ending of the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex* or *Gnat.* This text is perhaps more a parody of epyllion than a straight example of it, but even so a parody can be quite useful for illustrating the expectations of genre.

The *Culex* tells the story of a shepherd who falls asleep by a spring. When the guardian snake is about to attack him, a gnat stings him awake. The shepherd swats the gnat and kills the snake in a mock-epic battle that has some similarities to the fight between the Seven and the serpent in our text. In this case, the snake is not the direct instrument of the inadvertent death of the tiny, innocent creature, but it is still the catalyst. Whether or not Statius was conscious of evoking that pseudo-Vergilian text, it was certainly parodying elements of the tradition within which Statius was working.[51] This can be seen most clearly in the way it ends. The ghost of the gnat visits the shepherd in his sleep and rebukes him for killing the creature who saved his life. The poem ends with the shepherd erecting a memorial to the tiny gnat, the scapegoat whose death permitted his own life. It is a *tumulus*, decorated with marble and flowers, and the final lines of the epyllion give its dedicatory inscription. The humour resides in the contrast between the ridiculously small size of the gnat and the monumentality of his tomb. This paradox of scale is a key feature of Opheltes, even though a detailed description of his tomb is postponed until the next book.[52] This feature is linked to Callimachus' Hecale/Molorchus tradition, in which the juxtaposition of the large and the small is a major theme. The gnat and the mouse Molorchus hunts are light-hearted versions of the tragic fate of Opheltes, whose symbolic significance outweighs his tiny size. And just as the gnat and the mouse, as well as the tiny hut of Hecale, are Callimachean metapoetic symbols for the heroic smallness of epyllion itself, so too does the small size and paradoxically large significance of Opheltes symbolize the epic-in-miniature which is Book 5 of the *Thebaid*.[53]

Hypsipyle's ultimately successful self-refashioning as queen and mother means that she is no longer available to serve in the Hecale role, so another humble, sub-heroic,

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[51]There seem to be some echoes of the *Culex* in Statius' description of the Nemean snake; see Soerink 2014b, p. 67.

[52]See 5.534–7, esp. *tanto ... sepulcro*, 347.

[53]On the Callimachean symbols, see Ambühl 2004, pp. 40–4.

sacrificial offering must be substituted. Over the course of *Thebaid* 5, Hypsipyle clearly trades places with Lycurgus as sovereign and Eurydice as mother. At the baby's funeral, Eurydice complains bitterly that Hypsipyle has taken her rightful place, both in raising the child and in mourning for him (6.161–7, 182–4). The irony is that we know, and Eurydice does not, that Hypsipyle has also traded places with Opheltes in occupying the role of the fated sacrificial scapegoat.

Murder in Plain Sight

It is significant that *Thebaid* 5 comes to a final conclusion not with the description of Opheltes' tomb, which would make it like the *Culex*, but with the solemn declaration of posthumous honors by Amphiaraus. It turns out that this epyllion, which starts just like the *Hecale*, also ends just like the *Hecale*. But, due to the actions of Hypsipyle, both in her heroic self-presentation and in her negligence as a child-minder, there have been some major changes in the middle. She has escaped her literary fate by having someone else die in her place, and the posthumous honors decreed at the end are not for her. Was this an accident? In Statius' version of events, Lycurgus knows of an oracle foretelling that he, which is to say his household, will supply the first victim in the war against Thebes (*prima … funera*, 5.645–7). The name which corresponds to that status of first death, "Archemorus", is formally bestowed upon Opheltes by Amphiaraus at the end of the book, as in the usual version of the myth.[54] But Hypsipyle in her grief applies the name to the dead Opheltes over a hundred lines earlier, which, as Shackleton Bailey points out, must mean two things: that the name was part of the prophecy, and that Hypsipyle knows about the prophecy, too.[55] What no one at Nemea knows is who this victim, destined to be named "Archemorus", will be. In the next book, Eurydice reproaches herself for having assumed that this prophecy about the Theban war could have nothing to do with her tiny son (6.142). But Hypsipyle knows what happened to Hecale immediately after Theseus left her, and she knows that some member of Lycurgus' household will be the first to die in the course of the Argive expedition. Those facts mean that she herself is the most likely candidate for fulfilling the role of "Archemorus"; so she needs to arrange a substitute.

When Hypsipyle leaves Opheltes unattended, she seems to do so in defiance of another prophecy. Hyginus records that the boy was not to be put down on the ground before he could walk, so he says that Hypsipyle left him on a tall clump of parsley.[56] Statius does not mention this prophecy, so, when his Hypsipyle takes no

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[54]5.738–9; cf. Apollodorus, *Bibl*. 3.4.4.

[55]5.609, with Shackleton Bailey 2003, ad loc. The alternative is to convict Statius of gross compositional incompetence. For a review of efforts to address this problem, see Soerink 2014b, pp. 74–5.

[56]Hyginus, *Fab*. 74. When Hypsipyle later discovers the remains of Opheltes, she collapses onto the "harmful earth" (*terraeque inlisa nocenti*, 5.592), which may

such precautions, putting him directly on the ground, it is not clear whether we are supposed to find this surprising.[57] If Statius' audience knew that prophecy, her action would seem even more negligent. In any case, even an ancient audience might think it grossly negligent to leave a fussing and actively crawling baby wide awake and completely unattended in a field, as is demonstrated when Eurydice makes that very point in the next book (6.153–9).[58]

When, just after Opheltes' death, Hypsipyle prematurely calls the boy "Archemorus", perhaps she is quick to make the deduction that Opheltes has fulfilled the prophecy, but, if so, it is surprising that she has been able to think so clearly in the midst of wild grief. Statius drops a strong hint, but only a hint, that Hypsipyle has been pondering the identity of "Archemorus" before anyone else: perhaps from the instant she first encountered the Argive army. Did she, from that very moment, orchestrate the fulfillment of the prophecy by Opheltes rather than herself? It would be a delicious irony if a literary character who spends to much effort in Ovid's *Heroides* distinguishing herself from Jason's other, wicked, girlfriend, Medea, should also turn out to be guilty of deliberate infanticide.

One of the narrative pleasures of *Thebaid* 5 is to wonder about the reliability of Hypsipyle's autobiographical narrative. She manages to present herself as a queen of Lemnos and yet also completely blameless in the unfortunate events that happened there, which she is nevertheless able to describe in surprising detail. She even goes so far as to deny any stain on her chastity, claiming, against all other accounts and against all plausibility, that she was an unwilling partner in her relationship with Jason.[59] Lycurgus and Eurydice separately accuse her of fabricating every aspect of her past.[60] This prompts a question: if they were not certain that Hypsipyle was completely innocent in the slaughter of the men and boys of Lemnos, why did they entrust their son to her? This is more or less the reproach that Eurydice throws at herself (6.149–52). She now sees the death of Opheltes as the final crime of a serial murderer. The presence of Hypsipyle's sons at Nemea is proof that she did not murder them, but does it confirm her entire account of her innocent conduct during the massacre?

Statius has not convicted Hypsipyle of any crime. It is possible to accept her version of events at Lemnos and to see her as guilty in Nemea of nothing more than a

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simply be a reference to the fact that the serpent came from the earth (*terrigena … serpens*, 506). But it might strike a different chord with an audience familiar with the prophecy recorded by Hyginus. On the prophecy, see Soerink 2014b, pp. 15–19.

[57]On Hypsipyle's actions, see Parkes 2012, *ad* 4.785–9 and 793–5.

[58]On Opheltes' crawling, see Parkes 2012, *ad* 4.793–800 and 802.

[59]As noted by Gibson 2004, p. 164.

[60]Lycurgus: 5.658–60 (*mendacia*); Eurydice: 6.149–52.

moment of inattention which was ordained by the Fates (*sic Parcae volvere*, 4.787). Hypsipyle herself blames the gods (*sontes … dei*, 5.610–11; *nosco deos*, 620). Should we believe her? She claims to have had a premonitory vision of Venus (622), but we know that the only god orchestrating the present events is Bacchus. Even when she takes back the accusation against the gods and seems to accept personal responsibility for what she has done, she still really claims to have been nothing more than an instrument of the Fates (*ipsa ego te … exposui Fatis*, 623–4). But Statius has also left hints that make it possible for a reader to interpret events differently. When she runs back to Opheltes, she is already sure of what has happened to him (*iam certa malorum / mentis ab augurio*, 5.545–6). Is that because of quasi-maternal premonitions, or because she designed events to happen this way?

There is no one to corroborate Hypsipyle's Lemnian narrative, and even if we accept it, she demonstrates an intimate acquaintance with child-murder, including many men and boys of her own family (5.218–35). She then makes the inexplicable decision to abandon Opheltes. She has the means and opportunity to commit murder, and her history is potentially incriminating. The one thing obviously lacking is motive. It is easy to see why readers have tended to believe Hypsipyle's claim that Opheltes' death was an accident. Statius makes it abundantly clear that she loves the boy. We see that in her grief at his death, and even more clearly in Eurydice's speech in Book 6. Hypsipyle might have been able to fake her reaction to discovering Opheltes' body, but Eurydice, even as she accuses Hypsipyle of negligent homicide, acknowledges her former slave's grief and admits that the baby was fonder of his nurse than his mother (6.161–3, 180–4). This is why Eurydice's accusations of malice against her former slave seem hysterical and unlikely. She can offer no motive. Why would Hypsipyle kill a baby she loved and who loved her, even if it was not her own?

Our examination of the generic affiliations of *Thebaid* 5 can provide this final piece of the puzzle. Hypsipyle acts out of self-preservation. She sees that she is facing the prospect of becoming the first fatality of the Theban war (Archemora?). Eurydice, by contrast, assumes that the prophecy about her household and the Theban war must have to do with a grown man (6.141–2). Statius hints that this is why Lycurgus himself has not volunteered to join the Argive expedition. In the midst of their quarrel, Tydeus calls Lycurgus a coward for having fail to enlist (*timidone parum?*, 5.676). A few lines earlier, Statius made it clear that Lycurgus was not in fact a coward (*haud animi vacuus*), but that he was kept back by his "altars and temples" (5.644), which is to say, his duties as priest of the local sanctuary of Zeus. But in the very next line Statius admits that Lycurgus was also thinking of the prophecy, and this is why he viewed the Argive expedition with loathing. Statius does not state it explicitly, but he drops some very heavy hints: Lycurgus believes that *he* is the fated Archemorus. That is why he has not joined the Argive expedition. The wording of the oracle encouraged this misinterpretation, because it referred to Lycurgus himself as making the first sacrificial offering of death, when it really meant that the offering would be provided from his household (*prima, Lycurge, dabis Dircaeo*

funera bello, 5.647). Eurydice must also have interpreted the oracle as referring to her husband. It never occurred to them that their tiny son (nor, much less, their wet-nurse) might be implicated in this prophecy of death in an epic war.

Unlike Eurydice, Hypsipyle knows what genre we are in. In the world of epyllion, the fate of great heroes may be intertwined with the fate of the humblest creatures. She sees that she is in danger of fulfilling simultaneously the roles of Hecale and Archemorus/a. For all she loves Opheltes, she has a rare gift for self-preservation. She urgently needs to find a different member of Lycurgus' household to fulfill the prophecy and die in her stead. Opheltes is conveniently to hand. She leaves him to the tender mercies of the enormous snake that she must know lives nearby. Statius says that the local farmers (*agricolae*, 5.512) know the snake well and Hypsipyle is clearly very much at home in this part of the countryside. The snake guards the area around a local temple of Zeus, and Statius leaves it ambiguous as to whether this is the same temple of which Lycurgus is priest. If it is, he too must know about it. Hypsipyle's grief at the death of Opheltes is real, but her mask drops for a moment when she slips and prematurely calls him Archemorus. Hypsipyle has thought harder than her master and mistress about the potential ironies of the prophecy, and she also has a better understanding of literary genre. Lycurgus and Eurydice cannot see the danger to their baby son, because they are thinking in terms of high martial epic. So they think the offering they will have to make (*dabis*) must be Lycurgus himself. Hypsipyle understands that the prophecy is ambiguous: it may refer to any member of the family or household of the king. She understands the danger to herself because she has read Callimachus (or has chatted to Theseus on Lemnos) and she thus recognizes the role she is in imminent danger of playing. Statius hides the murder of Opheltes in plain sight. He shows us the act being committed. But he conceals the motive, so we, like the Argives, are inclined to ignore the meaning of a scene we have witnessed with our own eyes. It is only when we put *Thebaid* 5 in its proper context as an epyllion that we can finally see precisely why Hypsipyle felt that she had to murder Opheltes in order to save herself.

Maybe Statius was nodding when he made Hypsipyle use the name Archemorus before she should. But it is surprising that such a glaring error was not picked up in the drawn-out process of obsessive revision and public recitation. Maybe Hypsipyle used the name because she was thinking fast, despite her grief. Maybe Hypsipyle really did put down Opheltes because she was distracted. But she forgot about him for an awfully long time. Maybe that inattention to the baby is a sign of nothing more than benign self-absorption. Maybe she was just a bad care-giver, because she lacked the experience of raising her own sons. Maybe she did not know about the snake who guarded the area and its temple, even though she seems to know the area very well. Maybe it is just a coincidence that male children close to Hypsipyle (but not her own sons) tend to die when she is around.[61] Hypsipyle herself links the death of Opheltes with the murders on Lemnos, interpreting it as paying a debt of

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[61]For the deaths of Hypsipyle's close male relations on Lemnos, see 5.218–30.

wickedness owed there.[62]   But perhaps the link is simpler. Hypsipyle gives a plausible account of her own conduct. But maybe, just maybe, she is an accomplished liar and a serial killer, first on Lemnos and now in Nemea. Maybe she put Opheltes down deliberately, fully knowing that the snake was in the area. Maybe she delivered such a long, drawn-out account of her own life in order to buy time for the snake to come. Maybe her Lemnian narrative is so convincing, not only because it is well practiced, but because of the urgency of this occasion: she already knows, as she tells it, that she will soon need the Argives to protect her from a charge of murder. In her initial speech of mourning she is already contemplating the prospect of her execution (*moritura*, 5.623). She then offers to the Seven to forfeit her life (628–37). Of course, they (implicitly) refuse to take her life, which becomes a rehearsal for the way they leap to her defense when Lycurgus genuinely threatens her. Hypsipyle fools them all; but, just like all murderers in literature, she makes a single tell-tale mistake: in her (genuine) grief at seeing the corpse of Opheltes, she slips for a single moment and calls him the name which she has secretly ensured that he will bear: Archemorus.

How Not to Write an Argonautica

On the level of the narrative, Book 5, along with the drought in Book 4 and the funeral and games in Book 6, serves, as is very well known, as a delay in the tragic progress towards Thebes.[63] We have seen that Book 5 begins with a Callimachean metaphor which warns us that the epic flow of the *Thebaid* will contract for a while into a smaller stream (*amnem minorem*, 5.2). This holds true for the duration of the book, which is focussed on the epyllion of Hypsipyle, and her Lemnian adventures comprise a digression embedded within the Hypsipyle episode, which is a further digression within the Argive expedition. One aspect of that digression within a digression is worth noting: the role of the Argo. When Hypsipyle tells the story of the Lemnian massacre and of the subsequent arrival of the Argonauts, Statius is interacting very closely with an alternative epic tradition.[64] Indeed, if one can posit that there was a sub-genre of collective epic with many heroes, as opposed to the individual epic with one primary hero, then the *Thebaid* belongs to the same species of poem as the *Argonautica*-epics written by Apollonius of Rhodes, Varro of Atax and Valerius Flaccus.

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[62]When the Lemnian women discover that Hypsipyle has not killed her father, they demand a crime from her (*facinus reposcunt*, 5.489); she later claims to have repaid that debt via Opheltes (*exsolvi tibi, Lemne, nefas*, 5.628), on which see Soerink 2014b *ad loc*.

[63]See Vessey 1973, pp. 165–70 and Parkes 2012, pp. xvii–xx.

[64]See Gibson 2004, pp. 149–53 Also with Euripides' *Hypsipyle*; see Soerink 2014a, pp. 185–6.

We can read *Thebaid* 5 as a rebuke to the Latin poets who thought the way to write a Latin epic of Alexandrian spirit was to translate or adapt Apollonius' poem. Statius makes the point that, if you want to imitate the great Hellenistic epic, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius, which was itself a great innovation in terms of scale, subject matter and characterization, you need to emulate its spirit rather than its content. If formal inventiveness is the hallmark of Hellenistic aesthetics, then translation or even loose adaptation is its antithesis. The *Thebaid* as a whole is a testament to the notion that one should emulate the spirit rather than the letter of Alexandrianism. That principle is stated most clearly by Virgil at the start of the third book of the *Georgics*, when he dismisses the themes treated by the great Hellenistic poets as having become hackneyed. When Virgil enumerates those themes, he includes themes such as Hylas, who was an Argonaut, and whose story had been narrated by Apollonius, Theocritus and Propertius (*Georg.* 3.3–8). When Statius imitates that Virgilian list of worn-out, hackneyed epic themes in the *Silvae* (2.7.48–53), he explicitly includes the voyage of the Argo alongside the fall of Troy and the *Odyssey*. This must, as Gibson has pointed out, cast some light on his opinion about Valerius' epic.[65]

Statius has learned the lesson taught by Virgil: to be true to the spirit of Alexandria, one must make poetry new, even if that means, paradoxically, returning to the themes which the great Hellenistic poets had considered trite. Hence the *Aeneid*. A thoroughly Callimachean epic in spirit, it paradoxically embraces the very sort of cyclic epic material that Callimachus had rejected. The most obviously cyclic and hackneyed material Virgil treats is the Sack of Troy, and the way he makes it new is to tell it from the first-person perspective of Aeneas. Statius goes one better. For his overall subject matter, the war of the Seven against Thebes, he chose a topic which had become synonymous with bad, bloated poetry in the Roman re-interpretation of Alexandrian aesthetics. In addition to the archaic cyclic *Thebaid*, there was another Greek epic by that name by Antimachus of Colophon. We know that Callimachus despised at least one of Antimachus' elegiac poems, but we do not know what he thought of his epic.[66] That does not matter too much, since Latin poets were happy to make the leap. Catullus uses Antimachus as the emblem of bloated poetry (95.10), the antithesis of the learned epyllion of his friend Cinna. Catullus does not explicitly mention Antimachus' *Thebaid* in that poem, but all the other works he discusses there are hexameter, so it is present by implication. In any case, when Propertius (1.7, 1.9) wishes to invent a fictional writer of bad poetry, it is no surprise that this hapless figure, Ponticus, is trying to compose an epic *Thebaid*. Simultaneously the heir of cyclic epic and of Antimachus, Ponticus is definitively the antithesis of Callimachus.[67] Statius' decision to write a Callimachean *Thebaid* is witty response to

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[65]Gibson 2004, pp. 152–3. For a different aspect of Statius' engagement with Valerius, see Parkes 2009.

[66]See Krevans 1993.

[67]On the fictiveness of Ponticus the straw-man, see Heslin 2011.

Propertius, embodying an amplification of Virgil's dictum about redeeming the very subject matter which the arbiters of Alexandrianism had dismissed as bloated.

Valerius took a different route. Whatever the merits of his version of the Argo story, he cannot be said to have chosen a novel topic. In its own day, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius was an innovative idea, but not so Valerius' imitation. What Statius has done in his Hypsipyle epyllion is to point out how to do the Argo story right. The true Alexandrian spirit of innovation would dictate framing a familiar story in a new and unexpected way. Thus Statius repackages Apollonius' Hellenistic epic in the format of a Hellenistic epyllion after the manner of Callimachus, thereby renewing the spirit of both Alexandrian models and eschewing slavish imitation. Catullus 64 is once again an important precedent, as an innovative, miniature take on the Argo story, reimagined as epyllion. The key difference is that Statius puts the Argo in his innermost digression, whereas for Catullus it is the outermost frame.[68] Statius knows better than Valerius that, in order to make the material fresh, one should do precisely what Virgil did to the Cyclic story of the Sack of Troy: tell it from the first-person point of view of one of the participants. Statius tells part of the story of the Argo from a woman's point of view, and from the perspective of a possibly unreliable narrator, which adds to the novelty. He follows, as usual, in the footsteps of Virgil, taking epic material which had become over familiar, even cliched, and breathing new life into it. Statius takes the Argo-story, the *Thebaid*'s rival as the standard topic for collective epic at Rome, and turns it inside-out. He makes it an inset digression within an epyllion whose outer frame conceals a murder mystery. This is how Valerius should have approached this material if he had wanted to make it truly fresh and new.

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[68]Statius foregrounds his Catullan model at that very point: the first lines of the Argo-section of Hypsipyle's narrative (5.335–7) echo the first line of Catullus 64; thus Gibson 2004, p. 168.

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