

## COLOUR TERMS AND THE CREATION OF STATIUS' EKPHRASTIC STYLE\*

### ABSTRACT

*This paper focusses on colour terminology as a tool for achieving ἐνάργεια (pictorial vividness) in the Latin poetry of the first century C.E. After briefly outlining the developments in the concept of ἐνάργεια from Aristotle to Quintilian, the paper considers the use of Latin terms for black in three descriptive passages from Statius' epic poem, the Thebaid. It is observed that the poet privileges the juxtaposition of the two adjectives ater and niger in a pattern of uariatio, where ater often carries a figurative meaning and repeats established poetic clichés, while niger is part of unparalleled collocations that evoke a material notion of blackness. Further analysis of the uariatio in the context of each passage reveals that the juxtaposition of the two-colour terms enhances the vividness of the objects described not only by increasing their chromatic impact but also by establishing connections with other parts of the poem, and by inviting a reflection on the competing practices of imitation and transgression of poetic models. The analysis of one stylistic feature (the use of colour terms in uariatio) shows that this stylistic feature is used by Statius for achieving ἐνάργεια as an artistic effect, for reflecting on ἐνάργεια as an instrument through which poetic models are challenged, and for tying his own poetic practice to contemporary rhetorical discussions.*

**Keywords:** Statius; Thebaid; Latin epic; enargeia; colour terms; ater; niger

### INTRODUCTION

In the language of modern scholarship, the word ἔκφρασις mainly indicates the verbal description of a work of art. In ancient criticism, however, the term broadly referred to any descriptive discourse displaying its content vividly before the audience's mental eye.<sup>1</sup> Ancient rhetorical handbooks tell us that a variety of topics qualified as subject matter for an ἔκφρασις (descriptions of places, characters, events, actions and even artistic objects); however, what defined a descriptive passage as ἔκφρασις was its effect on the audience's mind. Through the qualities of σαφήνεια (clarity) and ἐνάργεια (pictorial vividness), ἔκφρασις solicited the imaginative response of readers or listeners, led them to visualize with their mind's eye the content of a verbal representation, and

\* I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous referees for their careful reading of previous versions of the paper and for their generous and constructive feedback. I also wish to thank Francesca Eonimo for allowing me to read a draft of her forthcoming book.

<sup>1</sup> Such is the definition of ἔκφρασις given by the rhetorical handbooks known as *Progymnasmata*: according to Theon's handbook (first century C.E.), for example, ἔκφρασις is a λόγος περιηγηματικός ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον (*Prog.* 2.118.7–8 Spengel). On the broad meaning of ἔκφρασις in antiquity, see R. Webb, 'Ekphrasis ancient and modern: the invention of a genre', *Word & Image* 15 (1999), 7–18 and J. Elsner, 'Introduction. The genres of ekphrasis', *Ramus* 31 (2002), 1–18; see also R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham and Burlington, 2009), especially 1–9. For the popular image of the mind's eye and its ancient sources, see M. Squire, 'Introductory reflections. Making sense of ancient sight', in M. Squire (ed.), *Sight and the Ancient Senses* (London and New York, 2016), 1–35.

ultimately turned them into 'eyewitnesses' of the textual contents.<sup>2</sup> The idea that certain combinations of words can achieve the effect of 'placing their subject-matter before the eyes' (πρὸ ὀμμάτων ποιεῖν) goes back to Aristotle, who, discussing metaphors in the *Rhetoric*, explains that the 'visibility' of a text is the effect of that 'vigour' or 'animation' (ἐνέργεια) produced by the representation of actions in progress and/or of animated subjects.<sup>3</sup> In the *Poetics*, however, Aristotle invites the tragic poet to keep both the μῦθος and the λέξις of his composition in front of his eyes (πρὸ ὀμμάτων) in order to visualize them very vividly (ἐναργέστατα) and find what is appropriate (τὸ πρέπον) to express them.<sup>4</sup> Modern interpreters acknowledge that Aristotle primarily and systematically associated the concept of πρὸ ὀμμάτων ποιεῖν with ἐνέργεια; however, they also observe that his notion of a 'vigorous' and 'animated' textual representation tended to encroach upon the idea of 'vivid' description endowed with ἐνάργεια. While the contiguity of ἐνέργεια and ἐνάργεια in Aristotelian discussions generated confusion among the philosopher's early interpreters,<sup>5</sup> it seems clear that, over time, the concept of 'placing before the eyes' became increasingly associated with the notion of ἐνάργεια.<sup>6</sup>

For example, the author of the treatise *On the Sublime* distinguishes between rhetorical φαντασία, whose object is ἐνάργεια, that is, to present things vividly, and poetic φαντασία, whose aim is to achieve ἔκπληξις (lit. 'the state of being startled out');<sup>7</sup> however, he also applies the comparative ἐναργέστερον ('more vividly') to Simonides' representation, in a lost poem, of Achilles' epiphany to the Greeks.<sup>8</sup> The anonymous author's flexibility in handling his rhetorical terminology suggests that, by the late first century C.E., ἐνάργεια was perceived as a larger rhetorical concept applicable to poetry as well.<sup>9</sup>

In his work *Περὶ ἔρμηνείας*, Demetrius follows Aristotle closely when discussing ἐνέργεια ('animation') as a feature of metaphorical discourse; in the same treatise, however, he also develops a detailed non-Aristotelian theory of 'evidence' (ἐνάργεια). A component of the plain (ἰσχνός) style, Demetrius' descriptive ἐνάργεια is achieved through the precision of details (ἀκριβολογία), the use of repetitions and symmetrical structures (διλογία), the gradual (κατὰ μικρόν) introduction of new elements, and the selection of cacophonous or onomatopoeic words to produce

<sup>2</sup> On ἐνάργεια, see G. Zanker, 'Enargeia in the ancient criticism of poetry', *RhM* 124 (1981), 297–311; R. Webb, 'Mémoire et imagination: les limites de l'enargeia dans la théorie rhétorique grecque', in C. Lévy and L. Pernot (edd.), *Dire l'évidence (Philosophie et rhétorique antiques)* (Paris, 1997), 229–48; A. Manieri, *L'immagine poetica nella teoria degli antichi*. Phantasia ed enargeia (Pisa and Rome, 1998); N. Otto, *Enargeia: Untersuchung zur Charakteristik alexandrinischer Dichtung* (Stuttgart, 2009); Webb (n. 1 [2009]); H.F. Plett, *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age. The Aesthetics of Evidence* (Leiden, 2012), especially 8–21; A. Sheppard, 'Imagination', in P. Destrée and P. Murray (edd.), *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics* (Chichester, 2015), 354–65.

<sup>3</sup> See Arist. *Rhet.* 1411b24; G. Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *Linguistica e stilistica di Aristotele* (Rome, 1967), 256–66; Webb (n. 2 [1997]), 229–32.

<sup>4</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 1455a23–7; cf. Morpurgo-Tagliabue (n. 3), 260–6.

<sup>5</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue (n. 3), 262 n. 10; Webb (n. 2 [1997]), 230–1; Manieri (n. 2), 99–104.

<sup>6</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue (n. 3), 271–83; Manieri (n. 2), 129–43.

<sup>7</sup> [Longinus], *Subl.* 15.2. In *On the Sublime*, φαντασία indicates both the idea driving certain thoughts and their verbal expressions, and the passages themselves where the author 'seems to see' (βλέπειν δοκῆς) what he describes, bringing such sights in front of his audience's eyes (ὕτ' ὄψιν τιθῆς τοῖς ἀκούουσιν): [Longinus], *Subl.* 15.1.

<sup>8</sup> [Longinus], *Subl.* 15.7; Manieri (n. 2), 58 and n. 171.

<sup>9</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue (n. 3), 268; Manieri (n. 2), 58–9.

phonetic mimesis.<sup>10</sup> The examples used by Demetrius to illustrate his notion of ἐνάργεια suggest that he understands vividness as a writer's ability to capture impressive facts in a snapshot, a sort of *pictura in tabula*.<sup>11</sup>

The notion of πρὸ ὀμμάτων ποιεῖν inherited by Roman rhetors has a lot to do with the Demetrian formulation: considered as a standard component of Greek rhetorical theory, ἐνάργεια in Latin rhetoric is the vividness of detailed descriptions that compels the audience to mentally visualize textual objects, and to experience emotional involvement with the text.<sup>12</sup> The terminology employed in Latin rhetorical works is revealing: Cicero calls ἐνάργεια *evidentia*; Quintilian uses *sub oculos subiectio* and the Ciceronian *evidentia* as synonyms.<sup>13</sup> For Quintilian, in particular, ἐνάργεια is achieved through the accumulation and precision of details that allows the author to go beyond the mere verbal exposition (*dicere*) in order to 'exhibit' (*ostendere*) the images represented as if they were things. In other words, Quintilian's ἐνάργεια is a virtue of style by which orators and poets paint with words entire scenes (*tota rerum imago quodam modo uerbis depingitur*)<sup>14</sup> inducing their audience to imagine even more details beyond what is actually said.<sup>15</sup>

In different modes, Latin poets of the first century C.E. reflect, in their writing, the interest in visuality that emerges from the Latin rhetorical culture of the same period, and which is defined in Quintilian's work. The ekphrastic style of the Flavian poet Statius, in particular, represents fertile territory for investigating how the notion of ἐνάργεια turns into poetic practice in early imperial literature. The visual quality of Statius' style, long dismissed as baroque mannerism,<sup>16</sup> has been re-evaluated in recent studies. Helen Lovatt, for example, defines Statius as 'the arch-describer', whose 'ability to evoke the visual' and whose 'relationship to works of art provided fascination and interest' even when his works were not critically acclaimed.<sup>17</sup> In the first book-length study of ἔκφρασις in the *Thebaid*, Francesca Econimo acknowledges that Statius' style is characterized by a constant attention to visual details and by a pervasive focus on the vividness of verbal expression that is capable of further stimulating the audience's imagination.<sup>18</sup> Through his constant attention to the vividness of his poetic diction—we can add—Statius' poetry responds precisely to Quintilian's understanding of ἐνάργεια as a virtue of style.

In this paper I focus on colour terms as a central element of Statius' ekphrastic style, appealing to the audience's linguistic awareness and literary memory, creating vivid images that inspire the audience's emotional reaction, and ultimately fulfilling the fundamental goal of ἐνάργεια according to post-Aristotelian rhetorical theories.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Demetr. *Eloc.* 209–22; cf. Manieri (n. 2), 133–7.

<sup>11</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue (n. 3), 280–1.

<sup>12</sup> Morpurgo-Tagliabue (n. 3), 271–4; Manieri (n. 2), 137–43.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Cic. *Orat.* 3.202; Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.32, 8.3.61, 9.2.40.

<sup>14</sup> Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.64.

<sup>15</sup> On ἐνάργεια as a virtue of style, see Manieri (n. 2), 137; Morpurgo-Tagliabue (n. 3), 277, 283.

<sup>16</sup> For the problem, see C. Criado, 'A reflection upon the application of mannerism and historical baroque concepts in Roman literature', *GRM* 50 (2000), 299–332.

<sup>17</sup> H. Lovatt, 'Statius' ekphrastic games: *Thebaid* 6.531–47', *Ramus* 31 (2002), 73–90, at 73.

<sup>18</sup> F. Econimo, *La parola e gli occhi. L'ekphrasis nella Tebaide di Stazio* (Pisa, forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> For colour terms generating vividness in poetry, see M.M. Sassi, 'Perceiving colours', in P. Destrée and P. Murray (edd.), *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics* (Chichester, 2015), 262–73; Manieri (n. 2), 83–5. On colour terms in antiquity, see J. André, *Étude sur les termes de couleur dans la langue latine* (Paris, 1949); E. Irwin, *Colour Terms in Greek Poetry* (Toronto, 1974); N.V. Baran, 'Les caractéristiques essentielles du vocabulaire chromatique latin (aspect général, étapes de

I consider Statius' use of two common Latin terms for blackness, *ater* and *niger*, repeatedly juxtaposed in *uariatio*.<sup>20</sup> I argue that, by means of this rhetorical device, Statius enhances the chromatic impact of a series of miniatures<sup>21</sup> (the polluted sky of a pestilence, the mourning Jocasta, Amphiarus' quasi-ghost), and creates an effect of *amplificatio* that illuminates the relationship between the miniatures and their narrative contexts. I observe that, in the passages considered, *ater* systematically alludes to poetic models in normative ways,<sup>22</sup> looking back to established and mostly affective meanings of the term in epic language.<sup>23</sup> *niger*, on the other hand, always extends its semantic range to represent a material notion of blackness. I argue that, as a consequence, the *uariatio* with the two terms is mapped onto the tension between formulaic epic language and the opportunities to break and renew its clichés, while also inviting a reflection on the competing practices of imitation and transgression of poetic models. Importantly, moreover, Statius' use of *niger*, while allowing him to reclaim the materiality of the objects that he describes, also fits in the ancient perception of colours as primarily material notions.<sup>24</sup> In the context of the conservative colour aesthetics of the Early Imperial era,<sup>25</sup> Statius' experiments with the semantics of *niger* allow him to revive and renovate poetic colour clichés by linking them to the perceptible reality. While generating ἐνάργεια in the poet's miniature descriptions, Statius' poetics of blackness forces the figurative colour clichés of his models into a conversation with the broader cultural pattern that tied ideas of colour to the material world. In particular, Statius' systematic reappropriation of the materiality of *niger* suggests that the poet is renegotiating the semantics of colour in between the cultural background of ancient colour perception, the shared knowledge of literary clichés, and his own sensitivity to the potential of colour notation for engaging the audience's emotive response.

#### ATER AND NIGER IN LATIN POETRY

Among the variety of Latin words and periphrases that express the idea of 'black', *ater* appears to have been, in mid Republican Latin, the standard word for blackness as

développement, sens figuré, valeur stylistique, circulation', *ANRW* 2.29.1 (Berlin and New York, 1983), 321–441; M. Bradley, *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2009); R.B. Goldman, *Color-Terms in Social and Cultural Context in Ancient Rome* (Piscataway, N.J., 2013); M. Bradley, 'Colours as synaesthetic experience in antiquity', in S. Butler and A. Purves (edd.), *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses* (London and New York, 2014), 127–40.

<sup>20</sup> On the use of rhetorical figures involving repetition and/or symmetry for achieving ἐνάργεια, see Manieri (n. 2), 139. For *uariatio* with colour terms, see André (n. 19), 317–19; Bradley (n. 19 [2009]), 76. Statius' use of *uariatio* with *ater* and *niger* mirrors at the level of language the poet's fondness for dual patterns, for which see, in general, A.-M. Taisne, *L'esthétique de Stace: la peinture des correspondances* (Paris, 1994), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Statius' writing by miniatures (miniaturizing poetic models, producing miniature ἐκφράσεις) is discussed, for example, by Lovatt (n. 17), 73; S. Rebggiani, *The Fragility of Power. Statius, Domitian, and the Politics of the Thebaid* (Oxford, 2018), 207 and Econimo (n. 18).

<sup>22</sup> On 'normative' allusion and its formal character, see, recently, C. Chinn, 'Nec discolor amnis: intertext and aesthetics in Statius' shield of Crenaeus (*Theb.* 9.332–338)', *Phoenix* 64 (2010), 148–69, at 150.

<sup>23</sup> On the figurative meaning of ancient colour terms, see André (n. 19), 43–52; Baran (n. 19), 324–5; J.R. Clarke, 'Colours in conflict: Catullus' use of colour imagery in C. 63', *CQ* 51 (2001), 163–77, at 163.

<sup>24</sup> See Bradley (n. 19 [2009]).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bradley (n. 19 [2009]), 228.

absence of light and opacity, without affective connotations.<sup>26</sup> However, since the first century B.C. and especially with Lucretius, *ater* specialized as a poetic word, developing figurative meanings such as ‘horrid’, ‘terrifying’, ‘mournful’, ‘sad’, with the purely chromatic meaning being eventually effaced.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the adjective was replaced by *niger* in prose and spoken Latin.<sup>28</sup> Attested as early as *ater*, *niger* was initially associated with words implying the idea of splendour, thus indicating a brilliant black; by the Classical period, however, the term became ‘le seul à marquer le noir, dans toute son extension’.<sup>29</sup> Despite being, by this point, mainly a word of the *sermo cotidianus* opposed to the poetic *ater*, *niger* also began to acquire a range of figurative meanings comparable to those of *ater*.<sup>30</sup>

In Latin poetry, Virgil played a major role in establishing *ater* as a poetic word: the term appears seventy-one times in the *Aeneid* and eleven in the *Georgics*.<sup>31</sup> Virgil uses the adjective, often in formulaic line-endings, to qualify themes such as the Underworld,<sup>32</sup> storms and clouds,<sup>33</sup> night and darkness,<sup>34</sup> the Homeric γαῖα μέλαινα and the dust raised by clashing armies,<sup>35</sup> fires<sup>36</sup> and blood:<sup>37</sup> as commentators observe, with several of those themes *ater* often implies more than just colour. Mostly affective, on the other hand, appears to be Virgil’s use of *ater* for personifications,<sup>38</sup> ‘deadly’ or ‘mournful’ animals, or dangerous places.<sup>39</sup>

Occasionally, Virgil stretches well-known images by means of unusual collocations, where *ater* remains suspended between literal and figurative meanings. Such is the case, for example, with the synaesthetic phrase *ater odor* (*Aen.* 12.591), twisting the image of dark flames (here, of a fire set to a beehive) but also graphically alluding to blurred sense perception. At *Aen.* 7.525–6 *atra ... seges*, Virgil intensifies the chromatic oxymoron implied by the image of the crop of weapons<sup>40</sup> through the substitution of

<sup>26</sup> André (n. 19), 43–52.

<sup>27</sup> André (n. 19), 48–51, 362–3.

<sup>28</sup> André (n. 19), 58.

<sup>29</sup> André (n. 19), 54.

<sup>30</sup> André (n. 19), 56.

<sup>31</sup> André (n. 19), 50. *ater* is absent from the *Eclogues*.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. with reference to infernal rivers (as in *G.* 1.243; *Aen.* 9.105 = 10.114; *Aen.* 6.132) or to the infernal kingdom/king (as in *Aen.* 6.127 *atri ianua Ditis*); cf. also the unprecedented collocation *atra silix* (*Aen.* 6.602).

<sup>33</sup> E.g. *G.* 1.236, 1.323 (line-ending formula *imbribus atris*) and *Aen.* 4.248, 10.264 (line-ending formula *nubibus atris*).

<sup>34</sup> E.g. *Aen.* 1.89, 2.360, 4.570, 5.721, 6.272, 6.866.

<sup>35</sup> For the γαῖα μέλαινα, see *atro puluere* (*Aen.* 2.272–3) and *atram* | ... *humum* (*Aen.* 10.730–1); and cf. *Aen.* 4.633 *cinis ater* (the soil of Dido’s homeland and the incinerated body of her nurse). For the dust of the battlefield, see e.g. *Aen.* 9.36, 11.876.

<sup>36</sup> As literally black (clouds of) smoke (*G.* 2.309; *Aen.* 3.572, 8.258, 9.239) or, with *ignis* (*Aen.* 4.384, 8.198, 11.186; cf. *fax*: *Aen.* 9.74, 10.77; see also *Aen.* 5.666 *faucibus*; 7.456 *lumine*), implying the paradoxical notion of ‘dark flames’. For ‘dark flames’ and the Virgilian formula *ignibus atris*, see below.

<sup>37</sup> Either *sanguis* (*G.* 3.221, 3.507–8; *Aen.* 3.28, 3.33, 3.622) or *cruor* (*Aen.* 4.687, 9.333, 11.646) but also *tabum* at *Aen.* 3.626 and 9.472, and, perhaps metonymically, *uulnus* at *Aen.* 9.700.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. *Aen.* 9.719 *atrumque Timorem*; 12.335 *atrae Formidinis*.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. *serpentes* (*G.* 1.129; *Aen.* 4.472); their *ingluuias* (*G.* 3.430–1), *hiatus* (*Aen.* 6.576, of the Hydra) and *uenena* (*G.* 2.130; *Aen.* 2.221); a tiger (*G.* 4.407); the fleece of a sacrificial sheep (*Aen.* 6.249). For ‘deadly’ or ‘sinister’ places, see *Aen.* 1.60 *speluncis ... atris*; 1.240–1 *atris* | *faucibus* (the Underworld’s entrance); 7.565–6 *atrum* | ... *latus nemoris* (= 11.523–4); 9.105 (= 10.114) *atra ... uoragine*.

<sup>40</sup> One of Virgil’s favourite images: see e.g. *Aen.* 3.45–6, 11.601–2, 12.663–4; cf. *G.* 2.142 (without any indication of colour).

*ater* for *ferreus*: in contrast to the shades of yellow evoked by *seges*, *ater* radicalizes the idea of this peculiar 'crop' as disturbingly dark, sinister and ultimately deadly.

Except for those cases in which the term substitutes for a metrically impossible *ater*,<sup>41</sup> Virgil prefers to use *niger* when referring to the perceptible darkness of various objects,<sup>42</sup> sometimes in the context of a colour contrast.<sup>43</sup>

In the first century C.E. the usage of epic poets (with the exception of Silius)<sup>44</sup> reflects the gradual convergence of *ater* and *niger* into a flexible notion of darkness.

Lucan employs *ater* and *niger* fifteen times each: either adjective is used to represent the darkness of funeral pyres,<sup>45</sup> clouds and winds,<sup>46</sup> and the depths of the sea.<sup>47</sup> Wounds dark with clotted blood are *atra* (Luc. 6.750–1 *atraque* ... | *uulnera*), but putrid blood is elsewhere *niger* (Luc. 6.547–8 *nigram* ... *saniem*; 9.772 *nigra tabe*).<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the darkness of night is generally *ater*, perhaps because it is sinister (Luc. 1.579, 3.424, 9.839), while a number of 'objects' actually black are qualified by *niger*.<sup>49</sup>

Valerius Flaccus, using *ater* seventeen times and *niger* fourteen times, describes winds, storms and the like with either *niger* (2.365 *Eurus*; 4.578 *pontus*) or *ater* (1.81–2 *atro* | *aethere*); likewise, for the Homeric γαῖα μέλαινα he has *nigra harena* (6.716, following Verg. *G.* 4.291) but also *atroque in puluere* (6.415). He can use *atris imbribus* (5.176) for the outpouring of putrid blood, or the Virgilian *sanguine atro* (6.708), but also *nigro tabo* (1.815).<sup>50</sup> He has *atra ueste* (3.406) and *nigramque* ... *pallam* (2.106) and, for unearthly creatures, *atraeque* ... *Irae* (2.205) and *niger* ... | *portitor* (1.783, of Charon). With *metus*, Valerius uses *niger* twice (2.45; 4.404) instead of the expected *ater*; on the other hand, he conforms to poetic usage preserving *ater* for 'black fires'<sup>51</sup> and *niger* for black animals (6.111 *agmine nigro*, of dogs; 1.147 *nigro* ... *equo*).<sup>52</sup> When he elaborates on well-known poetic images, Valerius appears to prefer *ater*: the dying Phaethon becomes an *ater globus* (5.430); Apsyrtus, descendant

<sup>41</sup> E.g. *G.* 4.468 *nigra formidine*; *Aen.* 4.514 *nigri* ... *ueneni*; *Aen.* 5.516 *nigra nube*; *Aen.* 7.414 *nigra nocte*; *Aen.* 9.34 *nigro* ... *puluere*; *Aen.* 11.596 *turbine nigro*.

<sup>42</sup> Plants (a number of cases in the *Georgics*; *Aen.* 8.599, 9.381), the soil (cf. *G.* 2.203, 2.255 with *terra*, 3.243, 4.291 with *harena*; also at *Aen.* 9.714), water (cf. *G.* 4.126; *Aen.* 6.238); winds and storms (*G.* 1.320–1, 3.278; *Aen.* 5.696); animals (sheep: *G.* 4.546; *Aen.* 3.120, 5.736, 6.153; *chelydris*: *G.* 2.214; the swallow: *Aen.* 12.473); fire (*Ecl.* 7.50 *adsidua postes fuligine nigri*). In the *Georgics*, see also *niger* with *aëra* (*G.* 1.428), *amurca* (*G.* 1.194), *hebenum* (*G.* 2.116–17), *bitumen* (*G.* 3.451), *limus* (*G.* 4.478).

<sup>43</sup> With *candidus*: *Ecl.* 2.16, *G.* 3.388; with *albus*: *Ecl.* 2.18, *Aen.* 3.120; with *niueus*: *Ecl.* 6.54.

<sup>44</sup> Silius follows Virgil in his preference for *ater*, appearing ninety-six times in the *Punica*, as opposed to *niger* (twenty times).

<sup>45</sup> *ignibus atris* in line-ending: Luc. 2.299, 3.98; *niger*: Luc. 3.505, 6.535–6 (*nigroque* ... *fumo* instead of the metrically impossible *atroque*).

<sup>46</sup> Clouds: Luc. 3.409 (*nubibus atris*, in line-ending), 6.518; winds: Luc. 5.608–9, 9.320.

<sup>47</sup> Luc. 5.564–5 *niger inficit horror* | *terga maris*; 1.547–8 *atra Charybdis* | *sanguineum fundo torsit mare*.

<sup>48</sup> On Luc. 9.772 as a model for Statius, see below; cf. also Luc. 1.615 *diffusum rutilo nigrum pro sanguine uirus*.

<sup>49</sup> See Luc. 1.234 *nigrae* ... *robiginis*; 3.411–12 ... *nigris* | *fontibus*; 4.310 *nigro* ... *limo*; 9.930 *nigris* ... *medullis*; cf. also 10.303 *nigris* ... *colonis* (of the skin colour).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ov. *Met.* 2.760–1 *inuidiae nigro squalentia tabo* | *tecta*, rewriting Verg. *Aen.* 3.626 *atro cum membra fluentia tabo*.

<sup>51</sup> Val. Fl. 2.236 *ignibus*, in line ending; 3.96 *faces*; 7.572 *atros* ... *fluctus*; but cf. 2.332 *nigris* ... *iugis*, of rocks blackened by the effects of volcanic eruptions.

<sup>52</sup> For *agmine nigro*, cf. Enn. *Ann.* 187 V<sup>2</sup> *it nigrum campis agmen* (of elephants) and Verg. *Aen.* 4.404 (of ants); for *nigro* ... *equo*, cf. Soph. *Trach.* 838 and Ov. *Met.* 12.402.

of the Sun, rides black horses (6.522–3 *atris ... equis*);<sup>53</sup> and the Harpies' squalid filth is represented through the unusual collocation *unguibus ... atris* (4.457).<sup>54</sup> At 3.499–500 *uiden Arctoo de cardine quanta | tollat se nubes atque aequore pendeat atro?*, Valerius creates a surprise effect by transferring the colour term: instead of being used to describe a powerful agent looming over the battlefield like a cloud,<sup>55</sup> *ater* modifies *aequore*, suggesting that the blackness has been displaced onto the battlefield itself.

Credited by Bradley as the first poet who creatively handles the transferability of colour terms,<sup>56</sup> Statius uses *ater* forty times and *niger* forty-three times in the *Thebaid* alone,<sup>57</sup> often clustering the two adjectives with other terms for obscurity and gloom. Both *ater* and *niger* are used for sacrificial victims,<sup>58</sup> for Underworld dwellers and places,<sup>59</sup> for the darkness of night (or of night-like conditions)<sup>60</sup> and of clouds.<sup>61</sup> Occasionally, however, Statius' use of *ater* seems to point to the affective meaning of the adjective. For example, rain-producing stars (*Theb.* 9.461 *Oriona*), stormy winds (*Theb.* 5.705 *Auster*; 8.411 *Boreas*) and the Ocean battered by them (*Theb.* 1.686–7) are all qualified by *niger*; however, at *Theb.* 3.122–3 *ceu nulla prius lamenta nec atri | manassent imbres*, the metaphorical 'rainfall of tears' (and the only instance of *ater* being associated with this theme in the *Thebaid*) encourages us to attach a figurative meaning to the colour term. Describing the 'black uproar' rising from the haunted field near Cape Taenarum, *Theb.* 2.51 *stridor ibi et gemitus poenarum, atroque tumultu | feruet ager* appears to recall *Aen.* 2.486 *at domus interior gemitu miseroque tumultu*,<sup>62</sup> with Statius' *atroque* glossing Virgil's *miseroque* and echoing the sense of 'grievous', 'distressing' and 'terrifying' from the Virgilian adjective. As a counterpart to the *ater tumultus* of Cape Taenarum, *Theb.* 1.368 *per nigra silentia* describes the deep silence<sup>63</sup> of the stormy night through which Polynices is lost on his way to Argos. In the two phrases, a visual element (darkness) is associated with auditory perceptions (or the lack thereof) to create a powerful synaesthesia: while the structural parallelism strengthens the impression that Statius uses *ater* and *niger* as interchangeable, the Virgilian model of *Theb.* 2.51 makes us wonder whether the poet is drawing our attention to the competition between the affective meaning of *ater* and the material connotations of *niger*.

The tension between the figurative and conventional meanings of *ater* and the transgressive materiality evoked by *niger* comes to the fore when the two terms are

<sup>53</sup> For the paradox of dark solar horses, cf. Prop. 2.15.32 *nigros sol agitabat equos*; 3.5.34 *solis et atratis luxerit orbis equis*.

<sup>54</sup> In *uariatio* with the description of the Harpies as a *niger ... nimbus* (Val. Fl. 4.451–2).

<sup>55</sup> As it is said, for example, of Hector in Hom. *Il.* 17.243 and of Hannibal in Sil. *Pun.* 5.379; cf. also the god Mars in Valerius' own passage.

<sup>56</sup> Bradley (n. 19 [2009]), 204.

<sup>57</sup> In the *Siluae*, *ater* occurs seven times and *niger* six; the unfinished *Achilleid* has one instance of each adjective.

<sup>58</sup> *Theb.* 6.87 *atra piacula*; 4.445–6 *armentaque ... | atra*; but 1.506–7 *nigri greges*.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. *Theb.* 4.521–2 *nigra flumina* but 7.782–3 *atra flumina*; 6.375 *nigrae Sorores* (the Parcae) but 11.75 *atra soror* (Megaera).

<sup>60</sup> *nox atra* (*Theb.* 1.346, 2.153, 7.454, 8.691), but note also *Theb.* 3.415–16 *nox ... | nigroque polos inuoluit amictu*; 5.152–3 *lucis ... | ... niger ipse*; 12.233–4 *memorumque arcana (sereno | nigra die)*; cf. also 12.254 *nigrales ... tenebras*.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. *Theb.* 1.464 *nubibus atris*, 2.106 *nigra sub nube*; cf. the discussion below.

<sup>62</sup> See K. Gervais, *Statius, Thebaid 2. Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford, 2017), 80.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. S. Briguglio, *Fraternas acies. Saggio di commento a Stazio, Tebaide 1, 1–389* (Alessandria, 2017).

juxtaposed in *uariatio*. In such cases, *ater* tends to occupy the metrically convenient line-ending,<sup>64</sup> is part of formulaic expressions, and its usage finds parallels in Latin poetry. By contrast, *niger* is generally positioned with greater freedom in the hexameter and tends to exceed both its normal semantic range and its attested poetic usages. While the repetition of colour details determined by the *uariatio* adds to the pictorial vividness of the poet's miniatures, the juxtaposed adjectives invite us to contrast figurative with material darkness, conventional epic language with the poet's linguistic experiments, the repetition with the transgression of normative poetic gestures. Structured through the rhetorical device of *uariatio*, Statius' use of colour terms thus achieves ἐνάργεια while offering a complex commentary on pictorial vividness in Latin poetry.

### MONSTROUS DARKNESS

In our first example, the ἐνάργεια achieved by juxtaposing *ater* and *niger* not only makes a specific image conspicuous for the reader's mental eye but has also larger thematic implications regarding the entire episode of Linus and Coroebus.

At *Theb.* 1.645–8, Coroebus claims responsibility for slaying the monster sent by Apollo to avenge the death of Psamathe and her son Linus:

ego sum qui caede subegi,  
Phoebe, tuum mortale nefas, quem nubibus atris  
et squalente die, nigra quem tabe sinistri  
quaeris, inique, poli.

Coroebus refers to the pestilence that devastates Argos by emphatically clustering words that evoke gloominess (646–7 *atris* | ... *squalente* ... *nigra*): Coroebus' speech invites us to visualize the translucent squalor of an infectious daylight, overpowered by concurrent forms of darkness. The accumulation of chromatic details creates ἐνάργεια at a pivotal and original narrative juncture, with the hero confronting 'face to face' Apollo in the form of his cult statue.<sup>65</sup>

The epic and formulaic phrase *nubibus atris* (646, in line-ending) translates the Homeric cliché of a νεφέλη μέλαινα/κυανέη alluding to both the 'caliginous' and the 'mournful' nature of the pestilential clouds.<sup>66</sup> As it evokes the material obscurity of the clouds, *ater* glances at poetic representations of the cause of the plague, that is, the gathering in the affected place of diseased air, frequently represented as a thick and gloomy atmosphere.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, the formula *nubibus atris* also echoes the use of emotive *ater* in association with a noun for 'plague'.<sup>68</sup> *nigra* ... *tabe* (647), on

<sup>64</sup> For the metrical convenience of *ater* at line-ending, see André (n. 19), 268–9.

<sup>65</sup> Coroebus' act of self-offering is a Statian innovation: see G. Aricò, *Ricerche staziane* (Palermo, 1972), 83–4; C. McNelis, *Statius' Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War* (Oxford, 2007), 33. On the accumulation of details in this passage, see Taisne (n. 20), 246 and n. 31.

<sup>66</sup> For *ater* applied to clouds and for the formula *nubibus atris*, see André (n. 19), 49, 368; for the Homeric cliché, see Irwin (n. 19), 88–9.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. Sen. *Oed.* 47 *grauis et ater incubat terris uapor*; Sil. *Pun.* 14.594 *ater picea uapor expirabat in aethra*; cf. also Ov. *Met.* 7.528–9; Luc. 6.89–90. For the idea that virulent contagions originate from the clouds above or the putrid earth below, see e.g. Lucr. 6.1097–101; Verg. *G.* 3.478–9; Stat. *Theb.* 2.274–5.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Sen. *Oed.* 166 *atra Mors* (caused by the Theban pestilence), 1060 *atra Pestis*; Sil. *Pun.* 7.356 *lues agit atra*, 14.613–15 *Acherusia pestis ... fert atra laborem*.



the other hand, is a rare phrase built around a word uncommon in Latin epic.<sup>69</sup> Statius is fond of using *tabes* and related words in a literal sense<sup>70</sup> that suggests decay by liquefaction into putrid matter.<sup>71</sup> At *Theb.* 1.647, *tabes* can be primarily understood as a literal reference to the rain as a ‘liquefaction of clouds’, following Lucr. 1.806 *ut tabe nimborum arbusta uacillent*. It is *niger* that, in Statius’ line, reinforces the material connotations of the noun and the visual impact of the image as a whole: on the one hand, the combination of *tabes* with *nigra* reminds us that poetic storms are often dark and squalid, sometimes pouring down like ‘black rivers’;<sup>72</sup> on the other hand, the colour term evokes other disturbing meanings of the noun, such as ‘rotten blood’ and ‘poisonous exundation’, familiar from other usages of *tabes* in the *Thebaid* and notably associated with *ater* in previous poetic occurrences.<sup>73</sup> In the context of Coroebus’ miniature description of the plague, then, *nigra tabe* is used to transform the ‘black rain’ pouring down from a malignant sky into a ‘rain of gore’,<sup>74</sup> contaminating well-known poetic clichés in order to craft a new and effective mental vision of the mortal disease.

The visualization of the Argive plague as a rain of gore is prepared and encouraged by Statius’ insistence, throughout the episode, on the blood of victims (Linus at *Theb.* 1.589–90; Poine’s victims at *Theb.* 1.618, 1.636) and on the bloodshed caused by the various monsters.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the tainted rain of the contagion contributes a significant detail to the reading of Coroebus’ aition as a miniature of Oedipus’ story,<sup>76</sup> replicating, for the Argive pestilence, themes used to represent the Theban pestilence. Blackness, for example, is a dominant theme in Seneca’s description of the Theban plague,<sup>77</sup> while in Sophocles the pollution caused by Oedipus’ crime buffets Thebes like a storm, procuring the deadly contagion: ἀνδρῆλατοῦντας, ἢ φόνῳ φόνον πάλιν | λύοντας, ὡς τόδ’ αἰμά χειμάζον πάλιν (Soph. *OT* 100–1). Statius’ *nigra tabe* thus glances back to several conventional images without repeating any of them but combining them all in a new picture of major visual impact. Introduced in terms of normative epic language (*nubibus atris*), the pestilence is then described with words exceeding such a norm: the allusive use of *niger* allows the putrid rain of the contagion to materialize in front of the reader’s eyes with enhanced pictorial vividness.

<sup>69</sup> *nigra tabes* only appears elsewhere in Luc. 9.772 *nigra destillant inguina tabe*. On the rarity of *tabes* in Latin poetry, see A. Estèves, ‘Color épique et color tragique dans la “Thébaïde” de Stace: récits de “néfas” et stratégies narratives (VIII, 751–765 et XI, 524–579)’, *Latomus* 64 (2005), 96–120, at 108 n. 52.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gervais (n. 62), 65.

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. *Theb.* 8.760–1 *ecce illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri | aspicit*.

<sup>72</sup> See e.g. the squalid storms of Lucretius (4.169, 6.253–9) and Virgil (*G.* 1.320–4). For torrential black downpours, see e.g. Lucr. 6.256–7 *niger ... nimbus, | ut picis e caelo demissum flumen*; Verg. *Aen.* 5.695–6 *ruit aethere toto | turbidus imber aqua densisque nigerrimus Austris*; Sil. *Pun.* 12.619–21.

<sup>73</sup> *OLD* s.v. 3a (‘rotten blood’), 3c (‘poisonous exundation’). For *ater* as the colour of putrid blood (especially *sanguis ater* or *tabum atrum*), see André (n. 19), 48–63; Baran (n. 19), 339, 344. *niger*, however, is associated with putrefaction in a plague at least since Lucr. 6.1200–1 *ulceribus taetris et nigra proluuie alui | posterius tamen nunc tabes letumque manebat*; see also Sen. *Oed.* 189–90 *stillatque niger naris aduncae | cruor* (of the Theban pestilence).

<sup>74</sup> On the rain of blood as a literary topos and a ‘standard ingredient in portents’, see G. Schmeling, *A Commentary on the Satyrice of Petronius* (Oxford and New York, 2011), 461.

<sup>75</sup> On which, see Taisne (n. 20), 246 and n. 32.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. D.T.W.C. Vessey, *Statius & the Thebaid* (Cambridge, 1973), 106; F. Ahl, ‘Statius’ *Thebaid*: a reconsideration’, *ANRW* 2.32.5 (Berlin and New York, 1986), 2804–912, at 2824.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Sen. *Oed.* 29–79, especially 44–5 *obscura caelo labitur Phoebi soror, | tristisque mundus nubilo pallet nouo*; 47–9 *grauis et ater incubat terris uapor | obtexit arces caelitem ac summas domos | inferna facies*.

While reflecting, in general, 'the polluting invasion of Death's disruptive force'<sup>78</sup> throughout the *Thebaid*, the accumulation of colour details also discloses the thematic importance of darkness in Adrastus' tale: a prominent feature of the narrative that precedes the aition of Linus and Coroebus,<sup>79</sup> darkness establishes internal links and structures the representation of monstrosity throughout the episode.

Darkness is, in the first place, a feature of the primeval monster, Python (*Theb.* 1.562–9):

postquam caerulei sinuosa uolumina monstri  
 terrigenam Pythona, deus, septem orbibus atris  
 amplexum Delphos squamisque annosa terentem  
 robora, Castaliis dum fontibus ore trisulco  
 fusus hiat nigro sitiens alimenta ueneno,  
 perculit, absumptis numerosa in uulnera telis,  
 Cirrhaeique dedit centum per iugera campi  
 uix tandem explicitum, ...

The opening of the aition is dominated, both visually and grammatically, by the image of the mythical snake: while Statius condenses in a little more than two lines Apollo's destruction of the dragon (1.567–9), the description of Python himself stretches, with abundance of visual details, over four lines, between *deus* (1.563) and *perculit* (1.567). Moreover, the miniature description of Python is opened by the Ennian *caeruleus*, a hyper-epic adjective that establishes the colour theme of the episode by evoking a problematic and elusive shade of darkness.<sup>80</sup> The dragon's unstable and visually deceptive darkness is then further defined and possibly complicated by another use in *uariatio* of *ater* (1.563) for the snake's monstrous body and of the 'Ovidian' *niger* (1.566) for its poison.<sup>81</sup>

Darkness, however, is a consistent feature of monstrosity in Adrastus' narrative. First, in order to avenge Psamathe's 'black' death (*Theb.* 1.595–6 *atro ... leto*), Apollo summons the monstrous Poine, another *dira lues* (*Theb.* 1.601) following the venomous dragon Python and preceding the infection of the plague. As observed by Alison Keith,<sup>82</sup> Poine is, in general, described with the language of gore and contagion; in particular, her forehead is *ferruginea* (*Theb.* 1.600), and she is also black by implication because she rises from the Underworld.<sup>83</sup> The death of Poine at

<sup>78</sup> D. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford, 1991), 381.

<sup>79</sup> See Ahl (n. 76), 2852.

<sup>80</sup> *caeruleus* is now generally understood as a peculiar shade of blue, dark (Bradley [n. 19], 9–11) and mutable (see e.g. E. Romano, 'Il lessico latino dei colori: il punto della situazione', in S. Beta and M.M. Sassi [edd.], *I colori nel mondo antico. Esperienze linguistiche e quadri simbolici* [Fiesole, 2003], 41–53, at 51–3). On *caeruleus* as a normative epic adjective, see André (n. 19), 166, 360; Bradley (n. 19 [2009]), 10 n. 50.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. *Ov. Met.* 1.444 *effuso per uulnera nigra ueneno*. On Statius' Ovidian intertext, see McNelis (n. 65), 29–30; A. Keith, 'Medusa, Python, and Poine in Argive religious ritual', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2013), 303–17, at 308–10; for a full list of verbal echoes between *Ov. Met.* 1.436–44 and *Theb.* 1.562–71, see now K. Gervais, 'Parent-child conflict in the *Thebaid*', in W.J. Dominik, C.E. Newlands, K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden, 2015), 221–39, at 222 n. 5.

<sup>82</sup> Keith (n. 81), 313.

<sup>83</sup> Lactantius glosses *ferruginea* as *nigra*; on the adjective as linking Poine to the Underworld, see André (n. 19), 109–10. For Poine's infernal origin, see *Theb.* 1.597–8 and cf. Taisne (n. 20), 245; McNelis (n. 65), 36. For the conventional blackness of the Underworld, see e.g. André (n. 19), 47, 341–2.

Coroebus' hand cannot but generate further darkness, in the form of a pestilence that, as we have seen, is both deadly and hideous in its material appearance. While a persistent darkness links all the monsters appearing in the aition, the precise verbal echo created by the *uariatio* with *ater/niger* establishes a specific connection between Python and the pestilence, and between the beginning and the end of the tale. As a consequence, the pollution caused by the plague can be read as a repetition of the primeval infection caused by the dragon,<sup>84</sup> as the far-reaching result of the dragon's power in generating grief and doom,<sup>85</sup> and as a reflection of the dark and vengeful side of Apollo's divinity.<sup>86</sup> While the circular vocabulary of darkness employed in Adrastus' tale mirrors the circularity of the narrative,<sup>87</sup> darkness itself becomes the marker of Apollo-related monstrosity, and disturbingly ties together the myth of Apollo's cosmogonic victory over Python with the god's own action as source of death and disorder. Far from being purely decorative, colour notation in the miniature of Apollo's cosmogonic triumph contributes in crucial ways to shape Adrastus' narrative as a tale of unending divine violence.

#### FEMALE DARKNESS

Darkness also dominates the miniature of Jocasta at the Argive camp in *Theb.* 7.474–8:

ecce truces oculos sordentibus obsita canis  
 exangues Iocasta genas et brachia planctu  
 nigra ferens ramumque oleae cum uelleris atri  
 nexibus, Eumenidum uelut antiquissima, portis  
 egreditur magna cum maiestate malorum.

The ἐνώπεια of Jocasta's Fury-like epiphany<sup>88</sup> is achieved through a combination of absence of colour (*Theb.* 7.475 *exangues ... genas*), faded whiteness (*Theb.* 7.474 *sordentibus ... canis*) and blackness (*Theb.* 7.476 *nigra ... atri*, surrounding the line).

Jocasta's mournful olive branch entwined with strands of black wool (*Theb.* 7.476–7) resonates with multiple literary echoes. While fillets in epic are often white, the phrase *uelleris atri* suggests that the colour of Jocasta's ornament is inspired by the darkness of Virgilian and Ovidian sacrificial victims: respectively, a lamb offered by Aeneas to the Night, mother of the Eumenides, ahead of his descent to the Underworld (Verg. *Aen.* 6.249–51 *ipse atri uelleris agnam | Aeneas ... | ense ferit*), and the victim of an offering

<sup>84</sup> The description of Python as *caeruleus* might also be read as anticipating the last, 'rainy', monster, given the association of *caeruleus* in Latin with rain, water and the sea: see Bradley (n. 19 [2009]), 10 n. 43; Bradley (n. 19 [2014]), 132; Sassi (n. 19), 268.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Gervais (n. 81), 222; Taisne (n. 20), 262–3.

<sup>86</sup> On Apollo as creator of monsters in the aition, see e.g. Ahl (n. 76), 2854; Keith (n. 81), 315; H. Lovatt, 'Following after Valerius: Argonautic imagery in the *Thebaid*', in W.J. Dominik, C.E. Newlands, K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden, 2015), 408–24, at 418, comparing the god to a 'malignly creative poet figure'.

<sup>87</sup> On the circular narrative of the aition, see Ahl (n. 76), 2853; McNelis (n. 65), 32, 36; Rebergiani (n. 21), 215.

<sup>88</sup> On Jocasta as a Fury, see e.g. A. Keith, *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic* (Cambridge, 2000), 96; A. Augoustakis, *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2010), 62–4; J.S. Dietrich, 'Dead woman walking: Jocasta in the *Thebaid*', in W.J. Dominik, C.E. Newlands and K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden, 2015), 307–21, at 308.

made by Medea (Ov. *Met.* 7.244–5 *sacra facit cultrosque in guttura uelleris atrī | conicit*).<sup>89</sup> Through the memory of these Latin precedents, the wool bands of suppliant Jocasta acquire unusual infernal connections. Moreover, Jocasta's black fillets remind the reader of Euripides' Jocasta who wears black clothes as a sign of proleptic mourning.<sup>90</sup> Once more ending the line, *ater* looks back again to normative poetic language and imagery, while also anticipating the poet's focus on Jocasta's emotions later in the poem.<sup>91</sup>

In the unparalleled *bracchia nigra*, on the other hand, the colour term substitutes for commoner *liueo* and its derivatives in describing the bluish-black colour of the self-beaten skin during the pre-emptive *planctus* that expresses Jocasta's grief for the imminent duel opposing her sons.<sup>92</sup> Once again, the meaning of *niger* stretches beyond poetic usage, restoring the dramatic detail of the livid skin to a full sense of colour.<sup>93</sup> Thrown into relief by its initial position and by the hyperbaton and enjambement that distance it from *bracchia*, the colour term alerts us to the intratextual and intertextual resonances of Jocasta's intensified blackness. On the one hand, hideous mourning is the queen's distinguishing feature from early in Statius' poem;<sup>94</sup> on the other hand, her *nigra bracchia* connect her to Lucan's grieving mothers in the second book of the *Bellum Ciuile*. Like Jocasta, Lucan's mothers are in mourning before the Civil War begins and one of them, described as *madentis | scissa genas, planctu liuentis atra lacertos* (Luc. 2.36–7),<sup>95</sup> closely anticipates the aspect of Jocasta in the *Thebaid*. While Lucan relies on the normative and alliterative *liuentis lacertos* for describing the woman's bruised arms, his use of *atra* has been interpreted as a reference to the psychological desolation of the *matrona*, mirroring the desolation of the entire city.<sup>96</sup> With Lucan's line in the background, Statius' preference for *niger* over normative words for 'livid' makes the darkness of Jocasta's arms more immediately conspicuous for the reader's mental eye. Literally making Jocasta's bruises darker, *niger* suggests a peak of self-inflicted brutality and emphasizes the physical outcome of Jocasta's sorrow: her violently blackened skin continues the darkness of her fillets and functions almost as a substitute for the (Euripidean) mourning robe. Through the startling detail of her

<sup>89</sup> For these parallels, see J.J.L. Smolenaars, *Statius Thebaid 7: A Commentary* (Leiden, 1994), 222–3.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 324–6, possibly a rare verbal memory from Euripides' tragedy (cf. Vessey [n. 76], 274). On the relevance of Euripides' *Phoenissae* for Statius' treatment of Jocasta, see e.g. J.J.L. Smolenaars, 'Statius' *Thebaid* 1.72: is Jocasta dead or alive? The tradition of Jocasta's suicide in Greek and Roman drama and in Statius' *Thebaid*', in J.J.L. Smolenaars, H.-J. Van Dam and R.R. Nauta (edd.), *The Poetry of Statius* (Leiden, 2008), 215–37.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Theb.* 11.170–1 *non si atra parens, miseraeque sorores | in media arma cadant* (where the colour term is paired with *miserae* to describe an emotional state); *Theb.* 11.461–2.

<sup>92</sup> On the normative colour of self-beaten skin, see André (n. 19), 172–3; J.R. Clarke, *Imagery of Colour and Shining in Catullus, Propertius, and Horace* (New York, 2001), 94; in Statius, see e.g. *Theb.* 6.133–4 *sustentant liuida nati | bracchia* (Hypsipile); *Ach.* 1.132 *nunc planctu liuere manus* (Thetis). For *bracchia nigra* as an unparalleled phrase, see Smolenaars (n. 89), 410; however, cf. *Silu.* 2.6.82–3 *non saeuus atros | nigrasset planctu genatrix tibi salua lacertos*, with C. Newlands, *Statius Siluae Book II* (Cambridge, 2011), 220.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Clarke (n. 92), 94 on *liueo* gradually losing its sense of colour owing to cliché use for bruised skin.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. e.g. *Theb.* 2.440–1.

<sup>95</sup> For Lucanian elements in Statius' Jocasta, see Dietrich (n. 88), 309.

<sup>96</sup> See D. Gagliardi, 'Ater in Lucano (per lo studio della lingua della *Pharsalia*)', *SIFC* 4 (1986), 64–7.

beaten arms, then, Statius' queen impacts the reader as a literal embodiment of motherly grief.<sup>97</sup>

As in Coroebus' aition, moreover, the visual vividness of the queen's figure has larger narrative implications. 'Black' Jocasta shows up at dawn,<sup>98</sup> emerging from the obscurity of Thebes' last night before the outbreak of war: while accompanied by daylight, at once awaited and feared by the Thebans, the mournful queen protracts the desolated darkness of the city into the following day.<sup>99</sup> The queen's epiphany, moreover, can be read as Statius' response to the authorial comment that opened the narrative of the last night of Thebes: *quis queat attonitas dictis ostendere Thebas?* (*Theb.* 7.452). The rhetorical question challenges the poet's ability to make the Thebans' anguish (*attonitas ... Thebas*) 'visible' for the reader: as observed by Smolenaars, the unparalleled phrase *ostendere dictis* introduces in this authorial address a reference to the concept of ἐνόργεια.<sup>100</sup> In particular, Statius' phrasing reminds us of Quintilian's terminology, as the verb *ostendere* appears in several passages of the *Institutio Oratoria* to define the enhanced vividness of descriptions characterized by ἐνόργεια.<sup>101</sup> We may thus suggest that Statius' choice of rhetorical vocabulary at the beginning of this particular narrative segment reasserts the central role of pictorial vividness in poetic descriptions of emotions. Embodying the grief of an entire city, carrying such grief into the new day, and with her epiphany concluding the narrative of the last night of Thebes before war, Jocasta's appearance functions as an immediate specimen of the poet's ability to turn emotional subjects into vivid pieces of poetic narration. Once more, Statius' poetics of blackness endows a miniature description with ἐνόργεια, catching the reader's eye and opening up the text to a dense intertextual reading as the poetic tradition is remembered, challenged and surpassed through the use of colour terms.

### GHOSTLY DARKNESS

When the Argive seer Amphiaras abruptly enters the Underworld, swallowed up by the earth before the walls of Thebes, his lack of blackness startles the myriads of the dead (*Theb.* 8.4–8):

horror habet cunctos, Stygiis mirantur in oris  
tela et equos corpusque nouum; nec enim ignibus atris<sup>102</sup>

<sup>97</sup> On Jocasta's awareness of her Fury-like appearance, see e.g. *Theb.* 11.339–40 *stabo ipso in limine portae | auspiciū infelix scelorumque inmanis imago*; cf. also E. Manolaraki, "Consider the image of Thebes": celestial and poetic auspicy in the *Thebaid*, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2013), 89–107, at 99.

<sup>98</sup> *Theb.* 7.470–3. Dawn is here a functional detail introduced by Statius to reinforce the choice of having Jocasta alive this late in the plot: see Smolenaars (n. 89), 218; cf. also Dietrich (n. 88), 307.

<sup>99</sup> For the desolation of Thebes' last night, see *Theb.* 7.453–9; on the Thebans' fear and desire of a new day, see *Theb.* 7.465 *lucemque timent lucemque precantur*.

<sup>100</sup> See Smolenaars (n. 89), 203.

<sup>101</sup> See Quintilian's passages collected above. On *ostendere* as a keyword in discussions of *evidentia*, see B.F. Scholz, "Sub oculos subiectio": Quintilian on *ekphrasis* and *enargeia*, in V. Robillard and B. F. Scholz (edd.), *Pictures into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam, 1998), 73–99, at 78.

<sup>102</sup> I follow Hill's choice of *atris* instead of *artus*: cf. D.E. Hill (ed.), *P. Papini Stati Thebaidos Libri XII* (Leiden, 1996<sup>2</sup>); for the reading *atris*, see also M. Dewar, 'Review of R. Lesueur (ed. transl.), *Stace, Thébaïde, Livres V–VIII. Texte établi et traduit* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1991)', *CR* 42 (1992),

conditus aut maesta niger aduentabat ab urna,  
sed belli sudore calens, clipeumque cruentis  
roribus et scissi respersus puluere campi.

To honour his priest Amphiarus, Apollo decides to spare him from being killed by human hands, sending him to the Underworld while still alive.<sup>103</sup> Amphiarus' intact body as he enters the Underworld is a scandal (5 *corpus nouum*): sprinkled with red blood (7–8 *cruentis* | *roribus* ... *respersus*) and hot with sweat (7 *belli sudore calens*), it fails to conform, in general, to the Underworld's dominant colour.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, the seer non-corpse signals that he has not received the funeral rites required in order to be admitted into the Underworld. Key among the unfulfilled ritual actions is the burning of the corpse on the funeral pyre:<sup>105</sup> Amphiarus' lack of blackness signals that the seer's body also fails to display the colour of a regular corpse. The burning of the corpse on the pyre is, in Statius' text, referred to through the cliché of the 'black fires' and of the formula *ignibus atris*, first attested in Virgil,<sup>106</sup> *Aen.* 11.185–7 *huc corpora quisque suorum | more tulere patrum, subiectis ignibus atris | conditur in tenebras altum caligine caelum*. While imitating Virgil's placement of the formula in line-ending, and reprising the rhythm generated by ensuing *condere*, Statius also 'corrects' Virgil's surprising representation of the pyre (*Aen.* 11.187). By choosing to accompany *conditur* ... *caelum* with the prepositional phrase *in tenebras*, and by pairing this phrase with *subiectis ignibus atris*, Virgil creates a paradoxical image in which the shooting up of murky fires is combined with the downward movement of the sky being engulfed in smoke.<sup>107</sup> In the *Thebaid*'s lines, on the other hand, *condere* is restored to the more usual construction with the ablative, frequent when the verb means 'bury': instead of the expected word for 'tomb', however, Statius surprises the reader by placing in the ablative the black fires.<sup>108</sup> Statius' 'mistaken' association of *condere* with the pyre is further emphasized by the displacement of a more appropriate referent for the verb in the following line (*Theb.* 8.6 *maesta ... ab urna*),<sup>109</sup> a lexical imprecision that mirrors, at the level of language, the ritual inappropriateness of Amphiarus' descent. Moreover, as Virgil's lines belong to the account of the normative epic funerals performed by Trojans and Latins during the truce in *Aeneid* Book 11,<sup>110</sup> Statius' close verbal imitation and the reuse of the formula *ignibus atris* further emphasize Amphiarus' failure to be honoured with a proper epic and heroic burial.<sup>111</sup>

194; R. Nau, 'A note on Statius *Thebaid* 8.5', *CQ* 59 (2009), 664–5 and A. Augoustakis, *Statius, Thebaid* 8. *Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford, 2016). *artus*, a plural accusative of respect attached to *conditus*, is recorded by the majority of the manuscripts and printed by most of the modern editors (see the full discussion in Augoustakis [this note], 63–4).

<sup>103</sup> See *Theb.* 7.691–8, 7.775–7.

<sup>104</sup> On 'black' as a cliché colour for the Underworld, see above. On Amphiarus' inappropriate physicality, see M. Masterson, 'Statius' "Thebaid" and the realization of Roman manhood', *Phoenix* 59 (2005), 288–315, at 309.

<sup>105</sup> For a list of the unfulfilled rites, see *Theb.* 8.9–13, with Augoustakis (n. 102), 61–3; cf. also J.M. Seo, *Exemplary Traits. Reading Characterization in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 2013), 165.

<sup>106</sup> André (n. 19), 369.

<sup>107</sup> See *TLL* 4.149.44–7 for the meaning of *condere* with *in* and the accusative.

<sup>108</sup> For Statius' conflation of pyre and burial here, see Nau (n. 102), 665; Augoustakis (n. 102), 63–4.

<sup>109</sup> *maesta* further echoes the Virgilian intertext, where *ignibus atris* is glossed by *maestum ignem* at *Aen.* 11.189.

<sup>110</sup> See N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 11. A Commentary* (Leiden, 2003), 145–55.

<sup>111</sup> For Amphiarus' disappointment in having been denied a heroic funeral, see *Theb.* 8.111–15.

As for the use of *niger* in this passage, a close look at Statius' lines reveals that the meaning of the adjective is, once more, stretched to express an unusual and vivid (lack of) blackness. *niger* in the sense of *adustus* ('black because consumed by the fire') is a Statian innovation, used only twice by the poet with reference to inanimate items.<sup>112</sup> The image of the scorched and blackened body, on the other hand, has a precedent in Valerius' description of Phaethon in *Argonautica* 5.430 *ater et Eridani trepidum globus ibat in amnem*.<sup>113</sup> Valerius' choice of a colour term is significant, as, for example, both Ovid and Statius, when describing Phaethon's demise, embed the idea of darkness in the participle *fumans*, focussing more on a detail of the main process (the burning of Phaethon) rather than on the visible consequences of that process on the character's body.<sup>114</sup> Valerius, however, is 'watching' Phaethon's story as part of the reliefs on the door of Apollo's temple: not only, in the context of an ἔκφρασις, making the colour detail explicit gives vividness to the image of the dying Phaethon, but the entire phrase *ater globus* pictorially summarizes the Ovidian image of Phaethon falling as a comet-like fireball that consumes and blackens at once the boy's body and the chariot of the sun.<sup>115</sup> While the Ovidian-Valerian Phaethon falls through the air like a burning comet, Valerius' selection of *ater* for the image brings us back to the Virgilian paradox of the 'black fires'. In depicting Amphiarus' strange, non-charred body, Statius exploits the *uariatio* with *ater* and *niger* to provide an articulate response to Valerius' description of Phaethon as an *ater globus*. *ater*, Valerius' own innovation, is restored by Statius to the normative expression *ignibus atris*, also a reference to the paradoxical and yet conventional image of the black fires implied in Valerius' image. On the other hand, while repeating Valerius' gesture of focussing on colour to create ekphrastic vividness, Statius' *niger* carries the inventiveness of the model a step forward by subtracting, instead of adding, a crucial colour detail to the image, thus defying the reader's ekphrastic expectations. In Amphiarus' case, it is the absence of colour that makes the image vivid: depending on his visual inappropriateness, on his multi-coloured, un-blackened living body, the ἐνόργεια of Amphiarus' miniature foregrounds the poet's success in capturing his character's unique transition into the world of the ghosts.

## CONCLUSION

Exploring Statius' use of colour terms has taken us into the poet's stylistic laboratory as he polishes the instruments of his ekphrastic technique. I have identified one specific stylistic feature (the use of colour terms in *uariatio*) and I have discussed how this stylistic feature is used by Statius for achieving ἐνόργεια as an artistic effect but also to reflect on ἐνόργεια as an instrument for challenging poetic models. Moreover, I have suggested that, through the use of authorial comments, Statius explicitly ties his poetic practice to contemporary rhetorical discussions of ἐνόργεια. Colour terminology, to conclude, proves to be an essential tool through which the poet makes textual

<sup>112</sup> Cf. *Theb.* 10.929 *et clipei niger umbo cadit* (Capaneus' shield) and 12.424–5 *hic tenuem nigris etiamnum adiuuere lucem | roboribus* (the logs of Eteocles' pyre).

<sup>113</sup> Michael Dewar *per litteras* kindly drew my attention to this parallel.

<sup>114</sup> See *Ov. Met.* 2.324 *excipit Eridanus fumantiaque abluit ora*; *Stat. Theb.* 12.413–14 *Phaethonta sorores | fumantem lauere Pado*.

<sup>115</sup> On Phaethon falling as a comet, see F. Spaltenstein, *Commentaire des Argonautica de Valérius Flaccus* (livres 3, 4, et 5) (Brussels, 2004), 500, quoting *Ov. Met.* 2.319–22.

descriptions visible to the audience's mental eye. Moreover, in terms of intratextual relationships, the vividness achieved through the use of colour terms invites the reader to visualize themes (for example black monstrosity) that connect the single episode to the rest of the poem; finally, the ἐνόργεια achieved through the experimentation with colour terms alerts the reader about Statius' engagement with its poetic past and signals his response to contemporary rhetorical theory. As it is appropriate to a poet imbued of a dense and refined literary culture, Statius' ἐνόργεια not only engages the audience through visual and emotive gratification; it also gratifies the readers by soliciting their awareness of common cultural patterns and of literary and rhetorical knowledge.

*University of Toronto Mississauga*

LORENZA BENNARDO  
[lorenza.bennardo@utoronto.ca](mailto:lorenza.bennardo@utoronto.ca)