

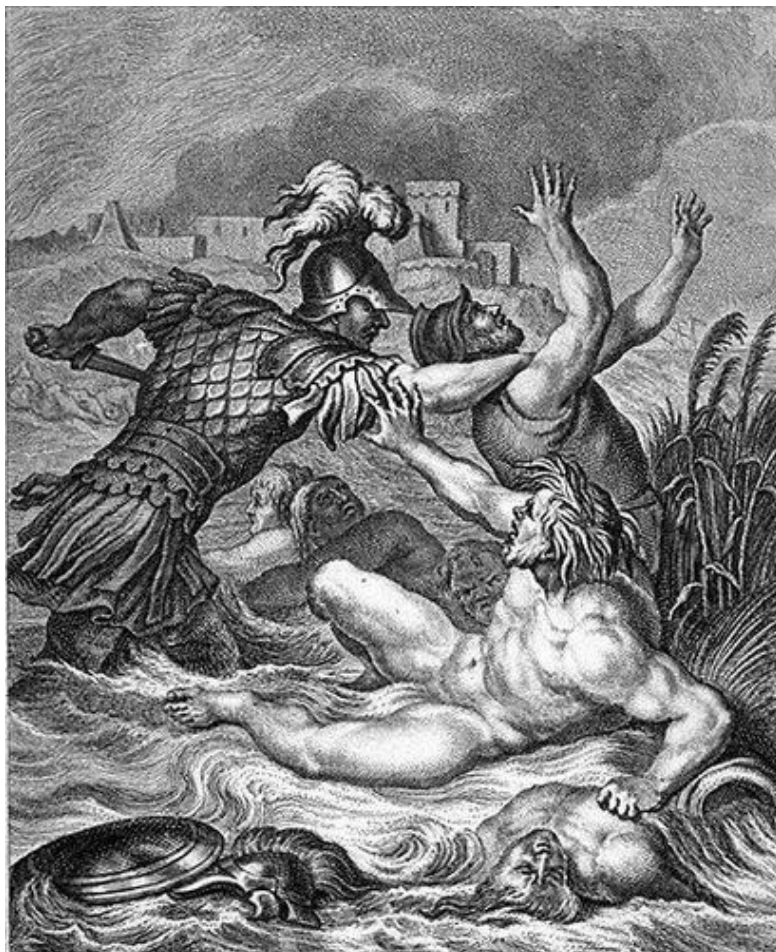
RIVER ON FIRE

The *mache parapotamios* and Ecological Crises in Greco-Roman Epic

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Cover image:
Johann Balthasar Probst, *Achilles Fights by the River*

Abstract

The *mache parapotamios*, or river battle, briefly brings nature to the forefront of epic narrative and provides an insight into perceptions of the environment. This type scene, appearing in a number of extant epics including Homer's *Iliad*, Silius Italicus' *Punica*, and Statius' *Thebaid*, demonstrates that these poems are aware of the importance of nature as divine and cosmological, and are concerned with its relationship to humankind. The *mache parapotamios* does not, however, communicate a 'green' message in which nature is considered, or cared for, as an entity unto itself. Destruction of the environment is frequently slated as sacrilegious, and it is often equated with cosmological disorder. What is more, the narrative promotes the consensual domestication of nature so that it will benefit humankind, recognising that undamaged and benevolent nature is better than its wild and aggressive counterpart. In this way, concern for the preservation of nature in epic is anthropocentric.

Using a schema with which to analyse nature in epic, we can categorise aspects of nature into domesticated or undomesticated, and natural or non-natural. In the case of the *mache parapotamios*, this schema takes into account the personification of the river, as well as its relationship with humans. Alliances with humans demonstrate domestication, such as the Scamander's cooperation with the Trojans, while enmity towards humans demonstrates a lack of domestication, as when the Trebia of the *Punica* assaults Scipio. Furthermore, a river is natural when it is in control of itself and acting according to its *phusis*, but an external force, such as pollution or obstruction, can cause a river to become non-natural. This frequently reflects negatively on the human perpetrators of the non-natural phenomena.

Each of the three chapters discusses one of the texts above and analyses the *mache parapotamios*, as well as other scenes involving nature, using the proposed schema. While each text presents an altered version of the river battle in order to best suit the needs of the epic, the significance of the relationships between the gods, humans, and nature remains a constant across all three.

*To the Water Protectors
Mni Wiconi. Water is Life.*

*E rere kau mai te Awa nui
Mai i te Kāhui Maunga ki Tangaroa
Ko au te Awa
Ko te Awa ko au.*

*The Great River flows
From the Mountains to the Sea
I am the River
The River is me.*

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Introduction

It is no surprise that rivers captured the imaginations of Greek and Roman writers. River water brings beauty to the landscape, the promise of life, and prosperity through fishing, trade, and irrigation. Rivers were incorporated into domestic life as places for bathing and washing, and the deities that supposedly dwelled beneath the waves were compensated with offerings.¹ Undoubtedly, it was not only the tranquil image of the river that intrigued writers, but also their ability to turn wild and lethal, able to flood and churn with the same waters that had once been slow and temperate.² Moreover, for those with scientific interests, rivers provided a fascinating and diverse subject of enquiry.³ For philosophers, rivers were symbolic; their ever-changing state resembled the unstoppable flow of time,⁴ the ceaseless movement of the cosmos,⁵ or human life itself.⁶ Callimachus uses the image of two rivers to distinguish between poetic genres: the grand Assyrian River represents epic poetry, while Callimachus' own poetry is like a small, pure stream (*Hymn to Apollo* 108-12).

Rivers were also significant markers of identity for those who lived in the vicinity of one. Some groups were named for specific rivers, such as the Cappadocians after the Cappadox and the Arevaci after the Areva.⁷ Individuals could also be named for rivers, and so we have Simoisius, Scamandrius, Ismene, Almo, and Galaesus, to name a few. In the Roman Empire, rivers were valued as symbols of conquest and also for their practical use; emperors portrayed themselves as masters of

¹ An episode in Tacitus' *Annales* (1.79) illustrates this well: Roman senators discussed the possibility that a number of the Tiber's tributaries be diverted in order to prevent future flooding; those whose rivers would be affected argued strongly against the plan, citing dangers to their own communities and the disrespect it would show to rivers whom they had provided with rites, altars and groves. See Campbell (2012) 118-9.

² A comical example of this is Ovid's *Amores* 3.6 in which the narrator comes across a river in flood and tries to mollify it with tales of amorous rivers, only to have it swell even further.

³ E.g. Herodotus on the flooding and source of the Nile (2.19-31); Pliny on the wonders of various rivers (*Natural History* 2.106); and Lucretius on the replenishment of river and seawater (5.261-72).

⁴ E.g. Marcus Aurelius 4.43.

⁵ E.g. Heraclitus, who said that we cannot step into the same river twice (DK 22A6).

⁶ E.g. Epictetus, *Gnomologium* 3.1.

⁷ Campbell (2012) 64-70, especially 65.

rivers, able to control and work in alliance with them for the benefit of Roman citizens.⁸

Unlike other features of nature, such as mountains, forests, and lakes, rivers visibly move and can even change course. Such liveliness makes them an easy target for anthropomorphism. Indeed, rivers are frequently personified in literature as minor male deities. More renowned rivers are generally personified more often and are assigned certain characteristics: the Acheloüs, for example, is well known for having only one horn, the other having been broken off by Heracles;⁹ the Asopus is famous for challenging Zeus after he abducted the river's daughter, Aegina;¹⁰ and the most venerated Italian river, the Tiber, is involved in a number of Roman myths.

In particular, rivers sometimes play major roles in literary narratives, especially in epic. One such role is the river battle, or *mache parapotamios*, in which a personified river battles a powerful warrior. This type scene occurs in four extant epics: Homer's *Iliad*, Silius Italicus' *Punica*, Statius' *Thebaid*¹¹ and Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*.¹² The Homeric instance is our earliest surviving example of the river battle, and after the *Iliad*, roughly eight centuries pass before the *mache parapotamios* re-emerges in any substantial form in our extant literature. By the end of first century CE, both Silius and Statius had published an epic containing a *mache parapotamios* inspired by the Homeric source model. While it is likely that poets between Homer and the Flavians made use of the type scene in works that have now been lost to us, we cannot say for certain how they may have presented it. In any case, comparative studies by scholars such as Juhnke (1972) and Chaudhuri (2014) demonstrate that the Flavian poets certainly took their inspiration for the *mache parapotamios* from the *Iliad*.

⁸ Ibid. 369-88. Consider also the passage in Statius' *Silvae* 4.367-94 in which the Voltumnus praises the emperor Domitian for taming his unruly waters.

⁹ Acheloüs took the form of a horned bull. The myth is described by Apollodorus (2.7.5) and by Sophocles in the *Trachiniae* (509-526), and later by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (9.1-97).

¹⁰ Apollodorus 3.12.6.

¹¹ Quotations in Greek and Latin are taken from the Teubner text of West (2000) for the *Iliad*, from the Teubner text of Delz (1987) for the *Punica*, and from the Loeb text of Shackleton Bailey (2003) for the *Thebaid*. All translations are my own.

¹² This thesis is primarily concerned with the *Iliad*, the *Punica*, and the *Thebaid*. The *Dionysiaca* does not receive its own chapter owing to both space constraints and to the fact that it is a late antique epic which differs significantly from the previous three in its outlook, conception, and theology. On the *mache parapotamios* of the *Dionysiaca*, see Schmiel (2003). On the *Dionysiaca* in general, see Shorrock (2011) and Domenico, ed. (2016).

As a consequence of the Homeric source model, the *mache parapotamios* has a common structure. This is enumerated below:

1. The river is filled with corpses, blood, and equipment.
2. The river, personified, berates the warrior for polluting the water.
3. The river fights the warrior and comes close to overwhelming him.
4. At the last second, the gods intervene, rescuing the warrior and calming the river.

Each epic has its own particular take on the type scene, and the details differ depending on the author, but the basic structure remains the same throughout Homer, Silius, and Statius. For this reason the *mache parapotamios* makes for a useful platform on which to study rivers in epic; the core arrangement remains constant, but the changes in detail reveal the purposes for which rivers are used. Moreover, rivers are representative of nature more generally; the voices of rivers in these epics speak for other features of nature, whose lack of liveliness makes them less likely to be anthropomorphised.

To help us interpret the treatment of rivers in epic, I propose a theoretical schema by which we can classify nature in ancient epic. This is expressed in the diagram below:

Nature (domesticated/undomesticated)	
Natural	Non-natural
Driven by <i>phusis</i> .	Imposed upon by external force contrary to <i>phusis</i> .

Nature, as I refer to it, is used to describe the aggregate of all aspects of the physical world not created by humankind. This includes trees, mountains, lakes, rivers, oceans, rocks, non-human animals, and so on. A river is a part of nature, and ‘nature’ is the collective term for all these physical aspects combined. In this way I use ‘nature’ in much the same way as we use it today. Throughout this thesis I will also use ‘environment’ and ‘landscape’ as synonyms for nature.

Although nature is itself not a product of human artifice, my model must also account for instances in which nature and humans interact in co-beneficial or exploitative ways. I refer to this in terms of domestication: just as there are wild

animals and domesticated animals, nature can likewise be divided into domesticated and undomesticated forms. We may say that domesticated nature is synonymous with activities such as agriculture, pastoralism, and hydroengineering; undomesticated nature is nature in its wild, at times uncooperative, form. As a result, domesticated nature is beneficial to humankind, while undomesticated nature poses a threat. This idea is present in our three epics, where a personified aspect of domesticated nature is loyal to its domesticators and desires to help them, while simultaneously wishing to harm their enemies, by whom it is not domesticated. The Scamander, for example, rescues dying Trojans while attacking Achilles. In epic, therefore, the status of nature as either domesticated or undomesticated depends both on an anthropocentric perspective on its relationship to humankind, and on the specific details of its role in the narrative. An aspect of nature may be domesticated by a specific group, but to other groups that same aspect may appear undomesticated.

According to my schema, nature can be divided into two subsets: ‘natural’ and ‘non-natural’ nature. The two subsets of nature refer not to an object’s materiality, but rather to its innate motivating force, which I call *phusis*. I borrow this term from pre-Socratic philosophy, in which *phusis* is the source of an entity’s behaviour, the reason for why it acts in the way it does, without pressure or restraint.¹³ For the pre-Socratics, *phusis* was an identifiable element, and each philosopher had a different idea as to what that element was. Thales believed that it was water (DK 11A12), while Heraclitus thought it more likely to be fire (DK 22B30). Anaximander, on the other hand, took a more abstract approach, believing the principle to be τὸ ἄπειρον, or the ‘Boundless’, which is infinite both in space and time (DK 13A5, B1, A11, A17). Moreover, the pre-Socratics thought that the primary element was from which everything else was created,¹⁴ and that it therefore dictated the movements of the cosmos, as well as everything within the cosmos. Accordingly, *phusis* was commonly associated with growth and creation.¹⁵

¹³ Collingwood (1945) 44. This was, at least, one interpretation of *phusis*, though Naddaf (2005) 11-35 explains that the pre-Socratic understanding of *phusis* was much more nuanced than one definition would allow. Rather, it could refer to primordial matter (such as fire, water, etc.), intrinsic force that he calls ‘process’, and/or the result of a combination of both. I have chosen to use the term *phusis* in terms of an intrinsic force, as per Collingwood’s interpretation.

¹⁴ E.g. Anaximander (DK 13A5): οὗτος ἀρχὴν ἔφη τῶν ὄντων φύσιν τινὰ τοῦ ἀπείρου, ἐξ ἧς γίνεσθαι τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς κόσμον.

¹⁵ Naddaf (2005) 11-35.

Returning to our key terms, ‘natural’ and ‘non-natural’, we can now say that that which acts according to its *phusis* is natural.¹⁶ Conversely, that which is forced to act or exist against its *phusis* is non-natural.¹⁷ For example, a river that flows from spring to sea is acting according to its *phusis* in a natural manner. But a river that is forced to flow backwards, from sea to spring, is acting in a way that is contrary to its *phusis* and therefore non-natural.¹⁸ In this way, natural and non-natural states are not exclusive to aspects of nature. That which is ‘natural’ is not always a part of ‘nature’; man-made objects have *phuseis* of their own, and can therefore be natural or non-natural too.

Such a framework is all well and good, but without a concrete means of identifying which subset is which, it is not all that useful. With the addition of personification, this becomes possible. In the three epics to be discussed, the rivers involved in the *mache parapotamios* all experience non-natural phenomena; they are also all personified. As anthropomorphised entities, the rivers are able to express distaste for certain experiences; for example, all three lament the inundation of corpses that pollutes their streams. Because an external force causes the inundation, and because the river makes clear that it is not something that it desired or chose, we can conclude that the corpse-filled river is a non-natural phenomenon. Volition, and therefore personification, is key in deciding whether an event is natural (desired) or non-natural (undesired). However, to make matters easier, there are three phenomena that are almost always non-natural in the *mache parapotamios*. These are: **the corpse-filled river, the obstructed river, and the backwards-flowing river.**

Using this schema, I analyse the treatment of the riverine environment and other relevant aspects of nature in each of the three texts. By classifying domesticated and undomesticated nature, and interpreting the effects of non-natural phenomena on nature, I identify a number of implicit attitudes towards the landscape. These are primarily religious and cosmological; both the Greeks and Romans thought nature to be closely connected to the presence and actions of the gods, and occurrences in the

¹⁶ There exists an adjective *phusikos* which may be translated as ‘natural’, or ‘inborn’. Aristotle employs this term (e.g. in *Physica* 191a3), but it is not found in the pre-Socratic fragments.

¹⁷ Note that I have chosen to use the term ‘non-natural’ rather than ‘unnatural’. This was a conscious choice intended to prevent normative associations. Nevertheless, as we proceed we will find that non-natural phenomena are indeed often portrayed as morally repugnant.

¹⁸ Note that a non-natural action or state is always provoked by an external force.

natural world were considered realisations of divine acts.¹⁹ Furthermore, features of nature could have divine lineage and be divine themselves; Hesiod, for example, claims that rivers are children of Tethys and Oceanus (*Theogony* 337-45). Aspects of nature were often personified as gods or were closely connected to specific divinities: for example, Gaea the earth goddess, and Oceanus the ocean boundary and father of rivers. Rivers had their own personifications, as did the four winds, and occasionally entire lands could be personified as a single deity.²⁰ Also personified were some planetary bodies and phenomena: Helios (sun) and Selene (moon), as well as the dawn goddess, Eos. Meteorological phenomena were also thought to be of divine origin, usually of Zeus/Jupiter's doing.

However, of equal concern is the interaction between humans and nature. While many myths describe the tension between nature and civilisation,²¹ with civilisation the unequivocal victor, there remains the inescapable truth that civilisation cannot develop without nature.²² The need for domesticated nature is often acknowledged, although interaction with nature is frequently seen as undesirable.²³ Nevertheless, implicit in the three epics is a preference for domesticated nature over undomesticated nature, as the former may be beneficial to humans, while the latter is a potential threat. However, owing to the potential for any aspect of nature to be numinous, the morality of domestication is often ambiguous; this issue is explored in several of the epics discussed in the chapters to follow.

There is no evidence that any of the texts ascribe value to nature as a thing unto itself. Nature derives its value from its divinity and its relationship with humankind. Therefore any concerns regarding pollution and obstructions are not what we might call environmental.²⁴ Rather, they are, as outlined above, overtly religious

¹⁹ Hughes (1994) 46.

²⁰ E.g. Oenotria Tellus of the *Punica* (15.522).

²¹ E.g. the *Enuma Elish*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Labours of Heracles, Cadmus and the Serpent of Ares, Theseus and the Minotaur, etc.

²² Hughes (1994) 32-7. Without agriculture and other practices, cities could never have developed.

²³ E.g. the Five Ages of Man myth as described in Hesiod's *Works and Days*: in the Golden Age humankind is uncivilised, but nature provides all that is needed for survival of its own accord. By the Iron Age, humankind has gained civilisation, but nature has grown wild and does not reproduce unless humans constantly interfere, a wearisome burden that marks the Iron Age as the worst out of the five. See also the Myth of the Ages in Virgil, *Georgics* 118-59, in which Jupiter ends the Golden Age and introduces *labor improbus* (145-6).

²⁴ That is, concerned with preserving nature for the sake of nature, not for the benefit of the gods or humans.

and cosmological, and implicitly anthropocentric concerns. Nevertheless, as this thesis will show, these texts demonstrate a general appreciation for nature as a significant physical presence in the world, and an acknowledgement of the fact that the condition of the landscape directly influences human activities, sometimes in ways that cannot be controlled.

1. *Iliad* 21: Achilles and the Scamander

The *Iliad* describes a brief period during the final year of the Trojan War, and focuses primarily on Achilles, as well as other Greek and Trojan warriors. Within that timeframe Achilles retires from the fighting, only to return to battle after the death of his friend, Patroclus. He kills the Trojan hero, Hector, whose burial takes up the final episode of the epic. This chapter is concerned with the first half of book 21, in which Achilles battles the River Scamander. An outline of this passage is given below.

Achilles, roused to a frenzy following the death of Patroclus, drives a great many Trojan soldiers into the Scamander River where he slaughters them indiscriminately. As a result of his rampage, the river becomes clogged and bloody with corpses: πλήθει γὰρ δὴ μοι νεκύων ἐρατεινὰ ῥέεθρα, | οὐδέ τί πη δύναμαι προχέειν ῥόον εἰς ἄλα δῖαν (“my lovely streams are full of corpses, and I cannot pour forth my water into the holy sea,” 21.218-9). In response the Scamander appears in a man’s form (ἀνέρι εἰσάμενος, 213) and rebukes Achilles for his vicious treatment of the Trojans and for disrespecting the river. The Scamander demands that Achilles take the fighting elsewhere and leave its stream alone: ἐξ ἐμέθεν γ’ ἐλάσας πεδῖον κάτα μέρμερα ῥέζε (“drive [the Trojans] away from me and onto the plain, and there perform your baneful deeds,” 217). Achilles says he will relent, but soon returns to battle the river directly.¹ Their fight continues for 94 lines (233-327), in which the Scamander comes very close to overwhelming Achilles with huge waves and strong currents. When the situation appears most dire, Hera steps in and orders Hephaestus to send his fires against the Scamander (328-41); these successfully quell the river’s fury and it agrees to retire from the fighting (372-6).

The description of the fight between Achilles and the Scamander is one of the few scenes in the *Iliad* that sets nature directly into the narrative. Elsewhere nature is almost exclusively reserved for similes, epithets, or passing mentions of distant

¹ Various explanations have been proposed for this disjunction: Leaf (1902) 401 considers the possibility of a ruse on the river’s part, or that we should read Scamander’s plea and Achilles’ response as irony; Willcock (1984) 287 suggests that Achilles’ assent may be much less clear than it appears. Less psychologizing interpretations are proposed by Richardson (1993) 70, who tentatively suggests there may have been another version that did not include the river battle, and West (2011) 378, who describes the transition as “bafflingly illogical,” suggests that line 233 was added later and integrated unsuccessfully.

homelands.² Moreover, the *mache parapotamios* does not present nature as a benign object of contemplation, but a wilful participant in the action; the personification of the Scamander allows it to enter the narrative as a physical character whose presence and movements are deliberate and consequential. It, like other men and gods, feels anger and pity and acts on these emotions.³ As outlined in the introduction, nature may be divided into two categories: domesticated and undomesticated. When the river actively aids the Trojans and does so deliberately, it shows itself to be domesticated. Thus, when the river revives Hector at 14.433-9, allows women to wash their clothes in its stream (22.153-6), and hides Trojan soldiers beneath its waves (21.238-9), it does so because it is loyal to the community that has domesticated it, pities their suffering, and wishes to help and protect them. Nevertheless, the poet reconciles this mild and pleasant river with one of the realities of nature: that it is not always so temperate, and can be as contrary as it is cooperative. And uncooperative nature is, at least within the realms of epic, undomesticated. As the river's anger rises, it begins to oppose the human force that it views as a threat, by appearing as a man to address and rebuke Achilles directly, and by attacking the Greek warrior with massive waves and flooding (21.234-71). These actions, though irregular and excessive, remain natural, as they are expressions of the river's volition. The anger and violence of the river directed at Achilles is both a reflection of nature when it is undomesticated, and simultaneously a continuation of Trojan domestication over it, since a source of the river's anger is that Achilles does not pity the suffering Trojan warriors: μένος δέ οἱ ἐν φρεσὶ θῆκεν | Ξάνθος, ἐπεὶ κεχόλωτο δαὶ κταμένων αἰζηῶν, | τοὺς Ἀχιλεὺς ἐδάϊζε κατὰ ῥόον οὐδ' ἐλέαιρεν ("Xanthus put strength in his [Asteropaeus'] heart, enraged because of the youthful men killed in battle, whom Achilles had slain in his stream without pity," 145-7).⁴

It is essential to consider the river's actions in terms of *phusis*, which propels it to act in certain ways. Whatever the river does willingly is done according to the river's *phusis*. If the river is domesticated, then it is the *phusis* of the river to be protective and sympathetic to its domesticators; if undomesticated, it is its *phusis* to be threatening and defensive. Homer demonstrates that the *phusis* of the river always

² Compare the many lengthy descriptions of nature in the *Odyssey*: Calypso's island (5.55-74); the Phaeacian shore where Odysseus spends a night (5.451-85); the island of the Cyclopes (9.116-41); Scylla's cave (12.73-85); Ithaca (13.236-49), etc.

³ E.g. anger: χῳσάμενος (21.212), κεχόλωτο (146), χολώσατο (136); pity: (145-7).

⁴ See Yamagata (1994) 180.

remains potentially variable, that is, it always holds within it the possibility of being either domesticated or undomesticated. Thus the Scamander can protect the Trojans beneath his waves and use those same waves to attack Achilles, all in a single motion (238-42).

The presentation of domesticated nature in the *Iliad* is a relatively unambiguous one. The war setting entails that human interactions with nature are few, and usually only represented in similes or *ekphrasis*.⁵ As a result, agricultural images are generally depicted as positive and productive; they represent the antithesis of war.⁶ Thus the domestication of nature is viewed as something desirable, as Jonathan Burgess notes: “The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* support anthropocentric exploitation of natural resources.”⁷ Nevertheless, it is clear that there is little place for domesticated nature on the battlefield: the need for renewable resources is not acknowledged as an issue, despite ten years of incessant warfare,⁸ and the mechanisms of war are much more frequently compared to the movement of undomesticated nature.⁹ Thus soldiers are often compared to rushing torrents of water or flash floods (5.85-92; 16.384-93; 17.263-6, etc.), which actively destroy the agricultural works of humans: dams, dikes, fields, fences and orchards are all flattened beneath the onslaught.¹⁰ Domesticated nature is shown to be weak in the face of its wild counterpart, and when the domesticated Scamander tries to protect those people to whom he is loyal, he fails them. This is because the war of the *Iliad* does not accommodate human/nature

⁵ In fact, two agrarian similes feature in the river battle episode: Achilles is compared to a farmer whose ditch is overtaken by running water (21.257-64) and Hephaestus’ fires are compared to the North Wind, which dries a field so it can be tilled by the farmer (346-7). Notable too are the descriptions of nature found on the shield of Achilles (18.483-608).

⁶ Taplin (1980) 15, in his discussion of the shield of Achilles, asks us to consider the Iliadic similes and the images on the shield as windows into the world behind the war, one of peace, agriculture and craftsmanship, to where the soldiers will likely never return: “the similes make us see war as wasteful and destructive.” See also Redfield (1975) 186-192.

⁷ Burgess (2015) 113.

⁸ Indeed Achilles and his companions appear to experience no lack of food or wine (e.g. 9.205-28; 24.621-30). Note a few interesting mentions of consumption: the wine sale at the end of book 7 (467-82) in which the Achaean soldiers purchase wine for a great feast. Notably, some soldiers pay for their wine with cattle. Also Odysseus’ words to Achilles at 19.160-70 acknowledge that soldiers need food and water. Then at 24.778-84 Priam orders the Trojans to collect firewood for Hector’s pyre, and they carry back an unspeakably great (ἄσπετον) amount (784). For more on this, see Bakker (2010) 48-50.

⁹ E.g. the simile at 17.53-69, which pits a domesticated olive tree directly against the undomesticated and tempestuous winds.

¹⁰ Note that it is primarily the Trojans who are compared with rivers and other freshwater sources. The Greeks are far more often compared with the sea: see Fenno (2005). Animal and meteorological similes are also common.

alliances, much as it does not accommodate the fulfilment of other peacetime customs such as supplication, a point I will return to later.¹¹ Although pastoral and agricultural interaction with nature is presented as something positive, it is nevertheless part of an entirely separate world. For this reason, the moral ambiguities surrounding environmental exploitation are not at issue, and the text presents a relatively black-and-white view of human involvement in nature: none of the similes or descriptions shows the destructive potential of domesticating nature. Instead the dangerous aspects of nature are emphasised, suggesting that undomesticated nature is much more at home in the world of war; nothing equals the violence of the battlefield like nature in full, unrestrained force.¹²

In the *Odyssey* there is more room for tension with regards to the environment.¹³ Where the *Iliad* places nature outside the physical setting at Troy, the *Odyssey* brings it back into the central narrative, using descriptions of nature to elicit a sense of space and geography. However, unlike the *Iliad*, where the threat of undomesticated nature is suitably related to the soldiers clashing on the battlefield, the *Odyssey* depicts a world at peace, one that is at odds with undomesticated nature. Here, undomesticated nature is a threat to the new, peaceful order of things; it manifests physically as monstrous creatures and dangerous characters, such as Scylla, Charybdis, and the Cyclopes.¹⁴ Conversely, the domestication of nature is venerated: when Odysseus takes from Aeolus the domesticated winds, he and his men sail home with ease, but upon releasing the winds, i.e. ‘undomesticating’ them, they are blown off course and must begin all over again (10.14-55).¹⁵ Also note the interaction between Odysseus and the Phaeacian river, in which Odysseus appeals to the river’s sympathies by supplicating it, successfully winning over the river’s loyalties and convincing it to carry him to safety (5.441-53). Other passages hint at the moral duty

¹¹ Yamagata (1994) 40-5; Chaudhuri (2014) 198: “Achilles’ dismissal of the Trojans’ worship of their local river deity as ineffective undermines the system of hoped-for reciprocity underlying many of the prayers within the poem.” Consider especially the failed supplication of Lycaon at 21.71-119.

¹² Johnston (1988) 31-54 argues that by comparing soldiers to wild natural phenomena, Homer implies that warfare is itself a part of nature: “warfare is thus not a human aberration but an integral part of the irresistible, eternal, and mysterious natural order of things” (33).

¹³ Although it is not clear that the authors of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are a single unit, they are nevertheless part of a contemporary epic tradition and therefore worth comparing.

¹⁴ Burgess (2015) 113.

¹⁵ For more on winds in the *Odyssey* (and the *Iliad*) see Purves (2010) 323-50.

towards pastoralism, agriculture and fishing, such as Odysseus' response to Penelope's questioning in book 19:

τὴν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς:
 'ὦ γύναι, οὐκ ἄν τις σε βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν
νεϊκέοι: ἦ γάρ σευ κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἰκάνει,
ὥς τέ τευ ἦ βασιλῆος ἀμύμονος, ὅς τε θεοῦδης
ἀνδράσιν ἐν πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἀνάσσω
εὐδικίας ἀνέχῃσι, φέρῃσι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα
πυροῦς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθῃσι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῷ,
τίκτῃ δ' ἔμπεδα μῆλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχῃ ἰχθῦς
ἐξ εὐηγείης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ (19.106-14).

Then the wily Odysseus said in reply: "woman, no mortal on this boundless earth could quarrel with you. For your fame reaches the wide heaven, just as the fame of a noble king does, who, god-fearing, lords over many strong men and maintains justice. The black earth produces wheat and barley, the trees are laden with fruit, the sheep reproduce unceasingly, and the sea provides fish from his good leadership, as his men thrive under him."

In this passage, fertility of the earth and sea is directly connected to good leadership.¹⁶ On the other hand, excessive exploitation of the land and home is a sign of moral failure, as when the suitors devour the products of Odysseus' *oikos*: ἀλλὰ ἔκῃλοι | κτήματα δαρδάπτουσιν ὑπέρβιον, οὐδ' ἐπὶ φειδώ. | ὅσσαι γὰρ νύκτες τε καὶ ἡμέραι ἐκ Διὸς εἰσιν, | οὐ ποθ' ἐν ἱερέουσ' ἱεράϊον, οὐδὲ δύ' οἴω: | οἶνον δὲ φθινύθουσιν ὑπέρβιον ἐξαφύοντες ("But at ease they greedily consume our provisions, with no thought for sparing it. For as many days and nights that come from Zeus, they sacrifice not just one or two animals. And they waste the wine, drawing it forth greedily," 14.91-5).¹⁷

However, the domestication of nature is at times problematized, as the episodes involving the Lotus-Eaters and Circe demonstrate. In the land of the Lotus-

¹⁶ Hughes (1994) 53.

¹⁷ Yamagata (1994) 28; Boyd (2009) 306-7

Eaters, men consume the lotus plant and afterwards forget all knowledge of their previous lives (9.82-104).¹⁸ Here the relationship between humans and nature does not result in a positive outcome, rather it serves to disrupt the normal functioning of civilisation. Similarly, when Odysseus' men first encounter Circe she transforms them into pigs (10.237-43). Circe 'domesticates' other wild creatures using potions (212-9) and her very servants are the children of nature: γίγνονται δ' ἄρα ταί γ' ἔκ τε κρηνέων ἀπό τ' ἀλσέων | ἔκ θ' ἱερῶν ποταμῶν, οἳ τ' εἰς ἄλαδε προρέουσι ("They were born from springs and groves, and from the holy rivers that flow towards the sea," 350-1). But Circe's domestication of nature is disruptive and threatening; it does not have a positive impact on human society and verges on the non-natural. Burgess proposes that such episodes as these indicate a "negative valuation of [nature],"¹⁹ but other more positive depictions suggest that the perception of nature in the *Odyssey* is much more ambiguous. While the domestication of nature can be difficult and yield horrifying results, when done correctly it is a boon for civilisation.

Attention should also be given to the unique position of the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians. Both of these groups are associated with the Golden Age, and this is reflected in their relationship with nature. The Cyclopes, while avid pastoralists, do not practice any kind of agriculture. Yet the earth provides all they need without any interference (9.106-11). The Cyclopes' lack of agricultural endeavour is emphasised by the description of the neighbouring island. This place, inhabited only by goats, is not very far by ship from the island of the Cyclopes, but its soil is perfect for growing food and there is a supply of fresh water, as well as a suitable harbour (116-39). Despite the Cyclopes' proximity to this arable land, they do not have the ships needed to get there (125-30), nor, presumably, the skills to cultivate it for civilisation.²⁰ The Cyclopes' relationship with nature indicates that they linger in the Golden Age, when people had no need for agriculture because the earth reproduced of its own accord (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 116-20). However, the barbarity of the Cyclopes puts the regular fecundity of the earth in an ominous light: their community (if it can be called

¹⁸ The exact identification of the lotus plant is unknown. Herodotus (4.177) describes it as a similar in size to the mastic-berry with a sweet taste like a date. Polybius (12.2) describes it further, and claims it was harvested and ground up or pitted and preserved for food; it could also be used to make wine and vinegar.

¹⁹ Burgess (2015) 113-4.

²⁰ Austin (1975) 144-5.

that) is highly uncivilised, and they lack the necessary motivation to form an appropriate society.

The Phaeacians are much closer to civilisation than the Cyclopes are; yet they hover on the threshold of the Golden Age. It is said that they are dear to the gods (6.203) and they live far from where men toil for a living (8). Furthermore, they once lived near the Cyclopes, that other Golden Age race (5).²¹ Like the Cyclopes, the Phaeacians inhabit a land that provides bountiful crops without need for agriculture; for example, Alcinous' palace gardens yield fruit all year round (7.114-21). Nevertheless, there is some mention of tilled fields (ἀγρούς... ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων, 6.259) so Phaeacia is a liminal setting that lingers between the Golden Age and what Dougherty dubs the "New World."²² Indeed, Phaeacia is Odysseus' final stop, from where he makes the leap out of the fantastic world of the Lotus-Eaters, Circe, the Cyclopes and Calypso, into the civilised world of Ithaca. Though the Phaeacians are decent, peaceful people, their perpetual prosperity must eventually come to an end when they incur the wrath of Poseidon by helping Odysseus return home (13.128-38), serving as a reminder that the people of the Golden Age are incompatible with the world that Odysseus belongs in.

In both of these examples, nature is neither undomesticated nor domesticated, at least in the terms I have outlined. Yet Homer makes clear that this kind of relationship with nature is an echo of the past, reserved only for those who are part of a previous, and now waning, age.

It should be clear at this point that the depiction of nature in the *Odyssey* is far more multifaceted than that in the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* presents nature as largely absent from the narrative, and domestication of it is desirable but unrealistic in the wartime setting; undomesticated nature is generally presented in martial similes, and though threatening, is rarely monstrous. Conversely, the *Odyssey* proposes limitations on the domestication of nature: it presents domestication as a reality, but one that is not always unambiguously positive. On the other hand, undomesticated nature is out of place in the peacetime setting, and is represented by threatening creatures like Scylla and Charybdis.

²¹ Perhaps their previous homeland was in fact Goat Island. See Clay (1980) 263-4 for such an argument.

²² Dougherty (2001) 91-2.

So far I have discussed those actions that the river performs willingly, and these I have labelled as ‘natural’ insofar as they are products of the river’s volition and therefore its *phusis*. However, there are at least two notable phenomena that are caused by external motivation: the first is the filling of the water with blood, corpses and equipment (21.235-8; 316-8; 325) and the second is the choking of the river with corpses and the subsequent obstruction of its flow (218-9). These I call ‘non-natural’ as they affect the river in ways that hinder the river’s *phusis* and frustrate the river’s will.²³ Furthermore, these events are caused by human actions; they are by-products of human/human interaction, rather than deliberate attacks by humans against nature.

The Scamander, to whom is given a wide range of attractive epithets, including ‘fair flowing’ (14.433; 21.1; 130; 24.692), ‘deep-eddying’ (15), and ‘silver-eddying’ (8; 130),²⁴ is transformed into a cesspool of blood and gore by these non-natural events. On a very basic level, nature is affected by war aesthetically: the carnage of the battle turns a beautiful stream into something ugly. Furthermore, Achilles’ goading of the river compels it to swell and flood, an image that is at odds with the mild river found elsewhere in the epic. The aesthetic transformation reaches its apex when Hephaestus sets the river alight, perhaps in reference to the Underworld’s own burning river, the Pyriphlegethon.²⁵

Of primary concern are the non-natural events described above; this is because they have potentially widespread consequences that extend beyond the world of nature. When the river fills with blood and other contaminants it becomes polluted and loses its purifying properties.²⁶ Where once the women of Troy washed their clothes is now a river filled with dead bodies and blood – it could hardly be considered a suitable place for washing and bathing now. Furthermore, the Scamander cleanses the dead, but in doing so it becomes polluted itself.²⁷ In its polluted state the Scamander lacks the very force of life – pure water – that sustains the people who rely on it. However, matters are even worse than this. A polluted river, if unobstructed,

²³ West writes: “The choking of the stream with corpses provided a naturalistic explanation of the flood”. I acknowledge that the river’s reaction to the obstruction does follow “physical laws,” in the sense that it does what one would expect a real river to in such a situation, i.e. it floods. However, I view this specific event as non-natural for the reasons outlined above.

²⁴ Mackie (1999) 493.

²⁵ Ibid. especially 497-8.

²⁶ Redfield (1975) 251. That is, polluted in the physical sense; *miasma* is not necessarily present here, as Parker (1983) 66 notes.

²⁷ Jones (2005) 23-4.

will eventually carry the filth out to sea where it may disperse, and the waters will once again run clear. In the case of the Scamander, the piling up of bodies has blocked its flow, forcing corpses to stagnate where they fall; the river is stuck, its only choice to heave the bodies up onto the earth beside it (21.235-8).

Thus we observe that through the non-natural event of human-induced pollution, the river's *phusis*, to act as a purifier, is hindered. Furthermore, the river's *phusis* dictates that it must flow out to sea, yet the blockage in its stream prevents it from doing so. Nature, here represented by the river, is transformed into something unfamiliar, but the effects of this transformation penetrate the layers of human society also. To understand why this is so, let us turn to the relationship between the Trojans and the Scamander. Fenno has noted that the Trojans are associated closely with fresh water, while the Greeks are linked with salt water.²⁸ This is most clearly evident in Homer's similes, which liken Greek soldiers to the sea and Trojans to rivers.²⁹ However, the Trojans are further associated with rivers through their names and heritage; Asteropaeus is the grandson of the Axius River, while many other Trojans are named after rivers.³⁰ It is clear that Trojan identity is closely linked with rivers, and most prominently with the Scamander.³¹ Their identities are so tied together, in fact, that the *mache parapotamios* episode directly foreshadows the future destruction of Troy. Mackie expands upon this idea, noting that although Troy is never razed within the confines of the *Iliad*, the city is, nevertheless, destroyed in other ways, namely through other fire-related events, such as the burning of the Scamander and the cremation of Hector.³² Indeed, the river itself assures Hera that it will no longer serve as the protector of Troy after it is set aflame: ἐγὼ δ' ἐπὶ καὶ τόδ' ὁμοῦμαι, | μή ποτ' ἐπὶ Τρώεσσιν ἀλεξήσιν κακὸν ἦμαρ, | μὴδ' ὅποτ' ἂν Τροίη μαλερῷ πυρὶ πᾶσα δάηται | καιομένη, καίωσι δ' ἀρήϊοι υἱες Ἀχαιῶν ("and I will even swear this: I will not defend the Trojans from that evil day, not when all Troy burns with a consuming fire that the warlike sons of Achaea ignite," 21.373-6). Fire is a potent symbol of

²⁸ Fenno (2005) 475-504.

²⁹ E.g. the surging Greek assembly (2.144-6); the roaring of the Greeks like the surf (2.394-7); Greeks advancing to battle like waves upon the shore (4.422-8); the rushing (2.809-10), pouring (12.470; 15.360) and rumbling (2.810) of the Trojans.

³⁰ For a complete list, see Fenno (2005) 483, n. 21. Most notable, perhaps, is Hector's own son, Astyanax, also known as Scamandrius.

³¹ Rivers were commonly used as markers of place and identity in Greece, owing to their function as boundaries and givers (or takers) of life: see Huskinson (2005) 248-9.

³² Mackie (2008) 183, also (1999) 493.

Troy's fate, but the destruction of the Trojan city may be assured by other images too: just as the idyllic river is transformed into a hellish stream of blood, filth, death, and suffering, so too will the once-glorious Troy be reduced to a polluted ruin. In other words, the fate of the Scamander is entwined with the fate of Troy and its people, both as a symbol that represents Trojan life, and as a physical ally that provides life through its waters.

We have seen how both the environment and humankind are affected by non-natural phenomena; I will now turn my attention to the effects of these events within the divine realm. The Scamander fulfils a variety of roles within the narrative, as a feature of the landscape and an ally to the Trojans, but it, alongside other rivers, is also an immortal. Like other gods, the Scamander has a priest (5.76-83) and is given offerings of horses and bulls (21.131-2). Rivers in general are counted among the gods in the *Iliad*, and they are summoned alongside all the other divinities to Zeus' halls (20.7). Furthermore, the Scamander is a son of Zeus (21.2).³³ We must therefore consider Achilles' actions and the related non-natural phenomena as events that have the potential to elicit the ire of the gods. Indeed, we have already seen how the Scamander protests the slaughtering of the Trojans in its stream at 21.212-21 and its violent reaction to Achilles' attack. However, the *Iliad* does not actively condemn mortals who fight immortals. 5.330-42 describes the wounding of Aphrodite at the hands of Diomedes, yet he receives no punishment for attacking the goddess. Instead Dione points out to Aphrodite that she is not the first divinity to be wounded by a mortal (381-4), and although she predicts death for those who battle the gods (406-9), Diomedes escapes any such fate in the *Iliad*.³⁴ If we return to Achilles and the Scamander, we might note that the river does not complain that the Greek hero is sacrilegious in his actions; rather that he is tainting the water and killing too many Trojans. Furthermore, instead of being punished, Achilles actually receives help from Poseidon, Athena, Hera and Hephaestus so that he triumphs over the river.³⁵

Much thought has been given in the scholarship to Homeric morality. Perhaps most quoted is Dodds, who noted that the gods of the *Iliad* do not concern themselves

³³ This contradicts Hesiod who claims that the Scamander was born of Tethys and Oceanus; nevertheless rivers in Hesiod are still of divine origin (*Theogony* 337-45).

³⁴ Indeed, some versions of Diomedes' life actually immortalize him, e.g. Pindar, *Nemean* 10: Διομήδεα δ' ἄμβροτον ξανθά ποτε Γλαυκῶπις ἔθηκε θεόν.

³⁵ The Scamander itself notes this in its speech to Achilles: αἰεὶ γάρ τοι ἁμύνουσιν θεοὶ αὐτοί. (21.215).

with justice.³⁶ Adkins, too, saw the gods of Homer as unjust.³⁷ Since then, critics have countered this view with more nuanced arguments. In *The Justice of Zeus*, Lloyd-Jones proposes that the early Greek idea of justice hinged on an understanding of order, which was maintained through reciprocity of *time*.³⁸ Zeus dispensed the *themistes* to kings such as Agamemnon, so that they might uphold the principles of reciprocal justice.³⁹ When Homeric heroes fail to award each other the proper *time*, as Agamemnon refuses to respect the *time* of Achilles, they violate the order of justice overseen by Zeus. There are certain behaviours, which, if they upset the proper allotment of *time*, are disagreeable to the gods. However, it is not always obvious to mortals when order has been, or might be, disrupted, and for this reason the justice of Zeus does not always appear fair or equal.⁴⁰ Lloyd-Jones also stresses the concept of double motivation; human characters of the *Iliad* are always responsible for their actions, even if the gods directly influence those actions.⁴¹

Kullman agrees that the gods operate according to the principles of reciprocity, but only as far as *do ut des*, and he takes a more pessimistic view of their concern for justice. The characters of the *Iliad*, he explains, do not see the gods as dispensers of justice, rather “divinity is seen as an explanation for the tragic nature of life.”⁴² Kullman notes the conviction found among Iliadic heroes that the gods will punish wrongdoers, but also calls attention to the fact that the gods themselves can be the cause of any such wrongdoing.⁴³ Like Lloyd-Jones, Kullman agrees that mortals are responsible for their actions, but asserts that errors made under the influence of the gods cause disproportionate suffering, rather than order and reciprocity.⁴⁴

More recently, Yamagata has argued that although both mortals and immortals are concerned with morality, their ideas of what constitutes justice are separate. In Yamagata’s view, the gods are compelled by *moira*, and although they have the ability to accelerate or delay, they cannot change the ultimate outcome. Their justice is the perpetuation of *moira*, but this does not always align with the human concept of

³⁶ Dodds (1951) 32.

³⁷ Adkins (1960) 62.

³⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1971) 4.

³⁹ Ibid. 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 27: “what is just for mortals is not necessarily what mortals want.”

⁴¹ Ibid. 9-10.

⁴² Kullman (1985) 8.

⁴³ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 15.

justice, and for this reason the gods appear to punish men beyond what is reasonable.⁴⁵ Humans, on the other hand, attribute many moral functions to the gods, especially Zeus, but Yamagata finds little evidence that the immortals fulfil these roles.⁴⁶

Allan, finally, is critical of those who label the gods of the *Iliad* as amoral. Not only does he claim that Zeus is the enforcer of cosmic justice, but also that he is “deeply concerned with the social norms of justice, both human and divine.”⁴⁷ Like Lloyd-Jones, Allan comments that the system of justice among humans, which places the *themistes* in the hands of kings, is derived from Zeus himself. Most critically, Allan asserts that morality is formed by social beliefs, and thus a person’s actions may be evaluated by the community and found to be either just or unjust according to those beliefs. Nevertheless, he maintains that such a fact does not exclude the gods from having an interest in human affairs.⁴⁸

Overall the scholarship since Lloyd-Jones’ book has favoured his interpretation of the gods more than the amoral and immoral gods of Dodds and Adkins. Some, like Kullman, maintain reservations about the interest the gods have in justice on the mortal plane, but most agree that the gods are, at the very least, concerned with a wider, cosmic form of justice, even if it does not align with human principles. I, too, am inclined to agree with this line of thought. That the gods are invested in maintaining cosmic order is illustrated at the end of the *mache parapotamios*, when Hephaestus, under the direction of Hera, burns the entirety of the Scamander’s riverine environment.

καίοντο πετέαι τε καὶ ἰτέαι ἡδὲ μυρῖκαι,
καίετο δὲ λωτός τε ἰδὲ θρύον ἡδὲ κύπειρον,
τὰ περὶ καλὰ ῥέεθρα ἄλις ποταμοῖο πεφύκει·
τείροντ’ ἐγγέλυές τε καὶ ἰχθύες οἱ κατὰ δίνας,
οἱ κατὰ καλὰ ῥέεθρα κυβίστων ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα
πνοιῇ τειρόμενοι πολυμήτιος Ἡφαίστοιο (21.350-5).

⁴⁵ Yamagata (1994) 97-120.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3-21.

⁴⁷ Allan (2006) 32.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9-10.

The elms and willows burned, as did the tamarisks. The lotus also burned, and the reeds and the galingale. Everything that lived alongside the beautiful running river was set aflame. The eels suffered and the fish came out of the whirlpools, tumbling here and there in the fair stream, distressed by the fire of the clever Hephaestus.

Mackie describes this event as a “brutal act perpetrated by higher powers,”⁴⁹ and the effects of the fire are indeed widespread and severe. Yet they come at a point when they are much needed. The episode builds in intensity from the beginning of the book, and multiple violent acts are inflicted on both sides. Achilles kills and defiles a number of Trojan soldiers, his rampage fills the river with blood and corpses and obstructs its flow, and he attacks the river, engaging it directly in battle. In retaliation, the river rouses itself, floods the plains, and threatens to violate Achilles’ body beneath the riverbed (316-23). As Redfield asserts: “as always in the *Iliad*, defilement brings about further defilement in a reciprocal process.”⁵⁰ As soon as Hera and Hephaestus step in, the progression of violation halts. Not only do Hephaestus’ flames burn the corpses that were obstructing the river (343-4), thereby reversing the non-natural state of the water, they also weaken the river so it can no longer continue flooding (366). The fire also completes the funerary rites of the slain Trojan soldiers by cremating them.⁵¹ Once Hephaestus has withdrawn his flames, the river reverts to its usual, natural course (381-2). The restoration of the river also signals the end of delay and the continuation of the narrative. Furthermore, the intervention of the Olympian gods prevents the premature death of Achilles; he must live so that he can fight and kill Hector later, and thus accept his *moira*.⁵² Moreover, the simile used to describe the effects of the fire is unambiguously positive:

πᾶν δ’ ἐξηράνθη πεδίον, σχέτο δ’ ἀγλαὸν ὕδωρ.

⁴⁹ Mackie (2008) 184.

⁵⁰ Redfield (1975) 251 n. 15.

⁵¹ See Jones (2005) 23-4.

⁵² The Scamander knows this to be the case: in its initial speech to Achilles the river does not ask him to desist, but, because Zeus has allowed the slaughter, requests he take the battle elsewhere (21.16-7); later the Scamander tells Hera that it will desist from the attack, accepting that Troy has been allotted an inexorable fate (373-6). The Scamander, like other gods, has the ability to delay the realisation of *moira*, but it cannot prevent the realization of *moira* indefinitely.

ὥς δ' ὅτ' ὀπωρινὸς Βορέης νεοαρδέ' ἄλωήν
αἶψ' ἀγξηράνη: χαίρει δέ μιν ὅς τις ἐθείρη (345-7).

The whole plain was parched, and the shining water was held fast.
Just as the north wind in late summer quickly dries a newly watered
garden, and the one who cultivates it is glad.

Once again domesticated nature is inserted into the narrative through simile. Despite the apparent brutality of the divine fire, the happiness of the farmer, indicated by the use of χαίρει, suggests that the ultimate outcome is positive: the fire in the river restores balance by reversing the non-natural phenomena and subduing the force that was inhibiting the trajectory of the narrative.

In other words, the *mache parapotamios* is associated with a disruption in the cosmic order, in that it is a challenge to *moira*, and therefore a concern of the gods. However, there are potential concerns on the human plane also. Whether or not the gods are interested in justice among humans, there is, nonetheless, a set of norms for acceptable human behaviour. These include institutions such as oaths, *xenia*, piety, supplication, and treatment of the dead. The latter three are of particular importance to us, as the *mache parapotamios* episode sees them all challenged in some way.

Although some Iliadic heroes escape divine punishment for impiety, overall the Greeks and Trojans are anxious to appease the gods and award them proper *time*. In book 1 Apollo unleashes a plague upon the Greeks; all involved, including Agamemnon and Achilles, realise that the only way to stop the plague is to return Chryseis to her father and sacrifice to Apollo (92-100; 442-5), thus reinstating his and his priest's *time*. More generally, people express their piety through sacrifice (e.g. 2.400-3; 11.725-9) and offerings (e.g. 16.220-30; 6.297-310) in order to make a request, which may or may not be granted. Homeric religion works on the basis of reciprocal *time*, but because the gods are compelled to uphold *moira* they do not always appear to reciprocate in kind.⁵³ Nevertheless, humans value their perceived relationship with the gods, perhaps because they believe the reciprocity works both ways, so the gods will reward piety and punish impiety. If we consider piety to be the

⁵³ Hence, at 16.249-52 Zeus grants only part of Achilles' request: Patroclus will succeed in driving away the Trojans, but he will not return alive, compelling Achilles to rejoin the fighting and fulfill his *moira*.

proper allotment of *time* to the gods, then it certainly seems to be the case that Achilles acts impiously in his treatment of the Scamander. Before his direct assault upon the river, the Greek hero scorns the Trojans for their pious behaviour:

οὐδ' ὑμῖν ποταμός περ ἔϋρρος ἀργυροδίνης
ἀρκέσει, ᾧ δὴ δηθὰ πολέεις ἱερεύετε τάυρους,
ζωοὺς δ' ἐν δίνησι καθίετε μώνυχας ἵππους (21.130-2).

Not even your fair flowing, silver-eddy river will help you, to which for so long you have sacrificed many bulls, and hoofed horses which you cast, still alive, into the eddies.⁵⁴

In fact, Achilles is not entirely correct; the river does rise up to help the Trojans, because the Scamander is domesticated, and because they have offered him appropriate *time* in the past. Achilles, who does nearly everything he can to disrespect the river, including insulting it, triggering non-natural phenomena, and directly attacking it, refuses to allot the river appropriate *time* and incurs its wrath. Despite his lengthy boasting, the river proves too much for him, and Achilles barely manages to hold his own until the other gods step in to help.⁵⁵ The *mache parapotamios* reinforces the superiority of the gods over mortals, even mortals such as Achilles, and also marks Achilles out as impious towards a specific god. However, Achilles' impiety does not extend further than this one river deity; he is the favourite among many of the other gods, he makes due sacrifices, and his impiety here does not affect his relationship with the Olympians. The Achaeans, who presumably would not have worshipped the Scamander due to its geographical distance from Greece, would have viewed Achilles' impiety at this moment as a non-issue. However, the Trojans, who worship the Scamander as they do other gods, would certainly have regarded Achilles' actions as morally repugnant. This impiety, then, is localised; its occurrence does not violate a universal moral code and it is only immoral to some.

⁵⁴ Despite Achilles' scorn, he too has worshipped rivers: at 23.140-9 he cuts a lock of hair he had been reserving for the Spercheus river.

⁵⁵ He loses his footing almost immediately (21.241-2) then turns to flee (246-8), but is prevented from escaping the onslaught again and again until he prays to Zeus for aid (248-83). See Chaudhuri (2014) 201-3.

Supplication in the *Iliad* has been the subject of much debate among critics, and any discussion of it requires careful consideration. Although many have noted the frequent failed supplications in the *Iliad*,⁵⁶ it is also true that the narrative is framed by two successful supplications: Thetis to Zeus in book 1, and Priam to Achilles in book 24. Gould has argued that the rules of supplication are bendable; thus he suggests that the unsuccessful supplicatory episodes in Homeric narrative are not failed or rejected supplications, but incomplete supplications, which the supplicandus has every right to refuse because physical contact has not been made, or has been broken.⁵⁷ Critics of this view note that his argument does not take into account context, or the importance of the verbal plea; battlefield supplication has an entirely different flavour to a supplication made in someone's home in a time of peace.⁵⁸ Kelly, who argues that battlefield supplication in the *Iliad* serves to characterise the supplicandi, does not believe that the refusal of the suppliant should in any way be considered immoral.⁵⁹ Pedrick, too, does not see any special code relating to supplication in the *Iliad*, and argues that the decision to accept or refuse is personal and without shame.⁶⁰ Naiden, who maintains that supplication may be accepted or refused depending upon the crimes of the suppliant, evaluates the reasons given for rejection, noting that on the battlefield a suppliant may be rejected simply for his status as the enemy.⁶¹ Indeed, the gods do not punish any of the warriors who refuse their suppliants, nor do their peers shame them.⁶²

Nevertheless, the very first supplication in the *Iliad* is a successful one; Thetis approaches Zeus on behalf of her son, grasps his knees and chin, and beseeches him to honour Achilles (1.500-16). Zeus bows his head, assenting to her request (528-30). This is a textbook supplication: the suppliant physically lowers herself, performs the customary gestures, and makes her case persuasively.⁶³ The supplicandus, for his part,

⁵⁶ Gould (1973) 80; Pedrick (1982) 132; Yamagata (1994) 41; Naiden (2006) 135; Kelly (2014) 147.

⁵⁷ Gould (1973) 81-2.

⁵⁸ Naiden (2006) 11; Kelly (2014) 150.

⁵⁹ Kelly (2014) 166; Kelly suggests that modern critics, who value mercy as a social norm, find it difficult to look past the violence of the refused supplication, and thus have taken an anachronistic approach to the issue.

⁶⁰ Pedrick (1982) 129.

⁶¹ Naiden (2006) 136. E.g. Diomedes refuses to accept Dolon as his suppliant because he may return later and do more harm to the Greeks (10. 449-53).

⁶² Diomedes (10.454-7), Agamemnon (6.63-6; 11.143-7) and Achilles again (20.463-72; 22.337-43) all refuse their suppliants (or the suppliants of others) and receive no punishment.

⁶³ For the characteristic gestures of supplication, see Gould (1973) 75-7.

hears her request and grants it, despite the trouble it will cause him. This episode sets up a paradigmatic example of supplication, which will not be seen again until Priam supplicates Achilles in the final book. The divine example establishes supplication as a norm; although there is no universal code that dictates the proper response to a suppliant, the refusal to accept perverts an established paradigm. The supplicandi of the Iliadic battlefield may not be immoral, but that does not mean their actions are any less distasteful. Achilles, who rejects the plea of Lycaon, incurs only the anger of the Scamander. Yet his actions, justified they may be, are liminal; the slaughter of a suppliant invites more pathos than the slaughter of a better-matched warrior such as Asteropaeus.⁶⁴

A similar idea is at play when it comes to the treatment of the dead. Overall, soldiers on both sides express horror at the thought of mutilation by the enemy, or by scavenging animals such as dogs and birds. So Agamemnon threatens his soldiers with the prospect of corpse mutilation by dogs and birds (2.391-3) and Athena expresses her anger by suggesting that the Trojans will feed their fat and flesh to animals (8.379-80). Furthermore, Priam predicts his own grisly fate, to be devoured raw by his own dogs, which he describes as the most pitiable fate possible (22.66-76) and Hector begs Achilles in his last moments to spare him the dishonour of having his corpse mutilated by dogs (22.338-9). These are only a selection of the many instances in which characters express deeply negative feelings towards corpse mutilation, especially by animals. However, for the most part, animal corpse mutilation is reserved for threats and fears, and rarely does it directly feature in the narrative. It is, without a doubt, an undesirable fate to be consumed by animals, yet those who acknowledge its horror tend to accept it as par for the course in war, rather than condemn those who would cause it to occur. In book 21, fears of mutilation become real when fish and eels consume the corpses of Lycaon (122-9) and Asteropaeus (203-4). The descriptions are grisly: fish and eels tear and pull at fat from the body. Segal calls this episode “a massive enlargement of the mutilation theme,” in which all Trojan corpses in the river are implicitly fed on. The outrage of the Scamander, according to Segal, is a result not only of Achilles’ general slaughter of Trojans, but

⁶⁴ If nothing else, supplication is at least a narrative device employed to heighten the pathos of a moment; after all, Homer made the choice to include six battlefield supplications in his poem, when he needed not include any. As Segal (1971) 13 explains, “The audience, in order to experience the movement toward climax and resolution, must be emotionally involved in the events. The stakes must be something that *matter*.”

of his treatment of their corpses, too.⁶⁵ In reality, the Scamander makes no specific comment to this effect. Moreover, the other gods do not express anger at Achilles for his treatment of the Trojans. While it is certainly the case that mutilation by animals is an undesirable fate, it is nevertheless not immoral to let an enemy be devoured by dogs, or any other animal. Even more direct mutilation, such as the treatment of Hector's body at the hands of Achilles and the other Greeks, is also not necessarily immoral; in fact, the Greek soldiers do not hesitate to stab his lifeless body where it falls (22.369-71). While Apollo and Zeus do indeed denounce the brutal treatment of Hector's body, they both refer to his unwavering piety as the reason for their pity (23.33-8; 66-70); Hector has always allotted proper *time* to the gods, and they in turn reciprocate, not by sparing his life, but by allowing his body to receive a proper burial. Although Achilles has clearly transgressed a norm by mutilating Hector's body beyond what is, perhaps, reasonable, it does not mark him out as anything more than liminal.

Furthermore, burial itself is an ideal, as illustrated by the cremation and funeral games for Patroclus in book 23, and the funeral of Hector in book 24. Yet these are isolated examples; it seems that the majority of warriors do not receive a proper burial or funeral.⁶⁶ This is hardly surprising: the volume of bodies on the battlefield is too immense to allow every dead soldier a send-off. It is not immoral, then, to deny one's opponent burial, nor is the lack of burial unexpected. Achilles is not the only hero to leave a trail of unburied corpses behind him, and though the piles of bodies in the river evoke an exceedingly vivid picture of slaughter, it is more indicative of Achilles' ruthlessness and prowess as a warrior than any kind of moral degeneracy.

That there is no strong, universal code of ethics in the *Iliad* should not come as a surprise; "in battle, killing is the business," notes Yamagata.⁶⁷ Indeed, while the *Odyssey* is quick to vilify those who transgress social norms, the *Iliad* rarely makes such judgements; there are no villains at Troy, only fallible people.⁶⁸ The exception is perhaps Thersites: αἰσχιστος δὲ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθεν ("the most shameful man to

⁶⁵ Segal (1971) 31.

⁶⁶ Though there is a mass burial at 7.416-32.

⁶⁷ Yamagata (1994) 42.

⁶⁸ Bespaloff's words resonate here: "Who is good in the *Iliad*? Who is bad? Such distinctions do not exist; there are only men suffering, warriors fighting, some winning, some losing," (1947) 48.

have come to Troy”, 2.216) who insults both Achilles and Agamemnon and is quickly punished by Odysseus with a blow to his back (265-6).⁶⁹ Nevertheless, war itself is not presented as immoral; it is only the other side to a coin, on the reverse of which is peace, or the cessation of conflict. This is Taplin’s ultimate argument, according to which the *Iliad* presents war in relation to peace, particularly on the shield of Achilles, and although the images of peace are idealised, neither it nor war is judged better than the other.⁷⁰ Similar to Taplin, I propose that the images of domesticated nature on the shield and in similes represent peace as an ideal to aspire to, and for this reason they are distant and unambiguous. Undomesticated nature receives due mention also, often in its capacity to overcome domesticated nature, as war itself overcomes peace. Nevertheless, the triumph of war over peace and undomesticated nature over domesticated nature is neither negative nor positive; it is simply the reality of the *Iliad*.

However, when nature becomes non-natural, as the Scamander does in *Iliad* 21, it is an aberration, an affront to the cosmic order, and must be dealt with. Indeed, although Hephaestus acts according to the will of Hera, whose only goal appears to be the preservation of Achilles and the destruction of Troy, he nevertheless succeeds in correcting the non-natural anomalies and restoring nature to its proper order. So too will Poseidon and Apollo restore the Trojan plain to its untouched state when they raze the rampart of the Greeks after the war has ended:

δὴ τότε μητιόωντο Ποσειδάων καὶ Ἀπόλλων
 τεῖχος ἀμαλδῦναι ποταμῶν μένος εἰσαγαγόντες.
 ὅσσοι ἀπ’ Ἰδαίων ὀρέων ἄλλαδὲ προρέουσιν,
 Ῥῆσός θ’ Ἑπτάπορος τε Κάρησός τε Ῥοδῖος τε
 Γρήνικός τε καὶ Αἴσηπος δῖός τε Σκάμανδρος
 καὶ Σιμόεις, ὅθι πολλὰ βοάγρια καὶ τρυφάλειαι
 κάππεσον ἐν κονίησι καὶ ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν (12.17-23).

⁶⁹ Compared Thersites’ failures to Sarpedon’s statement that men must earn the respect of their peers by proving their strength and courage in battle (12.310-28).

⁷⁰ Taplin (1980) 15-6. Scully (2003) challenges Taplin’s reading, suggesting that the images on the shield do not present a place to which heroes wish to return, but a frightening vision of an unrecognisable world.

Then Poseidon and Apollo deliberated about destroying the wall, leading towards it the might of the rivers, those which flow from Mount Ida to the sea: the Rhesus, Heptaporus, Caresus, Rhodius, Granicus, Aesopus, as well as the sacred Scamander and Simois, where many shields and helmets had fallen into the sand, and a race of semi-divine men.

λεῖα δ' ἐποίησεν παρ' ἀγάρροον Ἑλλήσποντον,
αὖτις δ' ἡϊόνα μεγάλην ψαμάθοισι κάλυπεν,
τείχος ἀμαλδύνας: ποταμοὺς δ' ἔτρεψε νέεσθαι
καρ ῥόον, ἧ περ πρόσθεν ἴεν καλλίρροον ὕδωρ (30-3).

He [Poseidon] calmed the current of the Hellespont, and when the wall was destroyed he covered the great beach with sand. Then he returned the stream to its course, where the fair-flowing water had run before.

This wall was θεῶν δ' ἀέκητι τέτυκτο | ἀθανάτων (“built contrary to the will of the immortal gods,” 12.8-9), and although the gods destroy it for this reason, the razing of the wall has the added effect of restoring the environment to its original state. Furthermore, this glimpse into the future reminds us that even though the war will come to an end, the landscape will remain constant long after humans have left. It is clear that the *Iliad* presents the workings of nature as part of the cosmos, and the violation of nature therefore disturbs the cosmic order. Nature is also valued according to its relationship with humankind; therefore, there is an underlying need and desire to domesticate nature, just as there is a desire to end war and return to peace. But the near-defeat of Achilles in the face of the Scamander’s onslaught demonstrates that humankind’s struggle with undomesticated nature is not so easy to overcome, and that nature is a divine, eternal force that may be tamed and altered, but ultimately exists, and will continue to exist, beyond the works and activities of humankind.

2. *Punica* 4: Scipio and the Trebia

The *Punica* of Silius Italicus is the longest extant Latin poem, with seventeen books and more than twelve thousand lines of verse. The Second Punic War is the subject of the poem, and the narrative follows the campaign of Hannibal as he enters Italy and makes his way towards Rome. There is no single Roman hero who occupies the focus of the epic; many fight and die for their city, including the celebrated Scipio Africanus, who sees out the end of the war. The narrative ends with the battle of Zama, in which Hannibal's army is finally and decisively defeated. The *mache parapotamios* occurs in book 4 during the battle of the Trebia, an account of which is given below. Other significant battles that occurred near water will be referred to throughout this chapter, including the battles at the river Ticinus, Lake Trasimene, and Cannae (Aufidus river), as well as the incident involving Regulus and the serpent at Bagraa.

The *mache parapotamios* begins when Hannibal drives the Roman soldiers towards the banks of the Trebia and into the water (4.570-2). At this moment the Trebia swells to attack the Romans, apparently roused by Juno's prayers (573-4). Elephants join the carnage in the river (598-9) and drive the frightened Trebia before them (601-2). Then Scipio (father of Scipio Africanus) makes an appearance and wreaks such slaughter that the Trebia fills with the bodies of the slain: *corporibus clipeisque simul galeisque cadentum | contegitur Trebia, et vix cernere linquitur undas* ("the Trebia was covered with corpses, as well as the shields and helmets of the fallen soldiers, and scarcely was it possible to see the waves," 625-6). When the Trebia begins a fresh attack, Scipio addresses the river and rebukes it for betraying the Romans and allying itself with the Carthaginians (642-8). The river engages Scipio directly in a fight before rising out of the water to address him and complain about the bodies and blood in his stream (660-66). Scipio then beseeches the gods for help (670-5); Vulcan, under the command of Venus, sends his fires to beat the river back (675-89). The river is quelled and immediately afterwards the Po appears, apparently

also affected by the fires (690-1).¹ Eventually, the river is restored to its proper course (“*ripas... priores*”, 696-7).

It should be evident that Silius closely parallels Homer in his rendering of the *machē parapotamios*. Like the Scamander, the Trebia is allied with a specific group and directly attacks another. Moreover, the Trebia is filled with corpses, blood, animals and equipment, and it appears in anthropomorphic form to complain about this. The battle between the river and hero is inconclusive, and, as in Homer, the fires of Vulcan ultimately bring about the end of the episode. Although the episode in the *Punica* is much more condensed than that of the *Iliad*, it draws many of its major elements from Homer’s version.²

But Silius’ account of the battle has not been entirely lifted from the archaic Greek poet. The battle of the Trebia was a recorded historical event, described by Livy in book 21 of his *Ab Urbe Condita*. Though Silius certainly embellishes, some, such as Nicol and Spaltenstein, have noted that the river’s involvement recalls Livy’s statement that the Trebia was higher than usual at the time of the battle (21.54.9).³ Silius almost certainly used other sources, too, perhaps Polybius and Appian, who both also describe the battle of the Trebia.⁴ In any case, the narrative draws from an historical tradition; it selects its general plot and characters from attested historical events. Silius is not the first to write an historical epic, but his is one of the only extant poems that combines history with mythic material, a decision for which he has been much criticised.⁵ Indeed, the battle of the Trebia is one of the most prominent examples of this; Silius takes an historical battle and adds the personification of nature, superhuman strength, and divine intervention. Although the outcome of the battle reflects the historical record, the details are more reminiscent of Homer, Virgil and Ovid than Livy.

¹ The Po is an interesting addition to this episode, as it is referred to frequently throughout the poem as a victim of non-natural phenomena (1.131-2; 5.127-9; 9.187-8; 12.696-7), though no battles are fought in or near it. The Trebia, however, is a tributary of the Po.

² For a comprehensive analysis of the similarities and differences between the river battles of the two poems, see Juhnke (1970) 13-24.

³ Nicol (1936) 31; Spaltenstein (1986) 319.

⁴ Polybius’ version of the battle at the Trebia also notes that the river was in flood but says little else about the river. Nicol (1936) 32 suggests Appian as another possible source, who included Scipio in his account of the battle (*The Hannibalic War* 6-7), unlike Livy who claimed he was injured at the time (21.35-9). See Pomeroy (2010) 27-45 for a more recent discussion of Silius’ sources.

⁵ Gossage (1969) 77; Miniconi-Devallet (1979) lxviii; Vessey (1982) 591; Feeney (1991) 302; Wilson (1993) 218.

With that in mind, I will now outline instances of rivers in earlier Roman epic. Virgil's *Aeneid* makes an obvious starting point.⁶ This text, although lacking a *mache parapotamios*, includes an episode in which the Tiber is personified. Aeneas, dozing beside the river, is visited by the river-god Tiberinus, who predicts the foundation of Alba Longa and advises Aeneas to visit Evander at Pallanteum (8.31-65). The river and river-god depicted here are tranquil and beneficent, vastly different to the Trebia of the *Punica*. Even when the river halts the flow of its current, as it does later in order to carry Aeneas and his men to Evander (86-90), it does so at its own behest, not as a non-natural response to corpses in its stream. However, despite this picturesque image of the Tiber, the Sibyl makes clear the suffering it will experience as a result of war, and compares the river directly to the rivers of the Troad:

bella, horrida bella,
et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno.
non Simois tibi nec Xanthus nec Dorica castra
defuerint (6.86-70).

I see wars, terrible wars, and the Tiber, frothing with thick blood.
Neither the Simois, nor the Xanthus, nor the Doric camp will be
absent.

Indeed, Latinus corroborates this image: *recalent nostro Thybrina fluenta | sanguine* ("the Tiber's stream still runs warm with our blood," 12.35-6). The bloodying of the Tiber in the *Aeneid* lacks the same moralising force that similar events have in the *Punica*, as we will soon discover; nevertheless, the comparison between the Tiber and the rivers of the Troad implies that the Roman river will act similarly to the Scamander and Simois, which had supported the indigenous population, rather than the invading force. There are clear challenges ahead for the Trojan settlers and their relationship with a new environment.⁷ Although it is clear that Homer is the source model for Silius' *mache parapotamios*, Virgil's *Aeneid* still maintains a firm grip on

⁶ As is the case with most of the post-Virgilian poets, Silius owes much to Virgil. See, e.g.: Hardie (1993) and Pomeroy (2000). It is said that Silius venerated Virgil so much that he purchased the site of his tomb (Martial 7.63; 11.48). For scholarship on nature in the *Aeneid* see Benario (1978) and Thomas (1988).

⁷ Jones (2005) 29-30.

the overall arrangement of the episode: as von Albrecht points out, the present divine apparatus, and the introduction of unconcealed moral concerns, are more Virgilian than Homeric.⁸

Rivers are mentioned frequently in Lucan's *Civil War* also. They have certain symbolic resonances; the Nile, in particular, acts as a boundary for the limits of human ambition, which Caesar attempts to overcome, without success, in his quest for imperial knowledge and power. In the Nile digression at 10.172-333, Caesar urges the priest to divulge the secrets of the Nile's source. This information, however, is sacred and deliberately kept unknown. Caesar's desire to know the Nile's source demonstrates his imperialistic ambition, which seeks to reach beyond human and environmental boundaries.⁹ The Rubicon is likewise important, acting as a physical boundary between Gaul and Italy, and a metaphysical boundary separating peace from war, and appropriate behaviour from inappropriate behaviour, just as the Ebro does in the *Punica*.¹⁰ Non-natural phenomena have a place in Lucan's epic too: in a passage recalling the violent regime of Sulla, the corpses of those killed clog the Tiber until it slows to a trickle. Blood and gore fill its banks until it is forced to throw the bodies up onto the land in order to restore its current (*Civil War* 2.209-20). This is only one of many images used to describe the horrors at Rome, but the bloodied Tiber is saved for last; its destruction is the climax of Sulla's proscriptions. As in the *Punica*, the bloody river is a clear sign that a transgression has occurred.¹¹ Moreover, the Rubicon swells as Caesar makes to cross it (1.204-5), but Lucan is more scientific in his reasoning than Silius: *tum vires praebebat hiems, atque auxerat undas* ("then Winter granted it strength and increased its waves," 217). The Rubicon is not personified in this episode, which is what we would expect to see in Silius, though *hiems* is partly personified and hinders Caesar's advance with an air of intention. Lucan's treatment of nature is thus, in a way, similar to Silius'; he utilises nature and its processes as a way of expressing moral judgements.

It is evident that these two epic poets influenced Silius' use of rivers in his own epic. Further influence likely came from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Ennius, and

⁸ Von Albrecht (1964) 149.

⁹ See Barrenechea (2010).

¹⁰ Cf. the shield of Hannibal 2.449-52. See Beneker (2011).

¹¹ Rivers in Lucan appear in other capacities too, such as the catalogue of rivers at 2.399-438. However, it is not my intention to conduct a full investigation into rivers and nature in the *Civil War*. See Zientek (2014) for such a discussion.

other genres.¹² Nevertheless, Silius places clearer emphasis on the moral implications of destructive human interaction with rivers and other areas of nature than his predecessors, with the possible exception of Lucan.¹³ Nature has a major part to play in the *Punica*, primarily as an indicator of boundaries, a topic I will discuss in detail in due course. However, I am not so interested in the effectiveness, or non-effectiveness, of Silius' epic style, nor in how he compares to his epic predecessors. Rather, I will evaluate his specific use and treatment of nature in the *Punica*, particularly during the *machē parapotamios*. As I have done for the *Iliad*, I will consider nature in its domesticated, undomesticated and non-natural aspects, with emphasis on the Trebia.

Unlike the *Iliad*, nature features prominently in the *Punica*. Rivers, lakes, forests, mountains, plains, and the sea are important indicators of topography. More than this, the humans of the narrative directly interact with nature and must factor it into their activities. Hannibal must cross the Alps and lead his army over dangerous rivers. The Romans struggle with the Carthaginians among trees (5.480-516), and many drown in the rivers of Italy. Every major battle in the epic is fought adjacent to water, except the final battle at Zama. Weather is also significant, and Jupiter occasionally stirs up wind, rain and thunder above battlegrounds (e.g. 5.70-2; 12.609-11). The Trebia is not, by any means, the only instance of personified nature in the *Punica*,¹⁴ but it is the longest (59 lines at least, more if one includes its involvement in the battle prior to Scipio's entrance). It is also certainly one of the most significant personifications, and one of the few times that nature is anthropomorphised.¹⁵ The river lifts its head out of the water and speaks: *tum madidos crines et glauca fronde*

¹² E.g.: Ovid: *Metamorphoses* 8.547-9.97, Theseus' meeting with the personified river Acheloüs and Acheloüs' fight with Hercules. Ennius: *Annales* 1.65; 66-9, in what is likely the tale of Romulus and Remus, the Tiber floods and flows backwards; Jupiter restores the Tiber to its proper course. Non-epic works: perhaps Statius' *Silvae* 4.67-100 the Volturnus river welcomes the rule of Domitian.

¹³ Although Silius, unlike Lucan and Virgil, never allows the Tiber to be sullied with blood and gore, Hannibal expresses interest in conquering it, insofar as it represents the city of Rome: *hic labor Ausoniam et dabit hic in vincula Thybrim* (3.511). However, like the Capitoline, the Tiber is beyond Hannibal's limits.

¹⁴ E.g. the Rhone is described as *territus* (3.483); Lake Trasimene avoids making contact with a corpse (5.330-1); at Bagrada the river and its banks mourn the death of the sacred serpent (6.284-5); the semi-anthropomorphic Volturnus wind interferes in a battle (9.495-523); the goddess of Italy speaks out angrily against the Carthaginians and visits Claudius in the Roman camp (15.522-43).

¹⁵ The Volturnus wind and the goddess of Italy (see above) are the only other two examples. Also of note is Juno's visit to Hannibal in the form of Lake Trasimene at 4.725-6.

revinctum | *attollit cum voce caput* (4.659-60), although up until this point it has fought Scipio in its ‘elemental’ form and seems only to appear anthropomorphised to address Scipio.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the river is personified throughout the entire episode in other ways; it rouses its waters at the behest of Juno (573-4), and fears (*timentem*) the advancing of the elephants (601). Active verbs also emphasise its intention: *intumuit* (638), *sustulit* (638), *propellit* (639), *torquet* (640), *impulit* (650), and *pressit* (650), among others.

Because the Trebia is personified, it has volition. Depending on its actions, we are able to distinguish between its domesticated and undomesticated state; as long as the river acts according to its will, then it remains within these two categories. When the river performs according to Juno’s request and targets the Roman soldiers, rather than the Carthaginians, it shows it is obedient to a particular god, and therefore domesticated in that capacity. On the other hand, to the Romans, and especially to Scipio, the Trebia is an undomesticated river that poses a threat to Roman safety. This is clear in Scipio’s words to the Trebia:

magnas, o Trebia, et meritas mihi, perfide, poenas
exsolves, inquit, lacerum per Gallica rivis
dispergam rura atque amnis tibi nomina demam;
quoque aperis te fonte, premam, nec tangere ripas
illabique Pado dabitur. quaenam ista repente
Sidonium, infelix, rabies te reddidit amnem? (643-8)

Treacherous Trebia, you will suffer punishments as great as you deserve. I will scatter the separated channels of your river through the land of the Gauls and I will deprive you the name of river. More than this, I will halt you at the spring from where you appear. And you shall not touch the banks, nor will you be allowed to be channeled into the Po. What sudden insanity, wretched Trebia, has turned you into a Carthaginian river?

¹⁶ As the Tiber does for Aeneas at *Aeneid* 8.31-5.

Scipio's speech indicates his belief that the Trebia is sympathetic to the Carthaginians, and, more pointedly, that it is not sympathetic to the Romans, though it should be, being an Italian river. However, there is something more sinister underlying Scipio's threats. François Spaltenstein asserts: "‘Nomina’ symbolise l'existence. L'idée n'est pas que ce ‘fleuve’ sera réduit, par exemple, à un ‘ruisselet’, mais que la Trébie disparaître."¹⁷ So what exactly is Scipio suggesting here? At first, he seems to insinuate that he will punish the river by domesticating it, by forcing it to flow in separate channels throughout Gallic lands. This would be non-natural domestication, such as we saw in the *Odyssey* with Circe's forced domestication of men who stray into her path.¹⁸ However, Scipio goes on to say that he will literally remove the river from the landscape; he will stop it at its source. This is not domestication as we have thus far seen it; this is complete annihilation. Domestication requires the existence of the river's *phusis*, even if it is thwarted, but a river that does not exist has no *phusis* at all. Indeed, following Scipio's threats, the Trebia responds: *poenasne superbas | insuper et nomen Trebiae delere minaris, | o regnis inimice meis?* ("Insolent man and enemy of my kingdom, do you threaten to punish me further by obliterating the name of Trebia?" 660-2). The river's words confirm Scipio's intention: he threatens to wipe the Trebia from the landscape altogether.

I will return to the substance of Scipio's speech later, but for now I will consider the non-natural phenomena that affect the river. Many of these are similar to what we have seen in the *Iliad*: the Trebia is filled with blood (593), corpses and equipment (625-6; 662-4) and it is unable to flow in its proper channel due to the obstructions (664). However, Silius adds an extra horror: the river is not only stuck, its stream also flows backwards (*retroque feruntur*) in its bed (665).¹⁹ When the river addresses Scipio, it rebukes him for the carnage he has wrought in the water and complains about each of the non-natural phenomena. Similar to the Scamander at *Iliad* 21.217, it suggests that Scipio either exercise moderation, or take his slaughter elsewhere: *adde modum dextrae aut campis incumbe propinquis* (666). Its words clearly suggest a concern for the preservation of its *phusis*.

¹⁷ Spaltenstein (1986) 319-20.

¹⁸ See chapter 1.

¹⁹ The image of the river running backwards occurs, perhaps most famously, in Euripides' *Medea* (410-20) to suggest a crisis in the social order. We also see this in Ennius (*Annales* 1.65).

In fact, all of these non-natural phenomena are thematised throughout the epic, and references to such events are common. Very early in book one, Juno predicts the future Roman defeats:

dum Romana tuae, Ticine, cadavera ripae
non capiant Simoisque mihi per Celtica rura
sanguine Pergameo Trebia et stipantibus armis
corporisbusque virum retro fluat ac sua largo
stagna reformidet Thrasymennus turbida tabo,
dum Cannas, tumulum Hesperiae, campumque cruore
Ausonio mersum sublimis Iapyga cernam
teque vadi dubium coeuntibus, Aufide, ripis
per clipeos galeasque virum caesosque per artus
vix iter Hadriaci rumpentem ad litora ponti (1.45-54).

When your banks, Ticinus, cannot hold the bodies of the Romans, and the Trebia, my own Simois, flows backwards through the Gallic land, packed with Roman blood and the arms and bodies of men, and Lake Trasimene fears its own muddy pools, overflowing with putrid fluids. When I see Cannae from above, the grave of Italy, and the fields of Iapygia immersed in streams of Roman gore, while you, Aufidus, uncertain of your course as your banks come together, scarcely forge a narrow passage to the shore of the Adriatic Sea through the round shields and helmets and hewn limbs of men.

In this programmatic secondary proem,²⁰ the goddess refers to each Roman defeat not in terms of the actual battles, nor number of lives lost, but in terms of the ecological crises that occur in the wake of Carthaginian victory. Hannibal and his allies make similar boasts at 6.706-8, 11.185-9 and 135-41. Silius encourages his audience to view the Carthaginian enemy as a threat to the physical landscape of Italy; he undermines any glory that might be found in their victories by presenting them as transgressions against nature. In a detailed analysis of this passage, Carlo Santini

²⁰ Recalling Jupiter's prediction at *Aeneid* 1.257-96.

offers a number of interpretations based on Juno's references to the violation of the rivers and lake in question. In particular, he proposes that the destruction of nature suggests an imbalance in the order of nature, as well as demonstrating that violence towards nature causes pollution, which is associated with religious taboos. He also proposes that the violation of nature works towards a climactic obliteration of nature.²¹ Underlying this argument is the certainty that the violation of nature, as seen in non-natural phenomena, is depicted negatively. More importantly, this passage indicates that the destruction of nature in the *Punica* is a direct threat to the safety and security of Italy and Rome.²²

The idea that violent interference causes imbalance in nature is evidenced elsewhere in the epic also. The most striking example of this occurs during the battle at Lake Trasimene: as Hannibal charges into combat against Flaminius, the earth shakes open to reveal the Underworld below, the lake rises higher than it has ever done before to immerse the surrounding forests in water, and rivers and ocean currents flow in reverse (5.611-26).²³ Such a disturbing event highlights the excessive climax of the battle; the effects of the fight literally cause the boundaries between planes to shift, and environmental phenomena contravene physical laws. Furthermore, the image of the river in reverse appears elsewhere to signal distressed nature: the Rhone runs backwards in fear of Carthaginian elephants at 3.463-5; the Ticinus, frightened of Mars, also reverses its course (4.442-3); and the Trebia complains that the volume of bodies in its stream forces it to run backwards (4.665). Beyond watercourses, the disruption of the cosmic order is also evidenced in other parts of nature: at 8.641-55 the Romans dream apocalyptic visions of blood flowing from Jupiter's temple, the Allia rising above its banks, the Alps and Apennines shifting positions, meteor showers, and the breaking open of the heavens to reveal Jupiter himself. All of these dramatic events occur only in dreams, but they suggest that the

²¹ Santini (1991) 69-72.

²² Indeed, the major places where nature is violated are in Italy: Ticinus, Trebia, Trasimene, Aufidus (all of which are included in Juno's speech), and the Metaurus. The battle of Zama features no such violation. Other places outside of Italy are violated, such as the Rhone and the Druentia, as well as the Pyrenees and the Alps, but these are not inflicted with non-natural phenomena as the rivers of Italy are.

²³ In fact, Livy recorded the earthquake described here (22.5), claiming that none of the combatants felt it, despite its tremendous strength. He does not include the detail that the Underworld was revealed through a crack in the ground, but he does say that the quake was strong enough to derail streams from their channels, force the sea into rivers, and cause major landslides.

oncoming battle at Cannae will not be a favourable one; indeed, in the following passage a soldier predicts the Roman defeat, concluding: *pons ecce cadentum | corporibus struitur, reicitque cadavera fumans | Aufidus* (“See how the bodies of the fallen make a bridge, and the stinking Aufidus flings the corpses out of its stream,” 668-70). The images of nature in turmoil are horrific; they clearly suggest that something is amiss.

The previous quote also illustrates that there remains a close causal relationship between violence towards nature and pollution.²⁴ The rivers where the major battles are fought are all inundated with blood, bodies, and equipment, causing the water to become polluted. At Ticinus, the horror of the violence is emphasised by the description of its usual behaviour just prior to the battle:

caeruleas Ticinus aquas et stagna vadoso
 perspicuus servat turbare nescia fundo
 ac nitidum viridi lente trahit amne liquorem.
 vix credas labi: ripis tam mitis opacis
 argutos inter volucrum certamine cantus
 somniferam ducit lucenti gurgite lympham (4.82-7).

The translucent Ticinus keeps its waters clear and prevents its pools from being muddied in the shallow bed. Slowly it pulls its water along the stream, which shines a bright green. Scarcely would you believe it to be moving: so placidly along the shaded banks it travels, the birds singing melodiously in contest with one another. Thus it leads its soporific waters in shining eddies.

Silius’ Ticinus is a peaceful, slow-flowing river,²⁵ its waters clear and blue. Yet the river after the battle could hardly be more changed: Serranus later laments that the Ticinus is *ater | stragibus* (“black with carnage,” 6.107-8), just as Juno had predicted

²⁴ Spaltenstein (1986) 321 notes: “L’encombrement du fleuve (vers 664) est devenu ensuite un motif constant, comme aussi ‘retro...feruntur’ 665.”

²⁵ This passage recalls the moment when Aeneas first catches sight of the Tiber, spilling forth its water into the sea while birds above sing and flit through the trees at *Aeneid* 7.30-4.

it would be overwhelmed with corpses at 1.45-6, a far cry from the crystal-clear stream it used to be.

As Littlewood notes, the motif of the corpse-filled river emphasises the pollution of Italian land.²⁶ In fact, the theme of pollution extends throughout the epic and is frequently used to vilify the Carthaginians. Hannibal's boasts are echoed by Roman lament (Serranus at 6.106-12) and divine disapproval (Jupiter at 12.695-7); the deeds for which Hannibal appears most proud are presented as extreme, sacrilegious and transgressive.²⁷ Time and again, nature rebels against the abuse it receives during war: the Druentia drowns many of Hannibal's men as they attempt crossing (3.468-76), Lake Trasimene recoils from the body of a dead soldier (5.330-1), and the Aufidus spews out corpses which had fallen into its stream (10.319-20). Although the major form of pollution – blood and gore in the river – results from the slaughter of both Carthaginian and Roman soldiers, the blame (or credit) for this defilement is almost always placed on Hannibal. Indeed in book 15 the goddess of the Italian earth herself appears and bemoans the treatment she has received at the hands of Hannibal: *quot corpora texi | caesorum, stratis totiens deformis alumnis!* ("how many bodies of the slaughtered have I buried? How often am I deformed by the scattering of my own children?" 15.530-1). She complains too that the crops are now harvested with swords, and that she is made ugly by the destruction of houses which fall *in gremium* (532-5). But her anger is directed solely at Hannibal and she seeks aid from a Roman consul, condemning the Carthaginians to a mass grave (547-57). It is clear from her perspective that the Carthaginians alone are the cause of her suffering.

Yet while the Italian goddess blames Hannibal for her troubles, the anthropomorphic Trebia assigns all blame for the pollution and reversal of its waters to Scipio. Indeed, this is not unwarranted; the appearance of Scipio signals the beginning of a bloodbath in which the Trebia is packed so closely with bodies that the water is barely visible (4.625-6). This is at odds with later Roman recollection of the event: Serranus laments the bloodying of the Ticinus and the Po, but of the Trebia he states only *tuque insignite tropaeis | Sidoniis Trebia* ("and you, Trebia, distinguished by Carthaginian victory," 6.108-9), omitting any mention of Scipio's responsibility

²⁶ Littlewood (2011) 185.

²⁷ See, for example, Hannibal's dream of a huge serpent that crushes forests and destroys everything in its path (3.185-197); so will Hannibal crush Italy with war. Hannibal receives this omen with joy (215-6).

for the pollution of the river. Scipio's actions in this instance are problematic, because Silius generally utilises non-natural events and their causation as a way to transfer blame for Roman suffering onto the Carthaginians. Yet here, the non-natural events are clearly linked with the arrival of Scipio. In fact, this is not so problematic; like Livy, Silius has pairs of good and bad consuls – Fabius and Minucius, Paulus and Varro – but none are perfect models of Roman heroism and virtue. For some, such as Minucius and Varro, their flaw is an irresponsible brashness and thirst for battle; others, such as Fabius, are perhaps too cautious to make much headway for Rome.²⁸ Scipio's major flaw is his inability to control his *furor* in battle, and this comes to light during his fight with the Trebia.

The Trebia episode parallels the tale of Regulus and the serpent of Bagrada in book 6.²⁹ The elderly Marus tells the story of Regulus, a celebrated Roman hero of the First Punic War, who fought and killed a monstrous serpent at the river Bagrada (6.140-298). Following the death of the serpent, Marus claims that the river, trees, caves and banks joined in lamentation because the serpent had been the servant of the naiads (283-8; 288-90). Furthermore, Regulus' defeat of the serpent is said to foreshadow later peril (*seris...periclis*, 290), likely hinting at the future capture of Regulus.³⁰ The destruction of nature is here clearly connected with military failure; the death of the serpent is almost a causal factor in Regulus' future defeat. It is curious then, that Serranus, who happens to be Regulus' son, should interrupt Marus' tale with this exclamation:

huic si vita duci nostrum durasset in aevum,
non Trebia infaustas superasset sanguine ripas (296-7).

If the life [of Regulus] had continued on into our age, the Trebia
would not have overflowed its ill-omened banks with blood.

Regulus' defeat of the serpent is heroic, certainly, and proves his valour in battle. However, the episode concludes with a problematizing of Regulus' treatment of

²⁸ Tipping (2010a) 193-4.

²⁹ A commentary and discussion of this passage can be found in Bassett (1955) 1-20.

³⁰ Spaltenstein (1986) 410.

nature: he has killed a sacred creature, for which he will be punished.³¹ Serranus' intention is surely to evoke the unquestionable heroism of his father and point out that, had he been alive still, he would have led the Romans to victory. His words imply that the Trebia would not have been filled with the bodies of soldiers had Regulus been present at the battle. Or, perhaps, that Regulus would have prevented the need for the battle altogether, having already won the war at an earlier stage. Yet there remains an undercurrent of ambiguity; it was, after all, Scipio who was responsible for the majority of the carnage in the Trebia, and without his presence the Romans would surely have faced a much more severe defeat, at least within the confines of the *Punica*. Although this is little more than an inconsistency, it nevertheless draws attention to a parallel between Regulus and Scipio, as Roman heroes who fight and triumph over a foe from nature with ambiguous, even questionable, results.³²

The Bagrađa episode illustrates how Silius uses human interaction with nature as a way to offer moral judgements. Regulus' actions are not enough to vilify him completely, but they do cast a shadow over his memory. Similarly, Scipio's encounter with the Trebia paints him as a liminal figure in this instance.³³ Indeed, Scipio's disregard for nature resembles the Carthaginian attitude. As Santini observes: "the Roman hero's role might just as easily have been taken by Hannibal, no less arrogant than he." Scipio's status as Roman consul and hero does not necessarily justify his behaviour.³⁴ Furthermore, not only does Scipio defile the sacred dwelling place of a god, he also threatens it with the worst fate imaginable: complete obliteration.

Scipio's threat introduces a new way of interacting with nature that is not present in Homer. Achilles (who has little power against the river), can barely hold

³¹ Augoustakis (2006) 159: "Regulus' deed is explicitly described as a violation against nature".

³² Regulus' heroism is especially questionable, as summarized by Cowan (2010) 341: "Regulus is a problematic figure, whose courage and *constantia* are tainted by his recklessness, arrogance, and cruelty to his family." See also Augoustakis (2006), especially 157-60 for more on Regulus at Bagrađa.

³³ Excuses may be made for Scipio's behavior: Chaudhuri (2014) 209 notes that the Trebia is somewhat insincere in its accusation of Scipio, as the river began to be obstructed by bodies before his arrival, and it directly assaulted the Romans. Nevertheless, Silius saves the explicit description of the obstructed river for the moment right after Scipio appears on the scene; Scipio is presented as the major cause of the build-up of corpses in the river.

³⁴ Santini (1991) 83. A similar point may be made about Regulus: Augoustakis (2006) 160 asks: "His fight against the serpent... presents a picture of violation. In this respect, how different is Regulus from Hannibal and his transgression in crossing the Alps?"

his own against it, let alone find a way to destroy it entirely. Yet in the *Punica*, Scipio fares much better against the river than his Homeric counterpart. Chaudhuri observes that Scipio's threats are technological; they resonate with ideas of Roman dominance over waterways and suggest advances in hydroengineering.³⁵ However, Scipio's aim is not to take control of the river and govern it with technology, but in fact, to destroy it entirely. This is a step further than domination, shifting the attitude beyond the realm of natural and non-natural, onto a plane where humans have total control over nature without concern for its *phusis*. The poem does not explicitly praise or condemn this specific idea, but in the katabasis of book 13, Scipio, now deceased, advises his son to control himself in battle (*martis moderare furori*), and to learn from his father's mistakes (13.667-71). Marks notes that the advice given seems to specifically recall the Trebia episode, when Scipio showed himself capable of excessive *furor*. Moreover, the language Scipio uses to encourage restraint in his son recalls the Trebia's words to Scipio during the battle: *adde modum dextrae*.³⁶ Later, Scipio's son meets Hannibal's father, Hamilcar. Scipio Africanus rebukes Hamilcar for the suffering Hannibal has caused. In particular, he says: *Alpes | eluctatus adest, fervet gens Itala Marte | barbarico, et refruunt obstructi stragibus amnes* ("he [Hannibal] came to us after struggling over the Alps, and the Italian nation is ablaze with foreign war, while the rivers flow backwards, piled high with the slaughtered," 13.741-3). Scipio Africanus frames the war in terms of ecological crises, as Juno had done in book 1, but to him they represent the very worst of Carthaginian achievements, a level to which he will not stoop, unlike his own father.

While Scipio Africanus assumes the mantle of the quintessential Roman hero, Hannibal descends further into moral disgrace as the narrative progresses. From the beginning, Hannibal's campaign is marked by his ability to transcend boundaries within nature; he refuses to sleep (1.245-6), passes unfazed beneath lightning storms (253-5), marches without tiring (255-6), refuses to drink even on the hottest of days (257-60), and is the first of his men to swim across unfamiliar rivers (263-4).³⁷ The treaty between Rome and Carthage dictates that the Carthaginians may advance no further than the Ebro, a limitation that Hannibal scorns: *foedera, faxo | iam noscas*,

³⁵ Chaudhuri (2014) 208.

³⁶ Marks (2005) 140-1.

³⁷ Compare the catalogue of Hannibal's virtues and vices in Livy 21.4. Here Hannibal is likewise liminal owing to his many vices, though he does not reject nature's limitations as he does in the *Punica*.

quid vana queant et vester Hiberus (“now I will make you understand that your treaty is good for nought, and your Ebro too,” 1.479-80). Not only does Hannibal break the treaty by physically moving his army far beyond the Ebro, he symbolically asserts his contempt for the barrier by wielding a shield that bears this image:

extrema clipei stagnabat Hiberus in ora,
curvatis claudens ingentem flexibus orbem.
Hannibal, abrupto transgressus foedere ripas,
Poenorum populos Romana in bella vocabat (2.449-52)

The Ebro flowed around the outermost edge of the shield, surrounding the huge circle with its winding curves. Hannibal was there, crossing over the banks and breaking the treaty, as he urged the Carthaginians to war against the Romans.

The description of the shield is programmatic, drawing on Homer’s description of Achilles’ shield in *Iliad* 18 and Virgil’s description of Aeneas’ shield in *Aeneid* 8. This passage in particular is modelled on Achilles’ shield, which is encircled by Oceanus, the father of rivers and border of the world.³⁸ In the *Punica*, the Ebro takes the place of Oceanus, transforming the Punic War into a microcosm.³⁹ But this microcosm is narrow and limited, as Vessey has argued, and serves to demonstrate that the success of Hannibal is temporary, “bound within a world restricted by space and time.” By contrast, Rome’s legacy will continue, *sine fine*.⁴⁰ Hannibal’s crossing of the Ebro is a transgression of a boundary that is both microcosmic and part of nature, and a suggestion that his future campaign is bound to fail in the end.

Boundary-crossing is of particular importance to the *Punica*. The Ebro is both a physical boundary separating Carthage’s territories from Rome’s, and a metaphysical boundary between appropriate and inappropriate human behaviour. The crossing of such frontiers held political resonance: Caesar’s bridging of the Rhine, for example, symbolically expanded Rome’s empire and challenged the people who

³⁸ Hesiod, *Theogony* 337-45. Notably, Oceanus is missing from Aeneas’ shield; Jones (2005) 74 argues that the omission of the oceanic border is deliberate and “shows how the Romans have moved beyond imagining the edges of the earth and now touch them with their empire.”

³⁹ As the shield of Achilles is a “microcosm of society”. See Hardie (1986) 340-2.

⁴⁰ Vessey (1975) 404.

dwelt on the other side (*Gallic War* 4.16-18), just as Hannibal's crossing of the Ebro challenges the current political and martial status quo. Rivers make especially good physical boundaries, owing to their inherently divisive nature, but mountains, too, mark borders between lands. The Alps act as another major boundary in the *Punica* – more important, even, than the Ebro, whose crossing is not narrated in the epic – due to their largely inviolate state, having not been traversed since Hercules did so many years previously (*Punica* 3.496-9).⁴¹ By crossing the Alps,⁴² Hannibal rejects their divine inscrutability, clearly transgressing the line between what is appropriate and inappropriate. Even the men are at first uneasy at such an idea:

at miles dubio tardat vestigia gressu,
impia ceu sacros in fines arma per orbem,
natura prohibente, ferant divisque repugnant (3.500-3).

But the soldiers advanced slowly, moving their feet with uncertainty,
as if they carried ungodly arms across the world into an inviolate land,
acting against both nature and the gods.

Their fear is incomprehensible to Hannibal, who urges them on with the promise of further victories (504-13). The army makes it over the mountains, but Hannibal's success does not come without a struggle. Nature rebels against his army: the snow swallows many of the soldiers and the wind harries them as they advance (3.520-7). Despite these obstacles, the crossing is a success. Once again, Hannibal proves himself capable of passing beyond nature's boundaries, but his army does not leave the Alps without altering the landscape: *mutatur iam forma locis: his sanguine multo | infectae rubuere nives* ("now the appearance of the place was changed: here the snow grew red with copious blood," 547-8).⁴³ The stain they leave on the Alps is a sinister

⁴¹ The Alps hold further significance as a prefiguration of the walls of Rome. See von Albrecht (1964) 24-29.

⁴² Following his successful, but less remarkable, crossings of the Pyrenees (1.415-19), the Rhone (446-65) and the Druentia (466-76).

⁴³ See Augoustakis (2003) 250.

reminder of Hannibal's transgression, which looks forward to later battles that see rivers and fields stained with blood as well.⁴⁴

Hannibal's disregard for nature is apparent elsewhere too. A lengthy digression describes a peaceful episode in which the legendary Falernus entertains Bacchus at his home on the slopes of Mount Massicus (7.162-211). The place in question is made fertile through the beneficence of the god, and becomes one of the most famous wine-producing regions thereafter. Immediately following this passage, Silius declares: *haec tum vasta dabat terrisque infestus agebat | Hannibal* ("then Hannibal laid waste to this place, and violence broke into the land," 212-3).⁴⁵ The immediacy of Hannibal's assault, which is no more than an expression of frustration at Fabius' continuing refusal to join battle (213-4), on a place that Silius unequivocally describes as being among the most fertile of areas, serves to emphasise Hannibal's utter disregard for the landscape – a quality that confirms him as *improbus*.

Throughout the epic, Hannibal and his allies frame their conquests in terms of their triumphs over nature. Hannibal's brother says of him: *mihi, cui cedunt montesque lacusque | et campi atque amnes, frater* ("he is my brother, to whom mountains, lakes, fields and rivers yield," 15.748-9). However, despite Hannibal's frequent boasts that he has mastered nature, his ability to overcome nature's boundaries and limitations declines as the narrative progresses. Manolaraki connects the tidal imagery of the *Punica*, in particular the passage describing the Atlantic tides at 3.45-61, with Hannibal's fate, governed, as it is, by cosmic necessity. While Hannibal is witness to the flow of the tide over the land, Manolaraki argues that he is not aware of the ebb of the tide as it retreats towards the ocean; this vision is reserved for Silius and his audience alone. Hannibal, who sees only the rising of the water, remains unaware of its eventual withdrawal and, analogously, his impending failure: "the tidal motif enables Silius... to illustrate that Hannibal underestimates the natural, divine, and historical principles that govern his place in the world."⁴⁶ Indeed, Hannibal's ability to withstand nature's compulsion dwindles in the second half of the

⁴⁴ The motif of the Alps has been discussed in detail by Subrt (1991) who critiques and builds on the argument of von Albrecht (1964).

⁴⁵ This passage closely parallels Ovid's story of Baucis and Philemon in the *Metamorphoses* (8.612-727). However, Silius' version ends with greater violence. On Silius' use of Ovidian material, see Wilson (2004) and Bruère (1959).

⁴⁶ Manolaraki (2010) 311.

epic. Once he could ride unassailed beneath a thunderstorm (1.253-5), but later, when Jupiter unleashes a furious tempest above the Carthaginians in defence of Rome, Hannibal is twice forced to retreat (12.627-32; 661-3).⁴⁷ Similarly, when Hannibal attempts to return to Italy after setting sail for Carthage, Neptune overwhelms his fleet with a fierce storm that nearly kills him (17.218-90). Hannibal's mastery over nature diminishes as his failure looms; Jupiter had allowed him to go so far: *Tyrrhenas sternere valles | caedibus, et ripas fluviorum exire Latino | sanguine fas fuerit* ("it is permitted for you to scatter the Etruscan valleys with corpses, and to make the banks of the rivers flow with Roman blood," 6.602-4), but the father of the gods imposes limits upon Hannibal too: *Tarpeium accedere collem | murisque aspirare veto* ("but I forbid you to reach the Tarpeian hill and conquer the city walls," 604-5).⁴⁸ Hannibal, however, is unaware of these limits; his campaign is characterised by the enduring and arrogant belief that he is capable of anything.⁴⁹ The crossing of nature's boundaries, in particular the Alps, and the destruction of the Italian landscape at places such as the Ticinus, Trebia, Po and Trasimene, serve, in Hannibal's mind, as evidence of his ability to succeed, because he has already triumphed in ways no others have done before. To Silius and his audience, these trespasses indicate instead that Hannibal will never conquer Rome, as these actions are transgressions that will eventually lead to his downfall. Indeed, during the final battle at Zama, Silius narrates the deaths of a multitude of renowned Carthaginians at the hands of Scipio Africanus; these men, says Silius, were famous for their exploits at Saguntum, for polluting Trasimene and the Po, for marching against the dwelling place of Jupiter on the Capitol, and for profaning the sacred spaces of the Alps (17.491-503). Here, the previous triumphs of the Carthaginians are directly connected to their deaths.

We have already seen how specific forms of nature, such as mountains and rivers, can mark the limit between empires, and between inappropriate and appropriate behaviour. Moreover, the triggering of non-natural events is also a kind of boundary crossing, as these phenomena profane sacred spaces and gods, and interrupt the usual order of nature. Both Hannibal and Scipio (and Regulus, in the past) are

⁴⁷ On this leitmotif see Schrijvers (2006) 103.

⁴⁸ Jupiter's limitations on Hannibal recall Zeus' restrictions on Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*: both will win glory, but neither will take the city walls because they are restrained by *moira* (*Iliad* 16.707-9). Turnus of the *Aeneid* is also a strong parallel for Hannibal; he too is bound by a particular fate (*Aeneid* 10.622-5).

⁴⁹ On Hannibal's *improba virtus* see Tipping (2010) 61-73.

guilty of causing non-natural events, but the cycle halts with Scipio Africanus, that paradigm of Roman virtue, who implicitly denounces such treatment of nature at 13.741-3 (quoted earlier). The character of anyone who crosses these boundaries is immediately called into question, but Hannibal, who transgresses nature's boundaries at every stage of his campaign, is more excessive, impious and immoral than anyone else. His failures are also correspondingly greater.⁵⁰

Rivers and other waterscapes are of particular importance to the *Punica*. While other aspects of nature, such as mountains, forests and fields, do feature in the epic, they appear less frequently than rivers. The historical record dictates that nearly all the major Italian battles of the Second Punic War occurred near or beside bodies of fresh water, but all the same, Silius makes much more out of this than a straight versification of the historical facts would require, by personifying the rivers, exaggerating their pollution, and referring back to the abuse they experienced. Beyond the major martial rivers of the *Punica*, other waterscapes appear frequently in catalogues, often denoting the homeland of an individual or group. Rivers are especially prominent in the catalogue of Roman forces in book 8 (356-616). As a result, destruction of riverine environments has potential implications not only for the ecological landscape, but for the local communities as well. But rivers can also be politically charged; we have already seen how the crossing of certain rivers could act as a political statement, or an expression of imperialism. More than this, rivers were often depicted as being complicit and involved in these processes.⁵¹ In the *Punica*, the major rivers are all Italian, and most are shown to be the unwilling victims of a Carthaginian assault, mirroring Roman sentiment. The Trebia is exceptional; rather than remaining neutral as most of the other rivers do, it acts in accordance with Juno's wishes, and therefore supports the Carthaginians. The river subverts the political status quo, which dictates that the rivers of Italy ought to be loyal to Rome alone. Indeed, Scipio's major gripe with the Trebia is that it has become Carthaginian despite existing on Italian land (4.643-8). It is for this treachery that he threatens to obliterate the Trebia altogether. There exists a tension between the idea that domesticated rivers should help, or at least refuse to harm, those who acted as their

⁵⁰ Indeed, Hannibal's inability to recognize boundaries present in nature prefigures his failure to overcome the walls of Rome, which are the ultimate boundary, and which Jupiter is unwilling to cede. See von Albrecht (1964) 24-46.

⁵¹ Coinage was an especially popular medium for displaying riverine collaboration and subjugation. See Campbell (2012) 378-383.

domesticators, and the fact that, in reality, rivers are unpredictable and often their natural processes are destructive to the communities and empires who lay claim to them. Even the Tiber flooded frequently, despite being Rome's tutelary river.⁵² The Trebia episode partly serves to make sense of this contradiction: the river floods and attacks the Romans because it is obedient to Juno, and by extension the Carthaginians, but also because rivers do not always perform in the way one might expect; variability is fundamental to their *phusis*.

Conversely, mountains are solid masses of unchanging rock. They too are important to the *Punica* as that other major physical manifestation of boundaries, yet their role is much reduced compared to that of the rivers. Unlike rivers, which are fluid and permeable, mountains are immovable and inflexible. Personification of mountains requires far more imagination than personification of rivers, which are already associated with life, movement and changeability,⁵³ and indeed, the Alps are not personified in the *Punica*. Landslides and avalanches make mountains potentially dangerous, but they cannot move from their position, unlike rivers, which can flood and find new avenues in which to flow. Because of the immovability of mountains, and their immensity that makes them difficult to alter and control, they cannot exemplify the domesticated/undomesticated/natural/non-natural spectrum as clearly as rivers can.

The principal attitude towards nature in the *Punica* is pragmatic; Silius portrays nature primarily as a marker of boundaries, of both the physical and metaphysical kinds. This is by no means a new use of nature in epic, as Lucan's *Civil War* demonstrates, but it does suggest an increased understanding of nature as something partly inviolate, which should, perhaps, be left to its own devices. However, the focus on Italian nature, and its frequent victimisation at the hands of the Carthaginians, suggests that nature is also seen to be part of Rome's political economy; the destruction to the Italian landscape is, on the face of it, an environmental catastrophe, but more importantly, it is an assault on the Roman Empire itself. Furthermore, the Romans maintain careful control over those environmental borders that separate them from their enemies, as the images paraded in the triumphal procession of the final book illustrate:

⁵² See Aldrete (2007) on the flooding of the Tiber. Of particular interest is the table on page 15.

⁵³ See Clarke (1997).

terrarum finis Gades ac laudibus olim
terminus Herculeis Calpe Baetisque lavare
solis equos dulci consuetus fluminis unda,
frondosumque apicem subigens ad sidera mater
bellorum fera Pyrene nec mitis Hiberus
cum simul illidit ponto, quos attulit, amnes (17.637-42).

Gades at the ends of the earth, and Calpe, the limit of ancient Hercules' accomplishments were both there. And the Baetis too, who is accustomed to bathing the sun's horses in the waves of its sweet stream. Also wild Pyrene, the mother of war, rearing her leafy peaks to the stars, and the Ebro, no mild river when it guides all those streams that it has brought with it into the sea.

Two of those boundaries mentioned are cities: Gades in south-western Spain, and Calpe, the limit of Hercules' achievements. The rest – the Baetis, the Pyrenees and the Ebro – are all environmental borders. With the end of the Second Punic War, some of the boundaries over which Hannibal crossed – namely the Pyrenees and the Ebro – are symbolically restored to Roman rule. However, complete authority over nature, even if it is Roman authority, is not necessarily a positive thing; the discomfort evinced by the elder Scipio's threats to annihilate the Trebia indicates that there is tension between human technological mastery and the power it can wield over nature, especially given that nature is often partly divine. For this reason emperors were anxious to be seen as cooperating with rivers, rather than exerting brute force over them.⁵⁴ This attitude exists within the *Punica*, and some of the major characters subscribe to it while others do not: Scipio, Regulus and Hannibal all treat nature with some measure of disrespect, and this contributes to their status as liminal figures. On the other hand, Scipio Africanus recognises the importance of protecting nature from exterior forces, as we saw in the katabasis of book 13, and this adds gravity to his ultimate success – the capture and defeat of Hannibal.

⁵⁴ See Campbell (2014) 372: "It was reasonable that river-gods too, once won over by imperial might and justice, would lend their efforts to supporting the emperor."

Overall, nature within the *Punica*, in addition to its role in the historical record, has a primarily moralising function. While there is concern over pollution and the effects of non-natural phenomena, that anxiety is not explicitly environmental. Of greater concern is the impiety and moral liminality associated with boundary-crossing, and the threat that boundary-crossing, exemplified by, but not limited to, non-natural phenomena, poses to Roman imperial stability. The ecological violations that transpire in the epic are, arguably, unavoidable symptoms of war, but the significant imbalance between (minor) Roman and (major) Carthaginian responsibility aids in the vilification of Rome's enemies, and suggests a moral superiority on the part of the Romans, who very rarely transgress boundaries in the epic, and who are characterised by *virtus* and *fides*. Silius' *Punica* is by no means categorically pro-Roman, but it is, nevertheless, a celebration of Roman achievements, and equally a condemnation of Carthaginian exploits, as the very first invocation illustrates:

da, Musa, decus memorare laborum
antiquae Hesperiae, quantosque ad bella crearit
et quot Roma viros, sacri cum perfida pacti
gens Cadmea super regno certamina movit (1.3-6).

Allow me, Muse, to recount the glory of Italy long ago, and to speak of how many great men Rome produced for war, when the Carthaginians betrayed the sacred agreement and set in motion a struggle for power.

From the first, Rome is already set high above Carthage in terms of *virtus*, and the rest of the epic exposes this disparity. Nature, too, plays a crucial role: a man's virtue in the *Punica* may be measured, at least in part, by the damage he inflicts upon nature, which generally does not deserve the violent treatment it so often receives.

3. *Thebaid* 9: Hippomedon and the Ismenus

My third and final chapter concerns a second Flavian epic, Statius' *Thebaid*. This poem narrates the struggle between Eteocles and Polynices for the throne of Thebes. It begins with the exile of Polynices after his brother, Eteocles, takes the throne. Filled with resentment for his brother's actions, Polynices assembles an army and marches against Thebes. At the climax of the narrative, the two brothers fight one-on-one and kill each other. The epic concludes with funeral fires for the major warriors, and the appearance of Theseus, who attempts to restore order, inciting a second civil war in the process. The *Thebaid* differs in many ways from its contemporary, the *Punica*,¹ but it too features a *mache parapotamios*: in book 9 the Argive hero Hippomedon, our Achilles/Turnus figure,² has his *aristeia*, the climax of which is a battle with the Ismenus River.³

The battle in the river begins at 9.225 when the fighters reach the riverbanks. The weight of the men at the river's edge causes the banks to give way (230-1) but Hippomedon jumps in anyway (233). Scenes of chaos follow, in which men struggle in the waves, many drowning as they try to hide or escape from Hippomedon (236-41). A brief interlude interrupts the carnage to introduce a new warrior – Crenaeus – who is the grandson of the Ismenus (319-37). Hippomedon kills the young warrior (345-6) and he is mourned by the waves and surrounding woods *horruit unda nefas, silvae flevistis utraeque, | et graviora cavae sonuerunt murmura ripae* ("the waves shuddered at this monstrous crime, the woods on either side wept, and the caved-in banks resounded with a louder rumbling," 347-8). After Crenaeus' death, his mother – the nymph Ismenis – seeks out his body and rebukes the Ismenus for failing to look out for the boy (351-98). Ismenus is completely unaware of what has been occurring in his own stream: *at pater arcano residens Ismenos in antro* ("but Father Ismenus was resting in his private hollow," 404) and he only learns of Crenaeus' death after a nymph tells him of it (416-8). When he discovers what has been occurring in his

¹ The relative chronology of these two texts is uncertain. Ripoll (2015) consolidates all the evidence but comes to no firm conclusions. However, there is some suggestion that Silius wrote his *mache parapotamios* before Statius wrote his; see Wistrand (1956) 58-9 and Dewar (1991) xxxi.

² See Conrau-Lewis (2014).

³ Like Silius, the Homeric source material informs much of Statius' own *mache parapotamios*. See Juhnke (1970) 24-44.

stream, Ismenus complains that he is inundated with bodies, weapons, and gore (429-33). He then rebukes Hippomedon (442-5) and begins an assault against the warrior (446-506). Eventually Hippomedon appeals to the gods for help (506-10) and Juno asks Jupiter to take action (510-19). With a nod of Jupiter's head, the river subsides (520-1).

In my previous two chapters I discussed the presence of nature in the *Iliad* and the *Punica*, and in both cases concluded that while the destruction of nature is a major concern in the texts, it is not necessarily an environmental matter, but rather a religious, cosmological, and political one. Nevertheless, it is possible to extract some underlying attitudes towards nature; for example, our texts suggest that nature is sacred, mysterious, and an integral part of the cosmic order. At the same time, it is valued according to how helpful or harmful it may be to humankind. In this chapter I will use the proposed schema to argue that the *Thebaid* treats nature in a similar way. I will also show, however, that within this framework the *Thebaid* differs in some crucial ways from the *Iliad* and the *Punica*.

First, let us take a look at the influence of Statius' predecessors on his own work. Much of what has been said regarding Silius and the influence of Virgil, Lucan and Ovid on the presentation of rivers in the *Punica* applies also to Statius' *Thebaid* and does not require repeating (see Chapter 2 above).⁴ However, the overall influence of the *Aeneid* on the *Thebaid* should not be overlooked, as Statius' narrator famously says at the end of his epic: *vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, | sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora* ("Live, I pray, and do not attempt to be the divine *Aeneid*, but follow it at a distance and always revere its footsteps," 12.816-7). As Ganiban argues, Statius does not try to outdo Virgil, but rather criticises and reinterprets the *Aeneid* from a moral and political perspective.⁵ Strikingly, Statius reinterprets the roles of the gods using a Virgilian paradigm; he assigns Jupiter the role of vindictive and wrathful god that had previously characterised the Juno of the *Aeneid*, and in turn, emphasises the change by likening Juno to the Virgilian Jupiter, insofar as she is a (weak) voice of reason.⁶ In terms of the landscape, Statius rejects

⁴ Of further interest on Ovidian influence in the *Thebaid* is Keith (2004/5).

⁵ Ganiban (2007), especially 1-2.

⁶ See Feeney (1991) 354; Ganiban (2007) 50-5; McNelis (2007) 6-7 and Micozzi (2015) 326-7. For a gender-specific interpretation of the *Aeneid*'s influence on the *Thebaid*, see McAuley (2016) 368-73.

Virgil's ambiguous treatment of the natural world. Here, a passage from the *Aeneid* describes the felling of a grove for the construction of Misenus' pyre:

itur in antiquam silvam, stabula alta ferarum;
procumbunt piceae, sonat icta securibus ilex
fraxineaeque trabes cuneis et fissile robur
scinditur, advolvunt ingentis montibus ornos (6.179-82).

Into the ancient forest they go, the dwelling place of wild animals.
Pines fall, while the pierced ilex resounds with each blow of the axe.
Ash and oak trees are split in two with wedges, and they roll the
mountain ash down the steep slopes.

This passage is reconstructed in the *Thebaid*.⁷ In particular, note the corresponding use and positioning of *procumbunt piceae*, *fraxineae/fraxinus* and *scinditur* at the beginning of their lines, as well as *robur* at the end:

...cedit ardua fagus
Chaoniumque nemus brumaeque illaesa cupressus,
procumbunt piceae, flammis alimenta supremis,
ornique iliceaeque trabes metuendaque suco
taxus et infandos belli potura cruores
fraxinus atque situ non expugnabile robur.
hinc audax abies et odoro vulnere pinus
scinditur, acclinant intonsa cacumina terrae
alnus amica fretis nec inhospita vitibus ulmus (6.98-106).

The lofty beech tree falls, as well as the Chaonian wood and the Cypress that can withstand the winter. The pines fall, food for high flames, and so do the mountain ash and oak trees, and the yew with its treacherous sap, and ash that will drink the blood of unspeakable warfare, and unassailable oak. Then the spirited fir tree falls, and the

⁷ See Schildgen (2013) 88-90.

pine is split with a fragrant wound, and the alder, a friend of the sea,
and the elm who is not inhospitable to vines, lean their clipped tops on
the earth.

Virgil's description of the felling of the grove generates ambivalent anxiety around the encumbrance of civilisation on the landscape.⁸ Statius takes a more explicitly moralising approach to the felling of the Nemean grove, denouncing it as a sacrilegious act (see pp. 9-11 above). The *Thebaid* challenges Virgil's comparatively indifferent approach to the violation of the landscape at the hands of Aeneas and his men by clarifying and underlining the moral issues at play and explicitly problematizing humankind's relationship with the landscape.⁹ The *Aeneid*, therefore, partially informs an understanding of nature in the *Thebaid*.

It would be remiss, however, to omit mention of the influence of Callimachus, in particular where rivers are concerned. McNelis' study of Callimachean intertextuality in the *Thebaid* addresses Statius' use of rivers, especially at Nemea, the Asopus, and the Ismenus, and suggests that they both reflect and resist Roman-Callimachean poetics.¹⁰ For example, the drought in book 4 signals a "counter to the poetic agenda" as it prevents the progression of the Argive troops, and therefore halts the continuation of the narrative.¹¹ Furthermore, the Asopus, which takes its origins from Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos* 75-8, is simultaneously anti-Callimachean, as the excursion into its past at *Thebaid* 7.317-27 delays the narrative further.¹² The swollen Ismenus, which joins together with the equally elevated Asopus, is Callimachean in physical form, but abandons "Callimachean values of small-scale streams and poetics" as a result of its grandiosity.¹³ Chaudhuri also comments on the Callimachean elements of the *machē parapotamios*, suggesting that Statius employs Callimachean

⁸ Thomas (1988) 267-8.

⁹ This passage also has a precursor in Lucan, whose description of the felling of the Massilian grove (3.399-445) involves similar desecration, although even here the crime is met with an ambiguous, even cynical, observation about divine retribution: *servat multos fortuna nocentes: | Et tantum miseris irasci numina possunt* (448-9). See Augoustakis (2006a).

¹⁰ I.e. that Callimachus was anti-epic, and critical of narrative digression, which could lengthen a poem unnecessarily. This is a contested interpretation of Callimachean poetics; Cameron (1995) 403-7 argues that Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo* is not anti-epic, but critical of elegy that attempts to imitate epic style.

¹¹ McNelis (2007) 87.

¹² Ibid. 112-5.

¹³ Ibid. 137.

imagery in order to compete with, and even outdo, Homer.¹⁴ Hippomedon's exceptional display of strength, and the river's corresponding intensity, challenges the Homeric notion that humans are powerless against the gods.¹⁵

Newlands has already made much headway on landscape in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Statius' *Thebaid*. Newlands examines three episodes in the *Thebaid* that demonstrate Statius' treatment of the landscape. These are, in order of discussion: the sacred grove of Diana (4.419-42), the sacred grove of Nemea (described at various points in books 4, 5 and 6), and the River Ismenus (see above). All of these *loci amoeni* have some parallel in the *Metamorphoses*, but Newlands argues that while Ovid's pleasant landscapes are deceptive and complicit in strife, the landscapes of Statius are victims of human aggression.¹⁶ Ovid's sacred places are maintained by the divinities, but Statius' gods are conspicuously aloof in this regard; they neither protect nor restore the earth.¹⁷ Newlands' most significant point is that "landscape thus provides a significant moral and political crux in its interrogation of divine and human action."¹⁸ Rivers demonstrate this especially well, as the watery landscape acts as a "symbolic topography in which the moral and physical evil of civil war is dramatically displayed in the sully and swelling of formerly pure and peaceful waters."¹⁹ Overall, Statius' depiction of nature unambiguously condemns human violence and chaos, and the metamorphosis of the landscape from the *locus amoenus* into a polluted and violated space reflects the confusion and discord inherent to the civil war.²⁰

Statius, then, takes a moralistic approach to violated landscape in the *Thebaid*. This is similar to what we have seen in the *Punica*, where the violation of nature is a transgressive and sacrilegious act. However, the *Punica* far more frequently pins the responsibility for the violation of nature on specific people,²¹ whereas the *Thebaid*

¹⁴ Whose poetry, some believe, is represented by the expansive πόντος in Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo*. See Williams (1978) 85-9, and Kahane (1994) 121. Others, such as Cameron (1995) 403-7, reject the association of πόντος with Homer.

¹⁵ Chaudhuri (2014) 213-4.

¹⁶ Newlands (2004) 137.

¹⁷ Ibid. 137-8.

¹⁸ Ibid. 136.

¹⁹ Ibid. 147.

²⁰ Ibid. 153-4.

²¹ I.e. Hannibal, Scipio, Regulus.

utilises the motif to reveal the negative impacts of the civil war as a whole.²² I will return to this point in due course, but for now I will outline instances of domesticated, undomesticated, and non-natural nature in the *Thebaid*.

Overall, nature in the *Thebaid* occupies a middle ground between nature in the *Iliad* and in the *Punica*. Nature is certainly much more present than in the *Iliad* and takes an active role in the narrative on a number of occasions. However, mentions of nature are less emphatic than in the *Punica*, where the pollution of the Italian rivers and the crossing of natural boundaries serve as important recurring thematic devices. Two instances of nature mentioned above – the Nemean grove and the Ismenus – are the longest and most significant treatments of nature in the epic. Nature appears on other occasions also: early on in the epic, after Polynices’ banishment, a ferocious storm wreaks havoc across the landscape (1.346-63), foreshadowing the turmoil to come.²³ Other mentions of nature are brief but still significant: twice Dirce’s spring is described as running with blood (1.38; 4.374-5); Acheloüs makes an appearance in the catalogue of book 4, hiding his one-horned head under the waves while *anhelantes aegrescunt pulvere ripae* (“his panting riverbanks grow sick with dust,” 4.106-9). In book 7 the earth cracks open and swallows Amphiaraus, who descends to the Underworld while the Ismenus runs through new openings in its banks (794-823).²⁴ One ought also to note the frequent references to the personified goddess Natura, who is invoked or referenced some eight times in the epic.²⁵ Her sphere of influence relates primarily to *phusis* (Latin *natura*) as we have so far defined it, although she is also at times associated with the physical world in general (e.g. at 10.88). The relatively frequent references to Natura are not especially surprising, given Statius’ penchant for personification,²⁶ but they do perhaps suggest a greater connection between *phusis* and the divine than in other texts.

²² And because the *Thebaid* is a part of the totalizing, archetypal genre of epic, the Theban civil war is paradigmatic of civil war in general. Therefore impressions of the civil war of the poem may also be impressions of all civil wars.

²³ Newlands (2004) 134.

²⁴ Or, perhaps, flees from its own waters, see Smolenaars (1994) 382 on lines 800-1. This episode recalls the autochthonous origin of the Thebans, who celebrate this katabasis by recounting the story of Cadmus (8.218-39); see Keith (2000) 60-1. On Amphiaraus, see Vessey (1973) 258-69, Masterson (2005) and McNelis (2007) 127-30.

²⁵ 6.845; 7.217; 8.330; 10.88; 11.466, 607; 12.561, 645. There are two references to Natura in the *Punica* (11.187 and 15.75), both concerning humankind’s mortality. Notably, there are no references to Natura in the *Aeneid*.

²⁶ See Feeney (1991) 364-91.

In the narrative of the *Thebaid* there are no conventional instances of domesticated nature. Unlike both the Scamander and the Trebia, who join forces with the Trojans and Carthaginians respectively, the Ismenus is not allied with either the Argives or the Thebans in the war, and does not actively support either group: *amnis utrimque timet, crasso vada mutat uterque | sanguine* (“the river fears both, and both dye the shallows with foul blood”, 9.257-8). However, the *possibility* for domestication is manifest in the youthful Crenaeus, the grandson of the Ismenus:

gaudebat Fauno Nymphaque Ismenide natus
maternis bellare tener Crenaeus in undis,
Crenaeus, cui prima dies in gurgite fido
et natale vadum et virides cunabula ripae,
ergo ratus nihil Elysias ibi posse Sorores,
laetus adulantem nunc hoc, nunc margine ab illo
transit avum: levat unda gradus, seu defluus ille,
sive oblicus eat; nec cum subit obvius, ullas
stagna dedere moras pariterque revertitur amnis (319-27).

Tender Crenaeus, born of Faunus and the nymph Ismenis, was delighted to fight in the maternal waves, in whose eddies he had trusted since his first day, nurtured in the shallows and the cradle of green banks. Thus he believed that the Elysian Sisters were powerless there, and joyfully he crossed over his fawning grandfather, now here, now to the very edge. The waves rose to meet his steps, whether he went downstream or to the side. Even when he suddenly met the current head-on, none of the pools hesitated, and the stream followed suit and reversed.

Here we have the youthful descendant of a river who faces a warrior much greater than himself, Hippomedon. The source model for Homer’s Asteropaeus is Crenaeus, the grandson of the Axios River whom Achilles fights and kills in the Scamander at *Iliad* 21.140-82. It is apparent, however, that Crenaeus is exceptional. Not only is he descended from the river, but the river actually flows in tandem with his movements, allowing him to walk on the waves, and even running in reverse if he should wish to

move upstream. The river's cooperation with Crenaeus is a kind of proto-domestication that hints at possible past or future domestication. The river is only sympathetic to one individual, however, and though Crenaeus fights on behalf of the Theban host, the river cares only for him, not his allies. Domestication, as we have thus far seen it, is usually the product of close proximity between a group of humans and a specific river, as with the Trojans and the Scamander, or else a product of imperialism: the rivers of Italy in the *Punica*, for example, belong to the Roman political economy as they are located within the bounds of the empire. In the *Thebaid*, we would expect the Ismenus to be sympathetic to the Thebans since it is also located in Boeotia, east of Thebes, and historically provided a significant portion of the city's water.²⁷ Indeed, the Thebans do try to use the river as if it is domesticated: at 4.414-8 Eteocles undergoes a purification ritual in the Ismenus. The ritual does not succeed and Eteocles remains impure; in any case, the Ismenus is an unsuitable agent of purification, as it will itself be polluted beyond recognition in the near future.²⁸

The events at Nemea are also worth noting here: as the Argive warriors march towards Thebes, Bacchus orders all the streams in their path to dry up (4.684-96). Rather than appealing to the river deities directly, as we might expect, Bacchus asks the nymphs to activate the drought. The nymphs can control the water of the streams and hasten to obey Bacchus' commands (697-710). This looks like domestication, but it is complicated by the indirectness of communication: Bacchus cannot control the rivers himself, nor does he command the rivers or river-gods directly; he liaises with the nymphs to achieve his end.²⁹ This is much more discursive than Silius' blunt introduction to his *mache parapotamios*: *Trebia... precibus Iunonis suscitatur* ("The Trebia... roused by Juno's request," 4.573). It is clear here that the rivers themselves are not domesticated by Bacchus, although they may be domesticated by the nymphs if we consider divine control over nature to be domestication. However, Statius' description of the nymphs suggests that they are assimilated with the rivers in a similar way to river-gods: *ast illis tenvior percurrere visus | ora situs, viridisque comis exaruit umor. | protinus Inachios haurit sitis ignea campos* ("A fine layer of

²⁷ Symeonoglou (1985) 9; 302. Elsewhere both the Ismenus and Dirce are synecdoche for Thebes, e.g. Euripides, *Bacchae* 5.

²⁸ Dee (2013) 185-6.

²⁹ Compare, e.g. Neptune directly controlling the sea and winds at *Odyssey* 5.291-8. Statius' indirect domestication here closely resembles Juno appealing to Aeolus to let loose the winds at *Aeneid* 1.64-86. For an alternative interpretation of this passage that focuses on gender, see Keith (2000) 57-60.

dust seemed to pass over their faces, and green moisture dried out of their hair. Immediately, a burning thirst drains the Inachian fields,” 4.697-9). The nymphs do not just control the rivers; they are intimately connected with them, and they share the same experiences, more so, even, than river gods, who, if the deity of the Ismenus is anything to go by, are startlingly disconnected from what happens in their own waters. Unlike both the *Iliad* and the *Punica*, whose river deities are either the same as the physical stream itself, or else so closely connected to the water that the two cannot be separated, the rivers and river-gods of the *Thebaid* are separate entities that can act independently of one another.³⁰ This brings even further ambiguity to the idea of domestication in the *Thebaid*, and raises an important question: is the imposition of the river-god’s will (and the will of the nymphs) on the river an act of domestication, or is it simply a personified manifestation of a twofold, but ultimately homogenous, consciousness, like a form of double motivation? This is a question that I will return to later, but for now, suffice to say that the domestication of nature is much more ambiguous in the *Thebaid* than in either the *Iliad* or the *Punica*.

The lack of successful or straightforward domestication in the *Thebaid* is unsurprising. The narrative orbits around the confusion and horrors of the civil war, where the usual order of things is destabilised. Nature, too, is thrown into confusion,³¹ and just as man’s relationship with his fellow man disintegrates in civil war, so too does man’s relationship with nature. Indeed, after the death of the brothers, two women, Antigone and Argia – one Theban, one Argive – come together to wash the corpse of Polynices in the Ismenus. Where before the river had failed to cleanse the body of Eteocles, here the body is restored: *ut sanies purgata vado membrisque reversus | Martis honos* (“when the gore had been cleansed in the pool, the glory of war returned to his limbs,” 12.416-7). Only after these two women have introduced the possibility of reconciliation does the river return to a domesticated state and fulfil its purifying function. However, the success of the purification is called into question because the river is *turpatus adhuc* (“still polluted,” 410).³²

³⁰ As the Tiber of the *Aeneid* is separate from Tiberinus.

³¹ See, e.g. the list of omens at 7.402-23.

³² See Dee (2013) 187: “whereas a *living* Eteocles is washed in a *pure* river, a *dead* Polynices (with Eteocles’ pyre still burning nearby) is being cleansed in a *polluted* river.”

Let us now turn to the non-natural phenomena present in the *Thebaid*. Like previous epic poets, Statius employs the trope of the river dyed with blood and clogged with bodies:

ille ego clamatus sacris ululatibus amnis,
qui molles thyrsos Baccheaque cornua puro
fonte lavare feror, stipatus caedibus artas
in freta quaero vias; non Strymonos in pia tanto
stagna cruore natant, non spumifer altius Hebrus
Gradivo bellante rubet (9.434-9).

I, that sacred river echoing with frenzied cries, who am said to wash the pliant thyrsus and horn of Bacchus with my pure spring, I am packed with carnage and seek narrow paths to the sea. Not even the wicked pools of Strymon swim with such blood, and the foaming Hebrus is not dyed red to such a depth when Mars wages war.

As in the other examples, the inundation displeases the river and it complains bitterly about the pollution, emphasising its previously pure (*puro*) state. Once again, the river's thwarted volition indicates that a non-natural process is occurring.

Pollution is the main form of non-natural phenomenon in the Ismenus episode, although it is not exclusive to the Ismenus. As I mentioned earlier, Dirce's springs are twice said to run with blood (1.38; 4.374-5). However, river pollutants are not limited to blood and gore; dust and mud are also styled as pollutants on a number of occasions, most emphatically at Nemea, where the parched Argive soldiers descend upon the river:

fremunt undae, longusque a fontibus amnis
diripitur, modo lene virens et gurgite puro
perspicuous, nunc sordet aquis egestus ab imis
alveus; inde tori riparum et proruta turbant
gramina; iam crassus caenoque et pulvere torrens,
quamquam expleta sitis, bibitur tamen. agmina bello
decertare putes iustumque in gurgite Martem

perfurere aut captam tolli victoribus urbem (4.823-30).

The waves roared, and the river was torn far from its spring. Once a clear, translucent green with pure eddies, now the emptying channel was polluted all the way down to the bottom. From there the water was churned up by the ridged grassy banks. Now the river was thick with mud and rushing with dust, and although they'd satisfied their thirst, they continued to drink, so that you'd believe they were warring armies, joining a regular battle raging beside the whirling pools, or that a captured city was being destroyed by its conquerors.

This scene foreshadows the battle of the Ismenus to come later, where two armies do fight *in gurgite*, but here mud and dust replace blood as the main pollutants.³³ Confusion and disorder reigns, as a space that should renew life turns into a landscape of death (some soldiers are carried away by the water or are trampled as they enter, 4.813-6), chaos, pollution and war.³⁴ The scenes of ecological destruction emphasise the brutality of the Argive soldiers even before they have joined in a real battle. Indeed, after the death of Opheltēs, the men will fell the trees of the Nemean grove in the same way that they despoiled the river: like victorious soldiers recklessly plundering a captured city (6.113-7).³⁵ In a reversal of the common Iliadic simile that compares warfare to nature, these similes instead imagine man's interaction with nature to be like another war, with nature the overwhelming loser.

In addition to pollution, there are two instances of the backwards-flowing river motif. This motif is much less prominent in the *Thebaid* than in the *Punica*, but it is equally alarming. At 7.405, rivers flowing backwards are included in a list of omens: *sideraque adversique suis decursibus amnes* ("planets and rivers turned away from their courses"). Rivers are here directly associated with celestial bodies, emphasising their connection to the cosmic order; their reversal is a sign that the universe is in a state of disarray as the armies march towards the battlefield. Indeed, the other omens are all of a similar type: blood and stones replace rain (408), ghosts appear (409),

³³ Vessey (1973) 170: "Water is an ancient image of life, and the thirst suffered by the warriors is a foreshadowing of their future death."

³⁴ See Newlands (2004) 141-6 on Nemea. Also Parkes (2012) 322: "The Argive army displays its readiness to break out in civil conflict."

³⁵ Newlands (2004) 145.

oracles fall silent (410), Eleusis cries out in the wrong months (411-2), and Acheloüs is said to have lost his other horn (416-7). The second reference to reversed rivers also occurs in book 7; here Tydeus warns Polynices against approaching Eteocles' camp, fearing that the Theban king will never let Polynices return once he has entered his domain: *Inachus ante retro nosterque Achelous abibit* ("sooner will our Inachus and Acheloüs flow in reverse," 553).³⁶ Tydeus uses the image of the river running backwards to describe something that he believes is unlikely to occur, apparently unaware that such an event has already happened.

There are no other instances of river reversal in the *Thebaid*; the Ismenus, though clogged with corpses, never flows backwards except to support Crenaeus. Therefore the primary non-natural phenomenon of interest is the pollution of river water with bodies, blood and equipment, as well as dust and mud.

As Newlands has already argued, the destruction of the landscape displays the inherent *nefas* of the civil war. Those who damage nature are cast in a negative light. This is especially true of Hippomedon, whose actions ultimately violate a sacred space and its divinity. Indeed, Hippomedon is portrayed as explicitly anti-river:³⁷ one of his major appearances occurs in book 7, when he becomes the first of his men to cross the swollen Asopus river (430-5), which not only foreshadows his later battle with the Ismenus, but also confirms his unchecked impiety.³⁸ Hippomedon expresses anti-river sentiment in other ways, most blatantly by killing the grandson of the Ismenus, and the retributive consequences of his arrogance are made clear at the time of his death, when another river descendant, Hypseus, strips his corpse (9.540-3). Asopian Hypseus proves his mettle in battle when he matches Hippomedon in the slaughter (253-6),³⁹ although the two never meet in combat. Hippomedon was able to overcome the Asopus once, but at the end of his life, the son of that same river strips him of his armour, thus ending Hippomedon's narrative with a tenuous sense of justice, though Hypseus is killed in the next instant by Capaneus (552-6).

More troubling than Hippomedon's crimes against the river, however, is the killing of Crenaeus, whose youthful naivety contrasts with Hippomedon's reckless

³⁶ Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.324: *ante retro Simois fluet*. See Smolenaars (1994) 249 for other examples of this *adynaton*.

³⁷ Like Achilles, he is disdainful of the divinity of the river and doubts its strength: *quove has traxisti gurgite vires, | imbelli famulate deo solumque cruorem | femineis experte choris, cum Bacchica mugit | buxus et insanae maculant trieterida matres?* (9.477-80).

³⁸ Conrau-Lewis (2014) 65-6.

³⁹ See also lines 9.568-9: *hic ferus Hippomedon, illic non segnior Hypseus | fletur*.

brutality – a *furor* that he inherited from the recently deceased Tydeus, who died while consuming the head of Melanippus (8.751-66).⁴⁰ Conversely, Crenaeus is *tener* and wrongly believes he cannot be killed in the familial waters of the Ismenus. His shield depicts the abduction of Europa (332-6), whose own misplaced trust in Jupiter (near water, no less) mirrors Crenaeus’ misguided confidence in the river’s ability to protect him.⁴¹ The killing of Crenaeus holds meaning on multiple levels. Before his death, Crenaeus gives a short speech, warning Hippomedon not to defile the sacred waters (9.340-3), but Hippomedon ignores the threat and, with little difficulty, runs Crenaeus through with his sword (345-6). This action is described as *nefas* (347) and causes the woods and waters to tremble and resound (347-8). Crenaeus’ words reinforce the sanctity of the river, and his death confirms that Hippomedon has lost all sense of piety. By killing Crenaeus, he insults the divinity of the river and thereby sets himself up for future punishment.⁴² Indeed, when the river-god finally hears of his grandson’s death, he sets out to avenge Crenaeus, and although the river does not strike the final blow, Hippomedon is killed the moment he escapes from the water (526-36). Hippomedon’s brutality is further emphasised by the pathos of the scene to follow, in which Crenaeus’ mother searches for his body amid the carnage wreaked upon the river by Hippomedon. Yet the apex of Hippomedon’s transgression comes after the river has begun its assault: Hippomedon asks, *unde haec, Ismene, repente | ira tibi?* (“from where has this unexpected anger come, Ismenus?” 476-7). Despite Crenaeus’ earlier warning, the Argive warrior still does not realise that he has done anything wrong.⁴³ Hippomedon’s capabilities extend beyond those of his Homeric counterpart, and even beyond those of Scipio;⁴⁴ Hippomedon fares better than both previous warriors in terms of the *machē parapotamios*, but the severity of his crimes is likewise inflated; his *nefas* is undoubtedly the greatest of all three. His death also comes much sooner, and unlike Scipio, he fails to recognise the gravity of his transgressions.

The scenes in the Ismenus, therefore, reinforce the argument that crimes against nature are immoral because they reflect the eruption of discord in previously

⁴⁰ Vessey (1973) 295.

⁴¹ Faber (2006) 110.

⁴² Dewar (1991) 118-9.

⁴³ Ibid. 119

⁴⁴ Chaudhuri (2014) 210.

peaceful spaces.⁴⁵ As at the Nemean grove, where a tranquil, life-giving river is distorted by lust for war and pollution, so too is the Ismenus transformed from a nurturing stream into a place of death, pollution and vengeance. The emphasis on Crenaeus' upbringing within the river makes the transformation even more pronounced. Furthermore, when Crenaeus dies he joins the ranks of other young boys who have died or will die in the war, including Atys (8.554-86) and Parthenopaeus (9.683-874), and whose deaths represent the indiscriminate slaughter and futility of war.⁴⁶ Like these boys, whose inexperience and youthfulness make them poorly suited to the battlefield, nature in its ideal form – the *locus amoenus* – is also unsuited to war, and is 'killed' with the arrival of human conflict.

We have already discussed the drought that leads the Argive soldiers to pollute the waters of Nemea, a non-natural event that is likewise transgressive, and foreshadows the deaths of those same soldiers.⁴⁷ However, the destruction of nature at Nemea is not limited to this pollution; indeed, the soldiers later fell the trees of the grove to atone for the killing of a sacred serpent (6.84-7), trees that had previously been inviolate (*incaedua*, 90). The description of the grove that follows emphasises its primordial lifespan (93-6) and the sorrow of its destruction (*aderat miserabile luco | excidium*, 96-7). As the trees fall, *dat gemitum tellus* ("the earth lets out a groan," 107) and Roman gods – Pales and Silvanus – flee from the woods (110-3).⁴⁸ The emphasis on the grove's numinosity and heritage problematizes the Argives' decision to fell it, and concludes an extended narrative that sees the entire Nemean grove, including the river and the trees, completely destroyed. Thomas argues that in the works of Virgil, the felling of trees is a potentially transgressive activity as trees can be numinous. Deforestation is often necessary for civilization, and aboriculture can make a tree more useful to humans; yet the memory of what has been lost – namely, divinity – as a result of humankind's interference remains an uncomfortable reality.⁴⁹ This idea is certainly present here, as Statius demonstrates how the need to fulfill

⁴⁵ Newlands (2004) 152.

⁴⁶ Dominik (1994) 103: "In no sense can their tragic deaths be said to have achieved anything remotely positive. This complete waste of human life bears testimony to the total futility of war."

⁴⁷ Vessey (1973) 170.

⁴⁸ Newlands (2004) 145 argues that this startling inclusion of Roman-specific gods "brings Rome into the orbit of the Theban conflict." Note the invocations to Pales in *Georgics* 1.3.1 and 294.

⁴⁹ Thomas (1988).

certain requirements of civilization through funerary rites can come into conflict with other spiritual and religious concerns.

Indeed, the destruction of the Nemean grove is the final result in a causal chain that began with the drought induced by Bacchus. Following the drought, the Nemean soldiers encounter Hypsipyle, who leaves her infant charge alone in the grove while she leads the men to water.⁵⁰ As a result, the men crowd the river and cause it to become polluted. Simultaneously, the drought provokes the thirst of a monstrous serpent, which roams the land looking for water (5.518-27); on its way it flicks its tail unwittingly (*ignaro serpente*, 539)⁵¹ at Opheltes, who dies instantly (538-40). When the soldiers find the dead child, they avenge his death by killing the serpent (558-78). However, the serpent was sacred to Jupiter, and it is mourned by nymphs, fauns, and the surrounding landscape.

The serpent at Nemea closely resembles the serpent at Bagra, killed by Regulus in the *Punica*.⁵² Indeed, the warrior who struck the fatal blow, Capaneus, nearly meets his end then and there:

ipse etiam e summa iam tela poposcerat aethra
Iuppiter et dudum nimbiue hiemesque coibant,
ni minor ira deo gravioraque tela mereri
servatus Capaneus; moti tamen aura cucurrit
fulminis et summas libavit vertice cristas (583-7).

Jupiter himself had already requested weapons from high heaven, and not long ago rain clouds and storms were assembling. But the anger of the god was not so great and Capaneus was saved, deserving of a heavier blow. However, the blast of lightning that had been stirred up ran its course and struck the very top of his crest.

⁵⁰ Keith (2000) 58-59: "With Hypsipyle's help, the Argive forces slake their thirst at the waters of Langia, while Opheltes by contrast, misses his nurse and her milk."

⁵¹ In some versions the serpent kills Opheltes deliberately: fragments from Euripides' *Hypsipyle* suggest the serpent throttled the child (904-5).

⁵² The episode also draws inspiration from Ovid's description of Cadmus' fight with the serpent of Mars in *Metamorphoses* 3.31-100. Cadmus, like Hippomedon, hurls a large rock at the serpent but fails to hurt it without the use of a javelin. Unlike the Nemean serpent, however, the serpent of Ares is deliberately cruel. See also Brown (2016) 216.

Instead, like Regulus, Capaneus survives only to be singled out for a later punishment.⁵³ After the death of the serpent, the Argives are forced to prepare a funeral pyre for the creature, yet as we have seen, even their attempt at atonement leads only to further destruction of the landscape.⁵⁴ This chain of environmentally devastating events problematizes the war and, in particular, the Argives' place within it; despite attempts to rectify mistakes they have made, the Argives are unable to atone successfully for their sacrilegious behaviour.⁵⁵ Indeed, Brown compares the Argive army to the serpent: both are too immense to be accommodated by the grove and river⁵⁶ and both cause devastation as a result of their raging thirsts.⁵⁷ The Argive soldiers kill the serpent, forgetting the destruction that they have already caused, and oblivious to the fact that by killing the sacred serpent, they are no better than the serpent that has killed an innocent child.⁵⁸ We have moved a little way from rivers, but these parallel episodes are equally as significant, and they reinforce a vital point: that violence towards nature in the *Thebaid* begets only more of the same violence, just as civil strife brings only further civil strife. In the *Thebaid*, humankind's struggle to live alongside nature directly parallels humankind's struggle to live alongside itself.

It is not only humankind's relationship with nature that is compromised in the *Thebaid*; nature's usual coherence is affected by the cosmic imbalance that mirrors civil strife, and doubts are raised over its ability to control itself. The problem of domestication, explored in some capacity above, further emphasises the lack of stability; in particular, the undeveloped domestication of the Ismenus, and the disassociation between river and river-god, exhibit the disruption of order in the world of nature. Statius' narrator tells us that the god of the Ismenus is residing *in antro* during the battle in the stream. Any knowledge of what has occurred does not reach him until after his grandson has already perished, when a nymph tells him what happened (9.416-7). Up until this point the river has been acting of its own accord, apparently without the knowledge of its deity; the river attempted to protect Crenaeus,

⁵³ He is struck by lightning after attempting to challenge the gods (10.827-939). See McNelis (2007) 140-5.

⁵⁴ See Ganiban (2013) 260-1.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 261: "Statius indicates the inherent criminality of the Argive cause."

⁵⁶ The serpent can stretch itself all the way across a river and inhibit its flow (5.516-7).

⁵⁷ Brown (2016) 221.

⁵⁸ Both child and serpent are given the epithet *sacer*: at 4.729 and 5.505 respectively, suggesting, perhaps, that they are necessary sacrifices.

while the god remained entirely unaware that the youth was in any danger at all. This disassociation is problematic; in the *Iliad* and the *Punica* the river and river-gods are one and the same, or else so connected they cannot be distinguished. Statius, the exception, is perhaps here modelling his verses on Virgil, yet the prophetic Tiberinus could hardly be said to lack knowledge of what occurs in or near his own stream.⁵⁹ If they must be distinct, then the relationship between river and river-god should be the ultimate expression of domestication, as in the *Aeneid*, yet the river-god's ignorance provides an opportunity for the river to act without the deity's direct influence. There is nothing sinister about the river's actions, and they correspond to the river-god's motivations (i.e. to protect Crenaeus), but the separation is nevertheless uncomfortable – it is hard to imagine that the river-god could remain oblivious to the battle raging in his stream, especially when it has such physical effects on the riverbanks and water, yet this is indeed the case. Dewar sees the separation of god and river as a primarily poetic choice, especially insofar as it distinguishes Statius from Homer and Silius.⁶⁰ However, there is also intra-textual significance, as the troubling split is a continuation of the ambiguous domestication present at the end of book 4 involving Bacchus and the nymphs, and therefore it is a further demonstration of the cosmological aspects of the civil war.

Moreover, Ismenus' twofold personality is a furtherance of the structural failure that occurs within the “vertical scheme” of the universe as outlined by Feeney.⁶¹ The universe is divided into three levels: the Olympians, the human world, and the Underworld, and the focus of the narrative shifts between each level continually. Yet the anticipated Virgilian interaction between the three planes is disrupted, with humans interacting far more successfully with the Underworld than with the Olympians, whose king fails to act, or acts in ways unexpected.⁶² Similarly, the Olympian gods do not cultivate a relationship with the natural world, and thus they do not heal it when it is devastated. Minor gods like rivers do not fit neatly into the three-tiered scheme, and accordingly they are split between human and Olympian realms: they are as detached from their physical streams as Jupiter is disinterested in

⁵⁹ See this passage especially: *Ego sum pleno quem flumine cernis | stringentem ripas et pinguis culta secantem, | caeruleus Thybris, caelo gratissimus amnis. | Hic mihi magna domus, celsis caput urbis, exit* (*Aeneid* 8.62-5).

⁶⁰ Dewar (1991) 134-5.

⁶¹ Feeney (1991) 345.

⁶² Feeney (1991) 345-6.

maintaining the human world, but they nevertheless care for certain humans, though they are powerless to help them in any meaningful way. However, there remains a clear separation between gods and humans, as revealed during the battle between Hippomedon and the Ismenus, in which the river emerges the clear victor despite Hippomedon's valiant effort to resist the barrage of water.

While Statius' *machē parapotamios* generates an uneasiness surrounding the civil war for its catastrophic effect on the cosmos, the entire episode is also charged with pathos, with the death of Crenaeus emphasising the war's brutality. The Ismenus' obliviousness during the battle in which his grandson is killed heightens the pathos further, as his ignorance prevents him from stepping in to thwart Hippomedon. What is more, the answering grief of Crenaeus' mother, Ismenis, punctuates the violent scene with lamentation, louder even than the rushing waters (9.407-8). Her wailing finally gains the attention of the river-god, who raises his head and drops the pine tree and urn he is holding (408-10). Maternal grief features prominently in the *Thebaid* and reminds the reader of the cost of war, particularly when the victim is young.⁶³ Ismenis' maternal grief intrudes upon Ismenus' leisure, even when the din of the battle could not. Moreover, as Newlands points out, the grief of Ismenis in this moment overshadows and disrupts Hippomedon's *aristeia*, as the narrative pans away from his rampage and follows Ismenis downstream as she seeks her dead child.⁶⁴ When battle is resumed, now between river and warrior, the terms of combat have changed: Hippomedon must face a god who is motivated by revenge for the death of his grandson:

at tu, qui tumidus spoliis et sanguine gaudes
insontis pueri, non hoc ex amne potentem
Inachon aut saevas victor revehere Mycenae
ni mortalis ego et tibi ductus ad aethere sanguis (9.442-5).

And you, proudly rejoicing in the spoils and blood of an innocent
child, you will not return triumphant from this river to powerful

⁶³ E.g.: 6.135-92; 9.608-39; 12.805-9. See Vessey (1973) 296. On motherhood in Statius, see McAuley (2016) 297-389.

⁶⁴ Newlands (2004) 151.

Inachus or savage Mycenae, not unless I was born of mortal blood and yours came from heaven.

In both Homer and Silius, the partisan river rebukes the warrior primarily for polluting his waters, but while the Ismenus does complain about the state of the river, he has no allegiance to either side, and his main motive for attacking Hippomedon is his familial grief.⁶⁵ Statius adjusts the Homeric source model so as to capitalise on the pathos of the scene: he makes Crenaeus the grandson of the present river, while Asteropaeus is the grandson of a foreign one. Thus the death of the youth generates an immediate emotional response from the Ismenus, whereas the Scamander is only indignant in a general sense. Indeed, Statius' poignant approach to the *mache parapotamios* is unique; while an audience may feel indignation and shock at the treatment of the rivers, or descendants of rivers, in the *Iliad* and the *Punica*, the new and overtly emotive intrusion of familial grief in Statius' narrative encourages us to reconsider Homeric ideas about warfare in which conflict is normalised; although the *Iliad* informs the presentation of Statius' battle scenes, the philosophy behind the conflict is more Virgilian in its complexity.⁶⁶ In Statius' narrative, the realities of war induce pathos, but rather than render this pathos a mere unavoidable truth of war, as it is in Homer, the highly emotive take on warfare opens up a possible discussion as to whether the present conflict – that is, the civil war – should be tolerable.

Non-natural phenomena, so prominent in Silius, are thus overshadowed by the grief of mother and grandfather. However, pollution remains an important thematic element in the *Thebaid* as a whole,⁶⁷ and here the narrative does not recoil from an opportunity to emphasise further the disastrous effects of the civil war. As we have already seen, like other rivers faced with non-natural pollution of blood, gore, and equipment, the Ismenus voices its displeasure at such impurities. Yet unlike the battles involving the Scamander and the Trebia, the *mache parapotamios* in the *Thebaid* does not end with the burning of the river by Hephaestus/Vulcan. Instead, Juno makes a plea to Jupiter, and the river abates with nothing more than a nod of Jupiter's head (9.520-1). This is an obvious rejection of the Homeric source model,⁶⁸ but the lack of

⁶⁵ Dewar (1991) 134-5.

⁶⁶ On pathos in Virgil, see Conte (2007).

⁶⁷ See Dee (2013).

⁶⁸ And perhaps of Silius: see Dewar (1991) 102.

purifying fire is significant on another level also; in chapter 1, I discussed how the fires of Hephaestus purified the Scamander, ridding it of the major pollutants and restoring it to its original condition. In the *Thebaid*, no such purification occurs, meaning that the river remains in a non-natural state even after the waters have subsided. Indeed, even in book 12 the water is still polluted with the carnage of the battle (409-10). The lack of cleansing fire signals a perpetuation of the disorder that has characterised the narrative so far, and allows the non-natural phenomenon to leave an indelible mark upon the landscape that persists even after the war has ended. As such, the *mache parapomatios* and other nature-related episodes are one of the many ways in which the narrative fosters a negative impression of the civil war.

Unlike the *Punica*, in which the violation of nature represents individual moral deficiencies, violence against nature in the *Thebaid* presents a much more generalised view of the conflict. In particular, the Ismenus' ambivalence towards both sides in the fighting, and its primarily parental motives for joining in the battle, challenge the earlier depiction of rivers as seen in the works of Statius' predecessors. Previously, rivers held some responsibility for the actions of the side they chose to support, and were therefore willing participants in warfare, whereas in the *Thebaid* they are no more than victims of human aggression and violence. At Nemea, the river is polluted and violated despite providing much-needed water for the thirsty soldiers. Later, the Ismenus is attacked, polluted and desecrated despite having no specific ties to either the Thebans or the Argives, and, considering the inattentiveness of the river-god, no interest in fighting in a battle between them.⁶⁹ Even when the god of the Ismenus does join the battle, it is not with the intention of swaying the war one way or the other, but simply to punish one man who killed an innocent member of the river's family, while simultaneously committing a significant act of sacrilege.

Thus I reiterate my original statement that Statius, like both Homer and Silius, does not approach the destruction and violation of nature as if it were an environmental problem. Rather, the ecological crises are indicative of a greater issue, namely the cosmological strife brought about by the civil war. Whether or not Statius

⁶⁹ Newlands' argument that Statius removes Ovidian collusion and deception from the landscape and replaces it with innocent victimhood is especially relevant here. However, the collusion of the landscape is not only Ovidian, but Homeric, Virgilian, and Silian also.

intended his epic to comment on the politics of his time,⁷⁰ the poem as a whole presents civil war as a greater social, political and moral crisis than the foreign wars described in Homer and Silius.⁷¹ Indeed, there is no prediction of glory for Thebans or Argives in the proem of the *Thebaid*, only *profanis odiis* (“unholy hatred,” 1.1-2), and *sontes Thebas* (“guilty Thebes,” 2).⁷² Appropriately, scenes depicting the violation of nature in Statius are more shocking, more emotionally affecting, and more physically destructive than the equivalent scenes in the works of his predecessors. Furthermore, Statius challenges the ways we have been interpreting nature by introducing more ambiguity, particularly in terms of domestication, which complements the disturbed relationships between the Underworld, humans, and the Olympians. Just as the structure of the cosmos breaks down in this story of civil strife, so too does the natural/non-natural schema begin to unravel as the usual order of things goes awry. Statius simultaneously reinforces and reinvents the way nature is used in epic, distorting the usual associations between humans, gods, and the landscape found in Homer, Ovid, Virgil, and Silius; the newly fragmented terrain conveys certain ideas about civil war, namely that it adversely affects human relationships with other humans, gods, and the landscape, and causes terrible and unnecessary strife. The suffering of nature in the *Thebaid*, therefore, exemplifies the effects of the conflict, and invites the reader to acknowledge that there can be no victors in civil war.

⁷⁰ Many deny that there is any such commentary present in the *Thebaid*. Among these is Vessey (1973) 63, who claims, “it would be wrong to see in the *Thebaid* any subtle political allegory.” For a comprehensive review of those who agree with this interpretation, see Dominik (1994) 131-2. For arguments that support the presence of political ideology in the *Thebaid*, see Dominik (1994) 132-80, McGuire (1997), and Braund (2006).

⁷¹ McGuire (1997) 94: “[The Flavian poets] frequently set their scenes of civil war in close conjunction to tyrannical figures and to suicidal actions, and they focus repeatedly on civil war’s capacities to obliterate more normal social, individual, and even linguistic traits.”

⁷² Compare the references to *gloria Aeneadum* (1-2) and *decus laborum Hesperiae* (3-4) in Silius’ proem. By contrast, Statius says he will deliberately not address tales of Roman triumph (1.17-8).

Conclusion

In book 23 of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, a dying soldier addresses the swollen Hydaspes:

προχοῇσι πόθεν σέο τέκνα καλύπτεις;
πολλάκι Βάκτρον Ἄρηα μετήιον, ἀλλὰ ρέεθροις
οὐ ποτε Μῆδον ὄμιλον ἀπέκτανε Μῆδος Ἀράξης,
Περσικὸς Εὐφρήτης οὐκ ἔκρυφε γείτονα Πέρσην·
πολλάκι μοι παρὰ Ταῦρον ἔην μόθος, ἀλλ' ἐνὶ χάρμῃ
οὐ Κίλικας ποτε Κύδνος ἐῶ τυμβεύσατο κόλπῳ
οὐ Τανάϊς χιονῶδες ἄγων πετρούμενον ὕδωρ
γείτοني Σαυρομάτη θωρήσσεται, ἀλλὰ κορύσσων
Κόλχοις ἀντιβίοισι χαραδρήεσσαν Ἐνυῶ
πολλάκι παχνήεντι κατεπρήνιξε βελέμνω.
Ἥριδανὸς πέλε σεῖο μακάρτερος, ὅττι ρέεθροις
ἄλλοδαπὸν Φαέθοντα καὶ οὐκ ἔκρυψε πολίτην,
οὐ Γαλάτην ἐκάλυψε καὶ οὐ τάφος ἔπλετο Κελτῶ,
ἀλλὰ φίλοις ναέτησι ρυηφενέων ἀπὸ δένδρων
Ἥλιάδων ἤλεκτρα φεραυγέα δῶρα κυλίνδει·
Ῥῆνος Ἴβηρ βρεφέεσσι κορύσσεται, ἀλλὰ δικάζων,
καὶ κρυφίην ὠδῖνα διασχίζων τοκετοῖο
κτείνει ξεῖνα γένεθλα (80-96).

Why do you drown your own children in the water? I have fought in wars against the Bactrians many times, but the Median Araxes never killed a Median army in its stream, and the Persian Euphrates never drowned its Persian neighbours. I have often been to war beneath the Taurus, but even in the heat of war the Cydnus never made a tomb for the Cilicians in its lap, nor does the snowy Tanais ever arm itself with frozen water against the Sauromatans, but often attacks the hostile Colchians with torrential war and hurls frozen hail stones upon them. The Eridanus was more blessed than you when he drowned the foreigner Phaëthon in his stream, rather than one of his own people; he never drowned a Galatian, he never buried

a Celt, but he carries amber gifts of prosperity from the trees of the Heliades to his nearby friends. The Iberian Rhine attacks his children, but only to pass judgement; he marks out the child born in secret and kills the foreign offspring.

Following a bloody battle in the Hydaspes, Dionysus' forces begin their crossing of the river. However, at the behest of Hera, Hydaspes launches an assault on the army mid-way across, citing offence at being treated like a mere road (183). He sends a barrage of waves against Dionysus and his followers (192-214), and Dionysus responds with his own fury, censuring the river for displaying insolence towards a greater god (225-51). Then Dionysus lights the Hydaspes on fire (255-9), which burns even more violently than the Scamander and the Trebia did (259-79). Hydaspes raises a plea to Dionysus, begging for mercy: ὕδασι καρποτόκοισι φέρων χάριν ("show kindness to my life-bearing waters!" 11). He confesses to being misled by a love for his children and submits himself to Dionysus, who removes the torch from the water (10-62).

Before concluding this thesis, I will make a few brief remarks on the *mache parapotamios* of the *Dionysiaca* to illustrate some of the ways that the river battle has been standardised as a type scene in epic tradition before the *Dionysiaca*. Owing to space constraints, the *Dionysiaca* will not receive its own chapter. However, an overview of the passage will demonstrate the importance of the *mache parapotamios* for discerning perceptions about nature, humans, and the divine in epic, even a late-antique one such as the *Dionysiaca*.

The soldier's suggestion in lines 80-96 that no river should harm its friends or neighbours is a familiar refrain found in all three epics that I have discussed. At times, the rivers are resistant to this idea: the Trebia switches loyalties, fighting against the Romans with whom it ought to be allied, and the Ismenus chooses no side, fighting only for its family and not with its patron city, Thebes. Yet in these instances the rivers are not entirely guilty; their motivations are clear and quite understandable. The Trebia, though an Italian river, is defiled by the very people who are supposed to be its allies. Meanwhile, the Ismenus is embroiled in a civil war in which the leaders on both sides are Theban kings, and thus the distinction between Thebes and its enemies is not so clear-cut. The narrators of both epics justify the rivers' behaviour and simultaneously suggest that humans have some responsibility in maintaining healthy

relationships with their rivers. Indeed, in the *Iliad*, the Trojans treat their river with respect, and it, in turn, offers them some protection. Meanwhile, Achilles, Scipio, and Hippomedon, who defile their respective riverine opponents, all emerge as morally ambiguous characters whose actions are problematic.

However, in the *Dionysiaca*, the morality of Dionysus is never in question. Dionysus is a god whose authority is far greater than the river's. Though he plays the part of Achilles, he also plays the part of Hephaestus, whose fires quell the rampaging river. The river's allegiance is to the Indians, its domesticators, but the *Dionysiaca* stresses that the river was wrong to favour its neighbours over the Olympian gods. Indeed, the river admits its transgression:

ἄασάμην, Διόνυσε πυριτρεφές: οὐρανίην γὰρ
σῶν δαΐδων ἀμάρυγμα τεῖν κήρυξε γενέθλην.
ἀλλὰ πόθος τεκέων με βήσατο (24.13-5).

I have acted foolishly, Dionysus, born of fire. For the glimmering of your torch heralds you as one born from heaven. But love for my children drove me to act as I did.

The message is clear: though rivers are typically bound by their human domesticators, the gods ought always to be obeyed. There is little sympathy for the river, and indeed the occurrences of non-natural phenomena are downplayed compared to the three previous epics. Unlike the other rivers, the Hydaspes does not explicitly complain about the pollution of blood and bodies in the river, although pollution does indeed feature during the battle prior to the *mache parapotamios*.¹ At the conclusion of book 22, a naiad emerges from the river and declares that she will leave for the untainted sea (392-401), but her chastising words against the pollution are not echoed by Hydaspes, who complains only that Dionysus treats him as if he were a road. Indeed, in a moment of dissonance the river exclaims: ὕγροβαφῆς δὲ | Νηιάς ἐν προχοῇσι πόθεν χρεμετισμὸν ἀκούει; (“why does the dripping naiad in my river mouth hear the neighing of horses?” 23.183-4) – a rather dissociative observation, given that the

¹ E.g. at 22.364-5, 370-1, 382-3, 23.4-6.

naiad we heard from earlier fled because of the pollution, not the crossing of Dionysus' army.²

In any case, despite the changes in structure and presentation of Dionysiaca's river battle, the *mache parapotamios* remains the same at its core. All four examples, then, are more than simple displays of heroic prowess; they are also explorations of the relationships between humankind, nature, and the divine.

In chapter 1, I discussed the *mache parapotamios* of the *Iliad*. I explained the differences between the presentation of nature in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, noting that the *Iliad* presents a more positive view of domesticated nature as something that is unambiguously helpful to humans, while the *Odyssey* depicts domesticated nature as desirable, but not always virtuous. I also pointed out that undomesticated nature in the *Iliad* is dangerous, and also akin to war itself, while in the *Odyssey* it is a direct threat to the established peace. Furthermore, I concluded that there is no moral code that brands Achilles as immoral because of his assault upon the river, despite its divinity, but that his actions are liminal because they disregard some social norms widely practised in the *Iliad*, such as piety, supplication, and burial. The non-natural phenomena resulting from Achilles' slaughter do not incriminate him, but they reflect a disruption in the cosmic order, which is restored when Hephaestus burns the Scamander. In the *Iliad*, nature is a powerful force, but its presence is limited. Ultimately, the *Iliad* emphasises the need to domesticate nature in order to reduce its threat.

In chapter 2, I looked at the *mache parapotamios* in Silius Italicus' *Punica*. Many years after the *Iliad*'s lack of concern over the violation of the Scamander, the *Punica* presents an unambiguously moral argument against the mistreatment of nature. We saw that Silius thematises the destruction of nature in order to identify the virtuosity of individuals. This is most plain in the figure of Hannibal, but the *mache parapotamios* episode also questions the virtue of the elder Scipio, whose actions violate the riverine environment. Non-natural phenomena and other violations, such as Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, are associated with boundary-crossing, which is presented as a moral failure. We also saw that the domestication of nature was of imperial significance, as Roman emperors sought to assert their claim to certain lands by co-opting aspects of the environment, especially rivers, to be their allies.

² See Schmiel (2003).

In chapter 3, I discussed the *mache parapotamios* in Statius' *Thebaid* and how the poet altered the Homeric source model in order for it to better suit a civil-war narrative. The unique focus on the pathos of the scene is an indicator of the brutality of the war, and the destruction of the environment is linked to the cosmic crisis brought about by civil strife. Moreover, we saw that there is ambiguity in Statius' treatment of nature, which challenges previous ideas about domestication in particular. Like the *Punica*, the *Thebaid* uses the mistreatment of nature as one way to measure morality, and so Hippomedon's assault on the river, and by extension his character, is presented as immoral.

Although the theory with which I have proposed to study these scenes is by no means perfect, it is a useful tool for understanding the presentation and use of nature in epic. Through the domesticated/undomesticated binary, the epic poets are able to clarify some of the ambiguities surrounding nature's place in civilisation, and explain the perceived unpredictable hostility and/or amiability of nature. By assigning human emotions and motives to the rivers, the authors manufacture reasons for which they might flood, change course, or remain tranquil. The volatility of the rivers also represents the volatility of nature more generally, and thus analysing the actions of rivers in epic also provides an insight into attitudes towards nature in epic overall.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown that the presence of nature in these epics is not just a topographical necessity. It is clear in these examples, especially the Flavian texts, that nature is a formidable presence in the world, and that its various processes affect humans in significant ways. Conversely, the poems also acknowledge that human activities can influence the environment, sometimes to the detriment of human society. Overall, the epics emphasise that nature and civilisation are co-dependent, rather than in conflict, despite the threats that both pose to each other. They are also presented as separate: humankind is not envisaged as a part of nature as trees, mountains, rivers and non-human animals are. Indeed, the humans of the epics are styled as successful or unsuccessful domesticators of nature. Despite the usually positive connotations of domestication, at times it is presented with more moral ambiguity as questions arise over whether humans should have equal footing with, or power over, that which is divine or of divine origin. On the other hand, valuation of nature as a part of the world unto itself, irrespective of the divine, is not present, and there is no sense of responsibility for preserving nature as it is. Yet, despite a lack of

environmentalism, per se, Greco-Roman epic is nevertheless mindful of the centrality of nature, whether positive or negative, to human life.

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