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Statius' literary *circus:* a concentric system of genres in *Silvae* 4,7

Statius' *Silvae* is a collection of poems whose generic status is notoriously hard to describe.[1] We may call it 'occasional poetry', but the term itself implies the variety of occasions and the corresponding rhetorical genres such as the *epithalamion* or the *genethliacon* much more than any kind of unity.[2] One can also say that the *Silvae* contain 'small poetry', contrasted with epic as the 'great' genre which Statius also practised. It has recently been emphasized that for Statius (as for Martial) the Callimachean bipartition of literature into 'great' and 'small' poetry is important, but he is apparently not much interested in upholding the distinctions between the various small genres inherited from the tradition; rather, he is interested in creating a 'minor canon', and thus we should perhaps talk about the 'non-genre', rather than the genre, of the *Silvae*.[3] Length, however, is by nature a relative term. The average length of poems in the *Silvae* is 121 lines, but the variance is quite substantial. The collection includes poems as short as twenty or thirty lines; but also others which are over two hundred, some even close to three hundred lines.[4]

We can also approach the problem of genre by looking at the metres Statius is using in the *Silvae.* For 26 of the 32 poems, the poet chooses his usual hexameters which, in addition to lending some epic grandeur, also call to mind traditional genres such as the poetic epistle, satire and bucolics. In addition to the poems in hexameters, we find four in hendecasyllables (1,6; 2,7; 4,3; 4,9); these poems evoke the iambic tradition. Finally, there are two in Aeolic metres (4,5; 4,7), opening up the collection towards lyric, more strictly defined. *Silvae* 4 stands out as the book in which Statius seems most willing to experiment, by moving away from the world of relatively lengthy hexameter poems with epic connotations, and exploring shorter, relatively more lyric forms.[5] It is in this book that the average length is shortest (80 lines, in contrast to 132, 109 and 152 in *Silvae* 1–3, respectively, and 168 in *Silvae* 5), and we find nearly the same number of hexametric and

1 On the problem of genre in the *Silvae*, see e.g. Bright 1980 and now Bonadeo 2017.
2 On such traditional rhetorical genres, see Cairns 1972 with e.g. Newmyer 1979, 16–19; Hardie 1983, esp. 74–102; on the *Silvae* and other kinds of miscellany books in context of the theme of *varietas*, see Fitzgerald 2016, 64–65.149–195.
3 Canobbio 2017 with regard to Martial; Bonadeo 2017 for Statius.
4 The two shortest and longest poems, respectively, are 5,4 (19 lines) and 2,5 (30); 5,3 (293) and 1,2 (277).
5 Newmyer 1979, 56–57, 127–128; cf. Hardie 1983, 164 and Zeiner 2005, 251.

non-hexametric poems (5:4). In the preface to *Silvae* 4, Statius professes that despite all the criticism he received after publishing the first three books, he is going to write even more of the same, just to defy his critics (*silv.* 4, pr. 24–26):[6]

> *quare ergo plura in quarto Silvarum quam in prioribus? ne se putent aliquid egisse qui reprehen-*
> *derunt, ut audio, quod hoc stili genus edidissem.*

> So why are there more items in the fourth book of my Silvae than in its forerunners? Because I do not
> want those who, as I am told, criticized my publishing this kind of composition to think that their
> strictures have had any effect.

But in fact, Statius is not writing *exactly* the same: he is responding to criticism by fine-tuning the metric and generic mixture of the *Silvae.*

In this paper, I am going to examine some passages of the two lyric poems in *Silvae* 4 where Statius reflects on his generic experimentation both in the *Silvae* and in his second epic, the *Achilleid.* I will take a very quick look at *Silvae* 4,5 and then move on to 4,7, which takes as its starting point the author's difficulties with the work-in-progress *Achilleid.* This lyric poem starts with a series of metaphors which describe the relationship of the genres Statius is composing in. Most of the individual metaphors, as we will see, are not new or striking in themselves, and I do not intend to exhaustively discuss their literary models (many of which have, of course, already been identified and discussed by others). However, if taken together, they can be read as an interesting description of the system of poetic genres (including epic) in general, and of the ways of how to combine elements belonging to different genres in a particular poem. My reading of *Silvae* 4,7 will be complemented by shorter discussions of two passages from Statius' epic poems: the chariot race in *Thebaid* 6 (which has already been interpreted meta-poetically) and a simile in the *Achilleid* which, as I am going to propose, can be interpreted in a similar way and in direct connection with the metaphors of *Silvae* 4,7.

1 The unusual lyre

Already in the preface to *Silvae* 4, Statius advertises that the fifth poem will be something new, a „lyric song". The generic novelty is also emphasized by Statius at the start of the poem,[7] and then in the comparison with spring which brings the renewal of nature:

> *proximum est lyricum carmen ad Septimium Severum*   (*silv.* 4, pr. 9–10)
> Next comes a lyric song addressed to Septimius Severus...

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[6] Quotations from the *Silvae* are based on the commented edition by Coleman (1988), with occasional divergences marked; translations for all Statian passages are taken from Shackleton Bailey's Loeb, with some alterations.

[7] Both 4,5 and 4,7 are recognized as *ode lyrica* in the *tituli* (of disputed authenticity: see Coleman 1988, xxviii–xxxii and most recently Laguna Mariscal 2012, 846, with further bibliography).

Parvi beatus ruris honoribus,
qua *prisca* Teucros Alba *colit* lares,
    fortem atque facundum Severum
        non solitis fidibus saluto. [...]

Nunc cuncta vernans frondibus annuis
crinitur arbos, nunc volucrum novi   10
    questus inexpertumque carmen,
        quod tacita statuere bruma.   (*silv.* 4,5,1 – 4.9 – 12)

Wealthy in the bounties of a small estate, where ancient Alba worships Teucrian hearth gods, I greet brave and eloquent Severus – but not with my usual lyre. [...] Now every reviving tree is coiffed with yearly leaves, now come new plaints of birds and song untried, song that in silent winter they disused.

The 'usual lyre' is apparently the one tuned for the hexameter (and occasionally the hendecasyllable), which Statius has been using for the earlier poems in the *Silvae*; now he is going to use a new one. Novelty is also emphasized in the third stanza, where the birds are said to raise „untried song" (*inexpertum carmen:* 11) during spring. Apparently, they do not just return to what they have been singing in the previous year (cf. Statius' claim in the preface that he is going to produce more of the same in *Silvae* 4); rather, they are experimenting with something new, just like Statius does in the present poem.[8]

The poet also makes clear whose lyre he is going to borrow. Line 4 echoes the opening of Horace's first Roman Ode, also in Alcaics, where he famously professed 'to sing previously unheard songs to maidens and boys' (*carmina non prius / audita ... / virginibus puerisque canto: carm.* 3,1,2 – 4).[9] The blissful simplicity of country life is not an exclusively Horatian motif, of course, but the employment of a lyric meter and a number of specific allusions to Horatian poems make the intertextual relationship clearly recognizable:[10]

hic tibi copia / manabit ad plenum benigno / *ruris honorum* opulenta cornu (Hor. *carm.* 1,17,14 – 16)
mihi *parva rura* ... / ... / Parca ... dedit (Hor. *carm.* 2,1,37 – 39)
satis *beatus* unicis Sabinis (Hor. *carm.* 2,18,14)[11]
quoscumque feret *cultus* tibi fundus *honores* (Hor. *sat*. 2,5,13)
novistine locum potiorem *rure beato*? (Hor. *epist.* 1,10,14)

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8 Postgate 1906, 322 quotes Pliny for the idea that nightingales learn their song from their elders and practice it (*nat.* 10,83); on the textual problems regarding *statuere* (Clark's conjecture which I accept here with Shackleton Bailey), see Coleman 1988 ad loc.
9 Coleman 1988 ad loc.; on *Silvae* 4,5 (and 4,7) as „Horatian" lyric, see Nagel 2009.
10 Nagel 2009, 146 treats the opening line as an example of Horatian *callida iunctura* (*ars* 47– 48). Another striking Horatian allusion later in the poem is *dulce periculum* (25), recalling Hor. *carm.* 3,25,18.
11 These first three allusions (to the *Odes*) are recognized by Hardie 1983, 154, 180.

> *agricolae <u>prisci, fortes parvoque beati</u>* (Hor. *epist.* 2,1,139)
> <u>*beatus*</u> *ille, qui procul negotiis / … / paterna <u>rura</u> bubus exercet suis* (Hor. *epod.* 2,1–3)[12]

What I would like to emphasize here, instead of a detailed intertextual interpretation, is that these echoes recall not just the *Odes*, but also Horace's *Satires*, *Epistles* and even the *Epodes.* Who is recalled here as poetic predecessor is not simply Horace the lyricist, but Horace who, after producing the *Epodes* and *Satires*, had become a lyricist for *Odes* 1–3, then returned to the world of hexameter for the *Epistles*, going back to lyric once again for *Odes* 4 and the *Carmen saeculare.* Thus, the Horatian echoes in *Silvae* 4,5 can be interpreted in two ways. First, we can read them as the suggestion of a lyric turn in Statius' career. If Horace himself had not started as a lyric poet, then Statius' lyric experiment can also be seen as the first move towards producing a lyric collection in the strict sense. Statius himself has the potential to become a lyricist, a 'new Horace' who is going to resuscitate Roman lyric supposedly latent since the death of its most important practitioner.[13] On another interpretation, however, Statius only presents us here with a plan of including lyric poems in the collection of the *Silvae*, while retaining the right to return to hexameters and hendecasyllables at any time. The next poems confirm that in the end, Statius chooses the second option. In *Silvae* 4,6, Statius describes the Hercules statuette of Novius Vindex in hexameters; then comes another lyric poem (4,7, see below), then 4,8 in hexameters; the book is closed with 4,9 in hendecasyllables. Statius, an author of occasional poems, has apparently turned himself into an 'occasionally lyric' poet.

2 The literary *circus*

Silvae 4,7 – Statius' second and last lyric experiment, this time in Sapphics – also begins with a reflection on generic change.[14] The poem reads as a letter addressed to Vibius Maximus, whom the poet asks to return from Dalmatia as soon as possible, as Statius needs inspiration and friendly advice for the continuation of his second epic, the *Achilleid.* The first person addressed in the poem is not Vibius, however, but the muse Erato (*silv.* 4,7,1–4):

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12 These last four parallels (except *epist.* 2,1,139) are mentioned by Coleman 1988 ad loc. Reciprocally, the Statian passage is listed as a parallel by Nisbet/Hubbard 1970 on Hor. *carm.* 1,17,16 and Watson 2003 on Hor. *epod.* 2,1.

13 This interpretation presupposes, of course, that the Statian speaker forgets about his potential rivals with regard to the resuscitation of „Horatian" lyric such as the lyricists mentioned by Pliny the Younger (e. g. *epist.* 9,22) or the choruses of Senecan drama which betray a strong Horatian influence.

14 This time, we find no statement to that effect in the preface: „now I appeal to Maximus Vibius to hasten his return from Dalmatia" (*Maximum Vibium … nunc quoque eum reverti maturius ex Dalmatia rogo: silv.* 4, pr. 16–20).

> *Iam diu lato spatiata campo*
> *fortis heroos, Erato, labores*
> *differ atque ingens opus in minores*
>   *contrahe gyros.*

Long have you ranged the wide plain, valiant Erato; now defer heroic labors and narrow your mighty work into smaller circles.

The phrase *non solitis fidibus* (4,5,4, see above) positioned *Silvae* 4,5 as „more lyric" in relation to the other poems in the collection; now the poet seems to be asking the muse for help in creating a poem smaller than epic (in general or, as it will turn out, the work-in-progress *Achilleid* in particular).[15] The 'wide field',[16] the 'brave' muse and the 'heroic labours' of the 'great task' all recall the world of epic. Since Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, readers should not be amazed at Erato's epic role;[17] nevertheless, the striking and paradoxical choice of the adjective *fortis* for the Muse who is (etymologically at least) responsible for erotic poetry signals that Erato has not yet been perfectly assimilated to the epic genre. If *fortis Erato* is asked to provide inspiration for an epic project, we can expect that epic to exhibit traits of generic complexity. Statius, working on the *Achilleid*, apparently goes out of his way to characterize the epic genre in a way which allows him to include his new epic as well, despite its focus on love and the resulting generic 'impurity'.

    Coleman recognizes the metaphor of 'epic as a chariot race' already in lines 1–2,[18] but this interpretation seems to be based on projecting back – not inadmissibly, of course – what we will read in the following lines (3–4) and stanza 6 (21–24; see below). The basic meaning of *spatium* is indeed „racing course (for horses)" (OLD s.v. 1), but the verb *spatior*, which Statius uses to describe the movement of Erato, is not found in this sense in the literary tradition that provides the intertextual background for the *Silvae*. One would expect the epic poet's muse to race across the vast field, but *spatior* rather

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15 Gibson 2006, 175 suggests that Statius may also be referring to the previous poem in the collection, 4,6 (in hexameters), for which the Hercules statuette (described as *ingens*, despite its small size, at 4,6,38) provided a heroic subject matter from which the poet now asks respite.

16 The metaphor ultimately goes back to Homer (I am grateful to Péter Agócs for pointing that out). Aeneas, meeting Achilles on the battlefield, says that „of speech the field is wide on this side and on that" (ἐπέων δὲ πολὺς νομὸς ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα, transl. Murray–Wyatt, *Il.* 20,249): one can speak at length and in many ways, „moving" in different directions during speech. Even if this metaphor does not refer to literary texts and their genres, it describes how different communicative schemes can be (cf. Edwards 1991 ad loc.).

17 Apoll. Rhod. 3,1–3, where epic inspiration is needed, but for narrating the love story between Jason and Medea; at *Aen.* 7,37–45, Vergil asks Erato to provide inspiration for the second half of the *Aeneid* as a „greater work", *maius opus* (cf. Statius' *ingens opus* at *silv.* 4,7,3). Statius' switch between „small" and „„great" is made in the other direction, of course, but ultimately he also hopes to regain inspiration for the continuation of epic composition.

18 Coleman 1988 on 4,7,1: „Statius here visualizes epic composition ... as a gallop round the race-track, contrasted with the tightly controlled dressage of lyric (3–4)." For the pre-Statian history of the „chariot of song" metaphor, see e.g. Lovatt 2005, 29–30.

denotes „a slow, leisurely walk" (OLD s.v. 1). It does carry ceremonial connotations so-metimes,[19] which is easily compatible with the sublime character of the epic genre. But the verb is also remarkably frequent in Ovid's love poetry.[20] To give just two examples: the reader of the *Ars amatoria* is advised early on in Ovid's didactic poem to walk in the city porticoes, where he will find the similarly strolling targets of his amorous conquest (*ars* 1,67); Coronis is also walking on the seashore when Neptune catches sight of him and becomes inflamed with desire (*met.* 2,573). Finally, the image of the 'walking muse' may even evoke the genre of satire and the Horatian *Musa pedestris* (*Sat.* 2,6,17). Statius thus addresses Erato in the opening lines of the poem as a muse who is equally at home in the genres of epic, love poetry and perhaps even satire, and suggests that generic complexity and the incorporation of minor genres are important features for the epic genre in general and/or (as will turn out in the following stanzas) the *Achilleid* as a particular epic poem.[21]

After outlining what activity should be suspended, Statius also makes his request to Erato in lines 3–4. Evidently, such appeals to the muse always refer to the poem in progress, so in this case the poet describes the creative process of *Silvae* 4,7 as making 'smaller circles', or more precisely the implementation of a 'great (epic) work' on a smaller scale. The phrase *ingens opus contrahe* thus again suggests the possibility of genre-mixing, the crossing of generic boundaries and the Callimachean-sounding 'mi-niaturisation' of epic.[22] As a synonym for στροφή as a poetic term, *gyrus* also refers to the lyric genre in the strict sense, and it is no coincidence that, as Llewelyn Morgan has discussed in detail, the term *minores … gyros* frames the fourth and shorter line of the Sapphic stanza.[23] Statius immediately achieves what he asks of his muse: he slows down the flow of the poetic text and makes do with the smaller size of strophic composition, and the even shorter fourth line. This kind of poetry is not only smaller than epic: this would be true of all poems in the *Silvae.* The poem just begun is also smaller than the rest in the collection, in that it remains within the 'smaller circles' of lyric and is thus even further removed from the epic (or even more radically miniaturised).

Gyrus is also a term taken from sport: it refers to a riding circle of small diameter used for training, demonstration riding or competition. *Contrahe* can be interpreted in this context as well, as it might imply the image of the trainer standing in the middle of the circle and controlling the horse with a lunge.[24] This second metaphor of the poem is

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19 Of the examples listed in OLD, see e. g. Dido walking in front of the altars (*Aen.* 4,62) or Propertius imagining his *pompa funebris* (2,13,19).

20 Ovid uses the verb 15 times altogether, 10 of which are in erotic poems or contexts (*am.* 2,2,3; 3,1,5; *epist.* 21,97; *ars* 1,67; *rem.* 85.627; *met.* 2,573; 4,87; 11,64; *fast.* 3,469); cf. McKeown 1998 on *am.* 2,2,3.

21 See also Söllradl in this volume (p. 95–102) on the interplay of 'great/epic' and 'small/un-epic' generic elements in Valerius' *Argonautica*.

22 For the aesthetics of miniaturizing in the *Silvae*, see Baumann 2019, passim, also on Martial, and now Gowers 2021.

23 Morgan 2010, 213, 218–219.

24 Coleman 1988 ad loc.

not only comparable to the first one along the lines of the opposition 'small' vs. 'large'. In the first metaphor, Erato was moving (presumably walking) freely in the natural, open and vast space of the epic field, apparently free of any external constraints. In the second metaphor, the space available is now not only smaller, but also more regular (circular), and the movement described is accordingly more controlled. The relationship between the muse and the poet also seems to have changed: now she is not moving (presumably accompanying the poet), but standing in the middle of the circle she directs the movement (whether fast or slow) of horse and rider: in other words, she makes the poet adhere to the stricter rules of lyric. Furthermore, *iam diu spatiata ... contrahe* may also suggest that the lyric *gyrus* is located within the epic *campus,* in accordance with the ancient conception that Homeric epic is the 'source' (and in that sense containing at least the 'seeds') of all other genres. The muse and the poet do not have to travel into another space, but only accept narrower limits of movement in the same space. Along with the formulations of genre-mixing discussed above, this spatial conception also suggests that epic is a 'super-genre' which incorporates other, smaller ones, which in turn can be interpreted as miniaturised versions of epic.[25] The possibilities for poets working in different genres are, however, not the same. In Statius' spatial metaphor, epic poets can go anywhere in the field, including the territory of the 'smaller circles', while lyric poets typically cannot go beyond the boundaries set for them. Propertius, for example, is using the metaphor of the *gyrus* in the context of a *recusatio,* recalling how Apollo criticised him in the dream on Mt. Helicon for transgressing the limits of elegy with his poetry: „Why has your page veered from the prescribed orbit?" (*cur tua praescriptos evecta est pagina gyros?:* Prop. 3,3,21, transl. Goold).[26]

In the next two stanzas, Statius uses different generic metaphors. In the second stanza, we find a very unusual legal metaphor: the poet asks Pindar to grant him membership in the group of lyric poets,[27] albeit only temporarily *(paulum)* – again, this suggests the temporary nature of Statius' lyric project, in contrast to the *Thebaid* in which he 'has immortalized' (*sacravi,* in perfect) the city of Thebes in a more permanent way (*silv.* 4,7,5 – 8):

> *Tuque regnator lyricae cohortis*   5
> *da novi paulum mihi iura plectri,*

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25 On (Homeric) epic as super-genre which incorporates the others, see Ambühl 2019 and her paper in the present volume (p. 20 – 21); also Hutchinson 2013, Bonadeo 2017, 161, and Gottfried Kreuz's paper in the present volume (p. 119).

26 Coleman 1988 ad loc., also mentioning other possible parallels for Statius' *gyrus.*

27 This if, of course, another strongly Horatian moment in Statian lyrics, recalling *carm.* 4,2 (where Pindar's name is also found in line 8 of the poem, beginning the last line of the Sapphic strophe); Horace's Pindar is important for Statius' poem because he is remembered as a poet composing „great" poetry even as a lyricist. Coleman 1988 on 4,7,6 also detects an allusion in the second stanza to Hor. *carm.* 1,26,10 – 12. Statius uses a much more traditional metaphor in the *Achilleid* proem, where he asks Apollo to provide him with „new sources" (*fontes novos, Ach.* 1,9); in *Silvae* 4,7, the water metaphor also appears in the next stanza.

si tuas cantu Latio sacravi,
    Pindare, Thebas.

And you, ruler of the lyric band, grant me for a little while the right to use a new quill, if I have hallowed in Latin song your Thebes, Pindar.

In the third stanza, on the contrary, the well-known and by Statius' time almost trite Callimachean metaphors of „finely woven song", „untouched myrtle" and „pure spring" follow (*silv.* 4,7,9 – 12):

Maximo carmen tenuare tempto;
nunc ab intonsa capienda myrto   10
serta, nunc maior sitis, at bibendus[28]
    castior amnis.

For Maximus I essay to trim my verse. Now my garlands must be taken from unpruned myrtle, now my thirst is greater but I have to drink of a purer river.

What is most important for my interpretation is the repeated use of comparative adjectives (*maior, castius;* cf. also the superlative name of Maximus), which echo the image of the „smaller circles" of the first stanza. Statius this time does not contrast „great" epic and „small" lyric in absolute terms. Rather, despite his greater and thus (more) epic poetic aspirations, he settles for a „more lyric" source of inspiration, which he now calls not „smaller" but „purer", and even refers to it as a „river" instead of a truly small „fountain". Again, this formulation suggests generic (and aesthetic) complexity by presenting the projected poem as both Callimachean (inasmuch the source of inspiration is relatively 'pure') and un-Callimachean (inasmuch it is a 'river'; cf. Kall. *Ap.* 108 – 112).

It is not necessary to discuss the next two stanzas, in which the poet finally addresses Maximus himself and asks about his return to Italy (13 – 20). More important for us is the sixth stanza, in which Statius complains about getting stuck with work on the *Achilleid* in absence of his supporter (*silv.* 4,7,21 – 24):[29]

Torpor est nostris sine te Camenis,
tardius sueto venit ipse Thymbrae
rector et primis meus ecce metis
    haeret Achilles.

My Muse is in torpor without you. Apollo himself comes more slowly than is his wont and, see, my Achilles is stuck at the first turning point.

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28 On the textual problems involving this line, see Coleman 1988 ad loc. Here I accept Shackleton Bailey's version (substituting only *at* for *et* found in the MSS.). However, I do not share his interpretation that *maior sitis* refers to Statius' enthusiasm for lyric; rather, I take it as referring to his need of inspiration for continuing the *Achilleid* (cf. Nagel 2009, 154 offering the same interpretation).
29 As Heslin 2005, 60 righty notes, the „writer's block" Statius complains about might well be just a polite and metaphoric way for asking further *financial* support.

Statius returns to the metaphors he used at the beginning of the poem, which liken different poetic genres to different kinds of movement in different spaces. Three words in the stanza denote slowness (*torpor*,[30] *tardius, haeret*) and recall *spatiata* (1) which, as we have seen, also implied lack of speed. The use of the word *meta* makes it clear that this time we are in the *circus,* witnessing a race, as it were: Achilles, the competitor metonymically standing for the epic about him, is stuck at the first turn *(primis … metis / haeret).* Statius, it is true, does not make explicit reference to either chariots or horses, and in the case of swift-footed Achilles – and recalling, perhaps, even the walking muse of the first stanza – we might even think of a running race.[31] Yet the *gyrus* of the preceding metaphor and the image of a „dangerous turn" that threatens with a rollover suggest a chariot race. The image aptly describes the unfinished *Achilleid* as we know it: the first book is completed, but shortly after the first book division as metaphoric 'turn' the text is interrupted.[32]

The relationship of the third metaphor to the first two can be interpreted in several ways. First, we can start from the consideration that the metaphorical *circus* occupies an intermediate position between the epic *campus* and the lyrical *gyrus,* both in terms of space and the movement that takes place within it. The space of the *circus* is obviously larger than that of the „smaller circles", but it is also smaller and more enclosed than that of the „wide field". The movement of the chariots is not entirely free (like that of the muse wandering in the wide field), but neither is it entirely regular (like that of the rider in the *gyrus*): they move in a racing track, in a set direction, but within these boundaries relatively freely, as implied by the competition. The text thus suggests that the *Achilleid,* now explicitly named, can also be classified as belonging to an intermediate genre: epic in some sense (or epic according only to a definition which already implies generic complexity, like the one Statius put forward in the poem by invoking *fortis Erato*), but not truly epic (a poem which would count as an epic according to anyone's definition). However, the system of the three metaphors is made more complex by the fact that, in retrospect, the metaphor of the *campus* itself can be read as referring to the ongoing work on the *Achilleid.* The *campus* is the ideal space in which it should move as an *ingens opus*, but Erato (at least for the time being) has not been able to shift into the right gear: instead of speeding, she walked, with all its satirical and erotic connotations. In the sixth stanza we see the muses (this time in the plural: *Camenae*) in a smaller space, the *circus*, where they also prove too slow, and Achilles gets into trouble at the first turn.

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30 As Morgan 2010, 197 notes, this word might be an allusion to Sappho's famous lack of words (γλῶσσα ⟨μ'⟩ ἔαγε: 31,9 L-P) through Catullus' translation (*lingua sed torpet:* 51,9).

31 The contemporary context provided by Domitian's innovations in sport festivals at Rome might also be relevant here: his newly built stadium (today's Piazza Navona) hosted the running competition, while the equestrian races were held in the Circus Maximus. Domitian's Capitoline Games, of course, also included musical contests which is important for the metaphoric chariot race of *Silvae* 4,7. On chariot racing in Ancient Rome, see the survey by Bell 2014.

32 Heslin 2005, 61.

We may even assume an intertextual connection at this point with the most famous occurrence of the word *meta* in Roman epic, Jupiter's prophecy in *Aeneid* 1, where the god promises the future Romans infinite rule: „for these I set no bounds in space or time; but have given empire without end" (*his ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono: / imperium sine fine dedi: Aen.* 1,278 – 279, transl. Fairclough–Goold). There will be no limit where Roman armies will have to turn back: the whole world will be Rome's playground, and the world will be the 'wide field' in which Virgil can move as an epic poet. Statius and Achilles, on the other hand, have to come to terms with the confined space of the *circus*, forcing them to make dangerous turns. The metaphor of the accident in the *circus* may thus not only be a way of suggesting the incompleteness of the *Achilleid,* but also – like *spatiata* earlier – a self-reflexive reference to its problematic generic classification, which has become one of the most important topics in scholarship on the *Achilleid* in recent decades. Achilles may be the greatest of heroes, and Statius may promise to write his complete epic biography, but the story of the young hero hiding in women's clothes on Scyros in the first book is simply not heroic at all, and too erotic in nature to be treated as a truly epic subject.[33] For this reason, the poem has been described as a „non-epic epic" in which elements of other, lesser genres – above all love elegy – play an important role, calling into question the epic status of the poem.[34] Perhaps not just incidentally, the two occurrences of the verb *haereo* in the *Achilleid* which have Achilles as the subject both underline his personal ambiguity and his indecision between male/heroic and female/elegiac identities: still in disguise, he leaves the room reluctantly with the other girls when Ulysses speaks about the preparations for the Trojan war („but he lingers looking back at the Ithacan and is the last to leave the assembly", *sed haeret / respiciens Ithacum coetuque novissimus exit:* 1,804 – 805), and later Ulysses criticizes him for being reluctant to join the war effort and thus profess his true identity („'Why do you hesitate?' he says. 'We know. You are half-beast Chiron's fosterling…", *'Quid haeres? / Scimus' ait, 'tu semiferi Chironis alumnus…':* 1,867 – 868).

However, in interpreting the relationship between the three metaphors (*campus, gyrus* and *circus*), we can also start from the observation that the racing ground of the *circus* is in itself a structured and complex space: it is divided into concentric tracks. The inner tracks are shorter, the outer ones longer. Seen in this way, the *circus* does not represent a kind of intermediate space between the 'great' *campus* of epic and the 'small' *gyrus* of lyric, but rather a space which incorporates both genres as extremes: epic on the outermost track, lyric on the innermost one. The third metaphor does not so much complement the first two as unify and rewrite them, implying a multi-divisional spectrum from small to large, from lyric to epic, with enough room – enough tracks – for all literary genres, rather than a binary opposition of „small" and „large" spaces or genres.

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33 On Achilles at Scyros, see Telg genannt Kortmann in this volume.

34 See e.g. Rosati 1992 and Hinds 1998, 135 – 144, reading the *Achilleid* as an „epic of ambiguity" and an „Ovidian epic", respectively; Hinds also lists other generic labels earlier scholars have used in connection with Statius' poem at 136n15. „Un-epic epic" is the term used by Cowan 2005, xvi.

The metaphor, when so interpreted, implies that each track corresponds to a different genre, and the competitors to different poems.[35] The competitors certainly start on the track corresponding to the (primary) genre of the given poem, but the race would not be a race if they were to remain in that track all the way. The possibility, or even the inevitability, of changing lanes is therefore also an essential element of the metaphor. In context of a metapoetic reading – and in light of the *campus/gyrus* opposition of the first stanza – changing lanes amounts to a poetic shift in the course of composition which affects the generic status of the poem. If the „competitor" shifts to an outer track, the text becomes temporarily (even) more epic; if the chariot shifts to an inner track, it moves away from epic and towards smaller genres (ultimately, lyric). The chariot of Statius' Achilles, the *Achilleid*, as some kind of epic after all, certainly started from (one of) the outermost tracks, with the opening word *magnanimum* (1,1) suggesting 'essential epic',[36] but then changed towards the inward tracks, representing love elegy[37] and other minor genres relatively soon in the first book, when the narrator started to tell the story of the young hero's hiding in Scyros.[38] In the last section of the finished text, the unfinished second book, we seem to witness a return to the outer tracks: Achilles leaves Scyros and recounts his heroic upbringing to Odysseus and Diomedes on board the ship bound for Aulis (*Ach.* 2,1–167).[39] Yet that is the moment when the chariot representing the *Achilleid* runs into trouble: Achilles is approaching the 'first turn' – one of the most dangerous manoeuvres of the race – just as he is returning to the outer, epic, track. Thus, while the *circus* metaphor seems to imply that generic shift is an inevitable part of successful literary composition, it may also suggest that a genre-shift as radical as the one we encounter in the *Achilleid* may have negative consequences, even calling into question whether or not the work can be continued.

3 Metapoetic chariots and horses in Statian epic

At this point, I „change lanes" myself, in order to look at two passages from Statius' epic poems, which can be interpreted also in the context of the poetic *circus* of *Silvae* 4,7. One

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35 The chariot of the *Achilleid* is guided by the protagonist instead of the poet; cf. *silv.* 5,2,160–163, where „Achilles" is imagined as reading out Statius' poem at a *recitatio.* Cf. also Apuleius' later gesture of comparing generic and/or stylistic change as jumping from one horse to another at the opening of his *Metamorphoses* (*iam haec equidem ipsa vocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo quem accessimus respondet*, „now in fact this very changing of language corresponds to the type of writing we have undertaken, which is like the skill of a rider jumping from one horse to another", transl. J. A. Hanson, *met.* 1,1). I owe this intertextual observation to the anonymous reader.
36 Hinds 2000.
37 On the presence of love elegy in the *Achilleid*, see e. g. Kortmann in the present volume (p. 184–186).
38 Thetis decides to bring her son to Scyros at 1,207–211, and first proposes that he should change clothes in her speech at 1,252–274.
39 Cf. Hinds 2000, 241–244 on how the Scyrian adventure is put „under erasure", not the least by Achilles himself, in the unfinished second book.

is related to Apollo's involvement in the chariot race of *Thebaid* 6, while the other is a simile in the *Achilleid*, which describes Achilles' initial reluctance to accept women's clothes.

Statius's remark in *Silvae* 4,7 that Apollo as inspiring deity arrives „more slowly than usual" (*tardius sueto:* 22) is obviously read, at first glance, as a general reference to the poet's earlier success with the already completed *Thebaid*, which Statius goes on to mention as a successful project in the next stanza: „my *Thebaid* … essays with daring string the joys of Mantuan fame" (*nostra Thebais … temptat audaci fide Mantuanae / gaudia famae: silv.* 4,7,25 – 28). There is, however, a particular scene in that epic in which Apollo does indeed arrive at the scene of a chariot race – and, unlike the situation described in the *Silvae*, he arrives very quickly. The first event in the funeral games in memory of Opheltes is the chariot race, and the narrator immediately asks Apollo to help him – taking the traditional role of a muse – draw up a catalogue of the competitors and their horses: „First toil is for the horses. Tell, Phoebus, the drivers' famous names, tell the horses themselves" (*primus sudor equis. Dic incluta, Phoebe, regentum / nomina, dic ipsos: Theb.* 6,296 – 297). Soon afterwards, the god reappears as a character in the epic: he delights the band of the Muses with a cosmological song (355 – 364). At the end of the song, he keeps the Muses waiting: „it was over, and he puts off the Sisters eager to listen" (*finis erat; differt avidas audire sorores:* 6,365). Apollo's song is not characterized as unfinished, unlike Statius' *Achilleid*; nevertheless, the verb *differo,* also used in the first stanza of *Silvae* 4,7 with regard to the postponement of epic composition, suggests here that Apollo could sing at even greater length about the cosmos, and will perhaps continue his song to be sung to the Muses later. At this moment, however, he catches sight of the competitors preparing for the race (366 – 371). Since his favourite, the *vates* Amphiaraus, is among them, the god rushes immediately and quickly to Nemea: „Straightway with a leap that shone through the air he came to Nemea, more swiftly than his father's flame and his own arrows" (*extemplo Nemeen radiante per aera saltu / ocior et patrio venit igne suisque sagittis:* 6,385 – 386). It is also this earlier, swift arrival that *sueto* in *Silvae* 4,7 may refer to. The swift divine support does not remain ineffective in the *Thebaid.* Apollo, summoning a monster from the underworld, frightens Arion, causing Polynices to fall from his chariot (6,491 – 512). Although Arion, who loses his charioteer, will cross the finishing line first, Amphiaraus wins the race: „the horse kept his glory, victory went to the seer" (*gloria mansit equo, cessit victoria vati:* 6,530).

Helen Lovatt has convincingly demonstrated how Statian – and in more general terms, epic – races may be interpreted metapoetically. In her chapter on the chariot race of the *Thebaid*, she puts great emphasis on the fact that in the epic it is a *vates* (seer and/ or poet) who wins the race, with the powerful support of the god of poetry (and divination).[40] The metaphor of the chariot race in *Silvae* 4,7 is also discussed as part of her

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40 Lovatt 2005, 23 – 40; 30 – 31 on the significance of Ampharaus as *vates.* See also Rebeggiani 2013 for an alternative political interpretation of the chariot race in the *Thebaid.*

chapter's introduction,[41] but it seems to me that there is an even closer connection between the two Statian passages. In *Silvae* 4,7 Achilles, or the poetic chariot of the *Achilleid*, is stuck because Apollo arrives more slowly than usual; in the *Thebaid*, Polynices falls from his chariot because of Apollo, who arrives quickly this time, but supporting another competitor. In the context of the *Thebaid* it is obvious why, as god of poetry and divination, he chooses Amphiaraus. In *Silvae* 4,7, by contrast, it is not clear why Apollo is slow to arrive, why he does not support „Achilles". The exact causes of a writer's block are, of course, often obscure. However, in light of Apollo's aggression against Polynices, the reader may be reminded of the Apollo-Achilles conflict, familiar from mythology. The cult epithet *Thymbrae rector* (22 – 23) refers to the temple of Apollo at Thymbra in which Achilles had killed Troilus, and was not much later killed himself.[42] Apollo's slow arrival, furthermore, may be an allusion to the Catullan variant according to which Apollo remained absent from the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (*Catull.* 64,299),[43] foreshadowing his later role in Achilles' death. Apollo's projected arrival in *Silvae* 4,7 thus proves to be a double-edged sword: he would have to help the poet and act against the inimical *heros* at the same time. If he does arrive as the god of poetry, it will undoubtedly facilitate the continuation of the unfinished work, the completion of the *Achilleid,* but it will also bring the death of the protagonist closer – a death which, at the same time, would greatly contribute to the undying fame of the hero Apollo is on hostile terms with. Is this the reason why Apollo is not completely willing to come to Statius' aid?

This contradiction has also been pointed out by Denis Feeney in context of the *Achilleid* proem,[44] where Statius also looks to Apollo for inspiration: „only do you, Phoebus, grant me new founts if I have drained the old one with a worthy draught" (*tu modo, si fontes digno deplevimus haustu, / da fontes mihi, Phoebe novos: Ach.* 1,8 – 9). A few lines later, the poet points out the paradox that his biography of the hero is in a sense not 'great' or epic enough, for the *Achilleid* is only a 'prelude' to an epic about Domitian: „great Achilles is your prelude" (*magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles: Ach.* 1,19).[45] Statius used the same phrase in the preface of *Silvae* 1 to describe poems like the *Batrachomyomachia* and the *Culex,* which are not only shorter than epic but also parodying the genre, and which could be read as a prelude to later epic poems by the same poet (*silv.* 1, pr. 7 – 10):

> *et Culicem legimus et Batrachomachiam etiam agnoscimus, nec quisquam est illustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit.*

> But we read the Culex and even recognize the Batrachomachia; and none of our illustrious poets but has preluded his works with something in lighter vein.

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41 Lovatt 2005, 24 – 25.

42 Coleman 1988 ad loc.

43 Cf. Fordyce 1961 ad loc.

44 Feeney 2004, 88 – 89.

45 On *recusatio* in Flavian poetry, see Nauta 2006 (esp. 30 – 37 on Statius, including the passages discussed here) and Kersten in this volume (59 – 60).

In a later passage in the *Achilleid*, the narrator seems to implicitly characterize his second epic also as a mixture of two unequal genres, epic and elegy. When she tries to persuade his son to adopt the female disguise as a temporary defence mechanism against the dangers of war, Thetis reminds Achilles that as the child of a goddess and a mortal he is of unequal descent: „As it is, my son, your birth is unequal" (*nunc impar tibi, nate, genus: Ach.* 1,256).[46] As Alessandro Barchiesi has noted, this statement can also be read as an allusion to Ovid's *Amores*, where the poet, having himself cited examples of unequal marriages from mythology, describes his own genre, the elegy, in the same terms: „this very kind of verse is unequal" (*carminis hoc ipsum genus inpar:* Ov. *am.* 2,17,21).[47] The *Amores* is unequal in terms of meter, of course, due to the inequality of hexameter and the pentameter that follows it. If we concentrate on content and style, however, the *Achilleid* can also be seen as a text oscillating between two genres: heroic epic and love elegy in the first book, within which the Scyros episode seems to be the most elegiac and the least epic.

The genealogical (and generic) comment does not convince Achilles: the memory of his tutor, Chiron, and the heroic education he received from him, makes the young hero resist. This section concludes with the following simile, which illustrates Achilles' initial resistance (*Ach.* 1,277–282):[48]

> *Effrenae tumidum velut igne iuventae*
> *si quis equum primis submittere temptet habenis:*
> *ille diu campis fluviisque et honore superbo*
> *gavisus non colla iugo, non aspera praebet* 280
> *ora lupis dominique fremit captivus inire*
> *imperia atque alios miratur discere cursus.*

> As though one were to try to subject a horse, haughty with the fire of unbridled youth, to the harness for the first time: long delighting in field and river and proud beauty, he does not bend his neck to the yoke nor his fierce mouth to the bit, loudly indignant to pass captive under a master's command, and marvels at learning new courses.

The simile starts as a description of resistance, but it ends with the horse giving in and starting to learn *(discere)* the rules of „different courses" (*alios cursus*), with amazement *(miratur)* rather than complaint (as *fremit* suggested in the previous line), also implying some kind of curiosity towards the unfamiliar.

With this passage, as commentators note,[49] Statius joins a famous chain of similes spanning the epic tradition from Homer to Vergil.[50] His direct model seems to be the

46 In the context of this paper, it might also be relevant that chariot drivers at Rome were also of ambiguous social status, celebrities on one hand, but of low prestige on the other: see Bell 2014, 496–498.
47 Barchiesi 2005, 52–53.
48 This simile is briefly discussed, together with other similes comparing Achilles to animals, by Bernstein 2008, 122–123. On similes and gender in the *Achilleid*, see also McNelis 2015.
49 Ripoll/Soubiran 2008 and Uccellini 2012 ad loc.; without discussion by Dilke 1954.
50 On this chain of similes, see e.g. von Albrecht 1969 and Gärtner/Blaschka 2019, passim.

Aeneid, where in Book 11 Turnus entering battle is compared to a horse happily leaving the stables for the fields. In turn, the Vergilian simile – as Servius (on *Aen.* 11,492) has already recognized – has a Homeric model: the same horse-simile illustrates both Paris' (in *Iliad* 6) and Hector's (in *Iliad* 15) entry into battle.[51]

> *Qualis ubi abruptis fugit praesepia vinclis*
> *tandem liber equus, campoque potitus aperto*
> *aut ille in pastus armentaque tendit equarum*
> *aut adsuetus aquae perfundi flumine noto*   495
> *emicat, arrectisque fremit cervicibus alte*
> *luxurians luduntque iubae per colla, per armos.*   (*Aen.* 11,492 – 497)

Just as, when a horse, bursting his tether, has fled the stalls, free at last, and, lord of the open plain, either he makes for the pastures and herds of mares or, accustomed to bathe in a familiar river, he dashes away and, with head held high in wanton joy, neighs, while his mane plays over neck and shoulder.

> ὡς δ' ὅτε τις στατὸς ἵππος ἀκοστήσας ἐπὶ φάτνῃ
> δεσμὸν ἀπορρήξας θείῃ πεδίοιο κροαίνων
> εἰωθὼς λούεσθαι ἐϋρρεῖος ποταμοῖο
> κυδιόων· ὑψοῦ δὲ κάρη ἔχει, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαῖται
> ὤμοις ἀΐσσονται· ὃ δ' ἀγλαΐηφι πεποιθὼς   510
> ῥίμφά ἑ γοῦνα φέρει μετά τ' ἤθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων   (*Il.* 6,506 – 511 = 15,263 – 268)

Just as when a stabled horse that has fed his fill at the manger breaks his halter and runs stamping over the plain – being accustomed to bathe in the fair-flowing river – and exults; high does he hold his head, and about his shoulders his mane floats streaming and, as he glories in his splendor, his legs nimbly bring him to the haunts and pastures of horses (transl. Murray–Wyatt, modified).

The Homeric simile had already been imitated by Apollonius in *Argonautica* 3 (1259 – 1262, where Jason is compared to a war horse, eager for battle), and by Ennius in the *Annales* (535 – 539 Sk), describing, again, a horse happy to leave the stable for the fields, although the *comparandus* and the context of the simile are unknown in this case.

The most important change Statius introduces to this traditional simile is, obviously, the reversal of the base situation: Statius' horse must leave the fields indignantly, accepting the harness and the instructions of a trainer instead of breaking out of the stable and gladly heading for the fields (*campo aperto* / νομὸν, corresponding to the heroic battle to come). Both Homer and Vergil also add, however, that these fields and rivers are already known to the horse (see *adsuetus, noto,* εἰωθὼς, ἤθεα). Having already been there before implies an earlier moment when the horse had to leave the fields and rivers temporarily. Statius takes this implied earlier moment as the basis of his own simile. The usage of *fremit,* „makes noise", by both Vergil and Statius also makes the contrast between the two situations a bit less clear-cut: in its immediate Statian context, it seems

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51 McGill 2020 on 492 – 497 convincingly argues that the passage from *Iliad* 6 is Vergil's main model.

plausible to take the verb as referring to the horse's indignation, but in Vergil its connotations are clearly positive.[52] Thus, if we read Statius' simile with Vergil in mind, it becomes possible to read Statius' *fremit* as the physiological sign of more complex emotions, indignation and excitement at the same time, already before we encounter *miratur* in the last line of the passage. All in all, the intertextual background provides Statius' simile with a much stronger proleptic effect, foreshadowing not only Achilles' later eagerness to change clothes, but also his return to the battlefield after the sojourn on Scyros.

There is, finally, a further point of contact between the Statian simile and some of its epic models which may come in handy for Statius. Both the Homeric and the Apollonian simile involves heroes, Paris and Jason, whose masculine and heroic credentials are far from perfect. Paris, in an earlier scene of *Iliad* 6, had to be reprehended by Hector, and even by Helen herself, for staying home rather than joining battle; and, when he finally arrives at the battlefield, he must apologize to Hector for being late (*Il.* 6,158 – 159). Jason is also criticized by Idas, not much earlier than the simile in question, for relying on help from Medea. Statius' Achilles is also a hero whose gender and generic status will be challenged during his stay on Scyros in disguise. Unlike Paris and Jason, Vergil's Turnus is not criticized for being effeminate, but he himself has erotic motives in entering the battlefield: he is not only defending his homeland, but also trying to win Lavinia back.[53] Vergil acknowledges the presence of this motivation by adding that the horse is happy to enter the fields because of the company of mares (*pastus armentaque … equarum: Aen.* 11,494) in particular, by contrast to Homer, who mentioned the pasture of horses in general (ἤθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων: *Il.* 6,511) without any feminine adjective. Statius' final twist in his game of literary imitation is that even Achilles will agree, in the end, and agree happily, to accept the female disguise (corresponding to the harness in the simile) because he glimpses the beautiful Deidamia and thus experiences erotic lust for the first time.

In addition to points of language, characterization and intertextuality, the horse simile can also be interpreted in light of *Silvae* 4,7 in order to bring to light its metapoetic potential. We have seen in both *Silvae* 4,7 and the *Achilleid* proem that Statius repeatedly uses the name of the hero as a metonymic shorthand for the poem: Achilles is „stuck at the first turning point", and he „plays a prelude" to the epic on Domitian. If we employ the same metonymy for the horse in the simile, then the animal may correspond not just to Achilles as protagonist, but also to the *Achilleid* itself. The poem started out as an epic, with the assumption that the poet and his muse will freely roam throughout the wide fields; but now Statius must face the consequences of choosing the whole life of Achilles as his subject. For the duration of the Scyros episode at least, he must confine his movement, even if reluctantly, to the smaller space of the metaphoric yard and accept the

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52 See also Uccellini 2012 ad loc. on various usages of this verb; McGill 2020 on *Aen.* 11,496 notes that Vergil's *fremit* in the simile echoes an earlier occurrence of the verb at 11,453, where soldiers clamour for their arms, eager to go into battle.
53 McGill 2020 on *Aen.* 11,494.

harness put on him and his poem by a new muse who teaches movement by „different paths" (*alios cursus),* which correspond to the „smaller circles" (*minores gyros*) in *Silvae* 4,7, with the muse holding the lunge (cf. the interpretation of *contrahe* above).

This interpretation of Statius' simile can also retroactively influence how we read its epic models. The similes about horses happily returning from the stable to the open fields can themselves be seen now as generic hints that the coming *aristeia* is the high point of any traditional heroic epic, where the poem comes closest to turning the idea of epic as the quintessentially martial and masculine genre into reality. By implication, however, all other parts of the poem are threatened of looking not perfectly epic, not sufficiently great in comparison to the *aristeia.* It is not a coincidence that both the narrator and some characters in the *Achilleid* repeatedly look forward to the famous duel with Hector[54] as the culmination of Achilles' heroic career and also as the moment, perhaps, when Statius' plan to write a truly epic biography will come closest to being deemed accomplished.

4 Conclusion

As I have already stated in the introduction, the three spatial metaphors Statius uses in *Silvae* 4,7 are not novel at all: literary 'fields', 'circles', and 'chariot races' can be found in earlier poetry as well. What makes Statius' poem interesting for metapoetic interpretation is, in my view, rather how he combines these well-known elements. By linking the binary opposition 'great field of epic' vs. 'small circles of lyric' with the metaphor of the *circus,* he suggests a more fine-tuned system (corresponding to the lanes of the racing track) in which epic and lyric are just the polar opposites, fencing a number of further genres in-between. Statius' metaphors are thus not limited to describing the relationship between two specific poems, *Silvae* 4,7 and the *Achilleid,* or even Statius' literary *oeuvre*; rather, his metaphors imply a concentric system of relatively smaller and larger genres in which potentially any poetic work can be placed.

The 'literary *circus*' of *Silvae* 4,7, furthermore, does not imply that specific poems belong to one fixed lane or genre only. The metaphor is rather used to suggest that multiple lanes can, or even should, be used during composition. Statius is thus focusing on the issue of generic complexity not in a prescriptive way, dissuading poets from mixing „incompatible" elements of subject matter, style and genre (as e.g. Horace professedly does in the *Ars poetica*), but rather reflecting on it as apparently standard poetic practice. Furthermore, instead of thinking of such generic complexity as a static feature of a poem (understood as the result of poetic composition) as the metapoetic *impar genus* in Ovid and Statius (see above) may suggest, in *Silvae* 4,7 he implies that generic complexity can also be thought of as a dynamic process, manifested in the decisions poets must make during composition. The competitors in the metaphoric chariot race can

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54 *Ach.* 1,6 (narrator); 88 (Neptune); 474 (Greek soldiers); 883 (narrator).

change generic lanes not only when they begin working on a new poem – or suspend working on one in favour of another, as is the case with *Silvae* 4,7 and the *Achilleid* – , but also during the composition of a single poem. Statius' second epic, with its sudden switches between 'epic' and 'elegiac' modes,[55] is a conspicuous example of this lane- and genre-switching practice, and the simile of the horse reluctantly leaving the fields in *Achilleid* 1 can be interpreted as marking such a moment of generic change. The *Achilleid*, however, as it is pictured in *Silvae* 4,7, also shows that there are risks involved in any poetic decision which results in changing the generic status of a poem.

The metaphor of the *circus* seems to provide a good illustration for two further aspects of the literary process as well. One is intertextuality and the agonistic nature of literary tradition. If the *Achilleid*'s poetic chariot is on the racetrack, it is clearly not alone, but competing against others. The idea of a race may be reinforced by reading the possessive pronouns of the lines in question with added emphasis: it is Statius' muses (*nostris … Camenis: silv.* 4,7,21) and his hero (*meus … Achilles,* 23 – 24) who are slowed down, not those of other poets, or of Statius' own *Thebaid.* In the earlier epic, Apollo favoured Amphiaraus emphatically instead of Polynices. As competitors, poets and their poems are trying to get ahead of each other by lane-switching – that is, by implementing genre shifts – in the most skillful combination possible in order to have a chance of victory: that is, of achieving literary success, including financial support from their patrons. The manifold intertextual links between the works of the Flavian epic poets, working on their poems more or less simultaneously, can be interpreted as a reflection of such a competition.[56] But we need not limit our interpretation of the poetic competition to a single genre or period, of course: as we have seen, the lanes in Statius' *circus* can represent different genres, and the performance of each competitor can be compared not only with that of his contemporary rivals, but also his predecessors in the literary *circus.* As Statius himself notes during the chariot race of *Thebaid* 6, old tracks, the visible traces of earlier chariots, are deleted by the new (6,415 – 416); in Lovatt's words, intertextual „repetition and imitation entail deletion".[57]

Finally, it would be difficult to imagine a *circus* without an audience. Statius' metaphor can be easily extended to include the readers of literary works (and the audiences at *recitationes*) as well. When Achilles' 'getting stuck' is mentioned in the third person and accompanied by the deictic exclamation *ecce* (23), Statius seems to imagine himself among the spectators of the literary contest, together with Vibius Maximus, even if he, as the addressee of this letter-like poem, is otherwise absent; alternatively, Statius' exclamation could point at a physical copy of the *Achilleid* which the addressee receives to-

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55 Cf. Harrison's discussion of Alistair Fowler's distinction between 'genre' and 'mode': Harrison 2007, 16.
56 Scholarly consensus dates Valerius' epic a bit earlier than those of Statius and Silius (but see also Wilson 2013 for at least an early starting date for the *Punica*). Incidently, the chariot races in the *Thebaid* and the *Punica* are a pair of passages where signs of reciprocal poetic interaction can be detected: see Lovatt 2010. See also Lovatt 2019, 439 – 443 and Schwameis (forthcoming) for metapoetic readings of the chariot race in *Punica* 16.
57 Lovatt 2005, 28.

gether with *Silvae* 4,7 serving as a cover letter.[58] The poet and his patron are the first to encounter the poem, even while it is still unfinished, and a select audience can be present at poetic recitations like the one Statius himself imagines as a potential venue for presenting the *Achilleid* (*silv.* 5,2,160–163).[59] The literary *circus,* however, remains open and the literary race goes on even after the death of the author: we too, as modern readers of ancient poetry, can sit in the audience of Statius' literary *circus.*

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58 Heslin 2005, 61.

59 On *recitatio* and the *Thebaid,* see Kreuz's paper in this volume (p. 127–129).

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