

The Chains that Bind: Statius, Harmonia's Necklace, and Elegiac Tropes

Statius, in the *Thebaid*, introduces markedly elegiac moments into two distinct episodes on Harmonia's necklace: its initial ekphrasis (*Theb.* 2.265-305), and Amphiaraus' introduction in the Catalogue of Argives where Eriphyle receives the necklace from Argia (*Theb.* 4.187-213). Statius crafts an innovative narrative of Harmonia's necklace wherein he explicitly connects disparate stories from archaic mythos to a single narrative causation: Vulcan, upset at Venus and Mars' continued relationship, crafts the necklace of Harmonia as a wedding gift to destroy her and the women of the Theban line. Statius further innovates when Argia willingly hands over the necklace to Eriphyle (cf. Georgacopoulou 2005). In Statius, elegiac language and themes are at the center of the necklace's narrative. By integrating a discussion of both key passages on Harmonia's necklace, this paper will examine the role of elegiac *topoi* in characterizing the necklace and its owners.

The first part of my paper looks at the elegiac *topoi* of the contrasting pair, Argia and Eriphyle. I follow Micozzi (2007) and Bessone (2002) in their analysis of Argia's elegiac language, borrowed from Ovid (*Her.* 13) and Propertius (4.3). While they have noted that Argia's speech giving up the necklace is intertextually linked to previous faithful wives of elegy whose husbands have left them for war (e.g. Galla, Prop. 3.12; Arethusa, Prop. 4.3; Laodamia, Ov. *Her.* 13), I argue that Eriphyle is also linked to an elegiac *topos*: the "greedy woman," whose lust for gold and gems makes her put aside love in exchange for corruption and destruction (e.g. Prop. 2.16, esp. 43-6, 29-30; 3.13; Tib. 1.9.18-20). Eriphyle's desire for the necklace is sparked as soon as she sees it (*coquebat/invidiam*, Stat. *Theb.* 2.300-1) and this greed for gold is exactly as destructive as the elegists promise it will be: she "wished to exchange a gift for her husband's

life” (*dona viro mutare velit...*, *Theb.* 4.194). Eriphyle’s desire for corrupting gold picks up the elegiac trope she embodies: the woman who will do anything, leave any relationship, for gold and material wealth. It is greed for, and the promise of, gold and gems, particularly emeralds (Gervais 2017; cf. Prop. 2.16.29; in the necklace at Stat. *Theb.* 2.276) that destroys this type of woman in elegy. I suggest that Eriphyle, as a negative elegiac trope of the ‘bad woman,’ balances Argia’s elegiac role as the faithful wife. Despite the women exhibiting opposing elegiac *topoi*, however, both of them end up causing the death of their husbands: Argia by supporting Polynices’ desire for war, and Eriphyle by forcing Amphiaraus into battle.

In the second part of my paper, I examine how the elegiac mode of the necklace was embedded in its origin story, told as an ekphrasis of the necklace at Argia’s wedding. The brief retelling of the story behind the necklace, Vulcan’s anger and erotic jealousy at Mars’ continued involvement with Venus, engages with elegiac language. Mars’ relationship with Venus is *furta* (2.270), the common word for secret affairs among the elegists. The pair were caught: *capto...amori* (2.270), also a common phrase for elegiac affairs (cf. Gervais 2017), and the chains which bound them indicate both the mythological net woven to trap the pair (cf. Hom. *Od.* 8.266ff), but also the chains of an elegiac mistress (Tib. 1.1.55-6, Prop. 3.15.10). Caston (2012) suggests that erotic jealousy is at the heart of the elegiac relationship and the elegiac triangle of poet, mistress, and rival; the impetus behind Harmonia’s necklace, and the emotion driving its creation is thus a key emotion of elegiac poetry. I argue that the elegiac trope of erotic jealousy at the creation of the necklace activates elegiac themes throughout the rest of the necklace’s history as it moves destructively from woman to woman.

In this discussion I make a new contribution to the study of Statius’ matrix of generic interplay. By using elegiac language and themes to describe the necklace and the women who

wear it, Statius incorporates the gender and power dynamics of elegiac relationships into the narrative of Harmonia's necklace, interrupting the masculine and military emphasis of the poem. I suggest that the presence of elegiac language in these sections of the *Thebaid* emphasizes the role and status of women as willing or unwilling agents in the plot of the epic.

Bibliography

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