ACHILLES' SHELL – AN *IMAGO MUNDI* IN SEARCH OF A BODY

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Résumé : Dans les *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide, des héros comme Hercule et Achille survivent à la mort et transcendent les frontières terrestres après que leurs corps aient été incinérés. La situation d'Achille est néanmoins particulière. Après sa mort, ce héros laisse derrière lui un souvenir unique de soi-même : une armure, moule fidèle de son corps, et un bouclier qui est une copie miniaturée de l'univers. Tandis qu'Ajax revendique le bouclier en raison de sa puissance physique, cet article tente de prouver que le véritable héritier des armes d'Achille ne peut être qu'Ulysse, en raison de son polytropisme et de son interaction unique avec Achille à Skyros. À travers des comportements kourotrophiques, et homoérotiques, Ulysse peut se vanter qu'Achille est son invention. Plus important encore, l'esprit pénétrant d'Ulysse est le seul capable de comprendre la complexité cosmique du bouclier. À la fin, il subira sa propre métamorphose, devenant un guerrier semblable à Achille, prêt à prendre Troie, une fois qu'il aura acquis les armes d'Achille.

Abstract: In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, heroes like Hercules and Achilles survive death and transcend earthly boundaries after their bodies are cremated. Achilles' situation is nevertheless special. After his death, this hero leaves behind a unique memory of himself: an armor, a faithful mold of his body, and a shield which is a miniature copy of the universe. While Ajax claims the shield due to his physical power, this article attempts to prove that the true heir to Achilles' weapons can only be Ulysses, due to his polytropism and his unique interaction with Achilles on Skyros. Through kourotrophic and homoerotic behaviors, Ulysses can boast that Achilles is his invention. More importantly, Ulysses' penetrating mind is the only one capable of understanding the cosmic complexity of the shield. In the end he will suffer his own metamorphosis, becoming an Achilles-like warrior, ready to take Troy, once he acquires Achilles' weaponry.

Mots-clés : Achille, bouclier, Ulysse, Ajax, cosmos
Keywords: Achilles, shield, Ulysses, Ajax, cosmos

The bodies of the characters in Greek and Roman epic poems constitute a treasure trove for the scholarship on memory. The body in literature can have its own

memory and imprint (Fuchs, 2000). Some see it as a canvas inscribed with scars (Assmann, 2010; Erll, 2008; Sutherland, 2005), others as a *"locus* of violence" (Curley, 2013, p. 168) and even "a suit" which can accommodate for different roles (Zimmermann, 2019)[1]. Regarding Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Charles Segal asserted that "[a]lthough the poem is all about bodies, the body, ultimately, is only a trope for something else, that is, the instability and vulnerability of the human condition" (Segal, 1998, p. 9)[2]. My paper aims to discuss the status of a hero's body in Ovid and the interactions between the world as *locus* for heroic deeds and the heroes' bodies as recycled *loci memoriae* of their own kind[3].

The heroes' bodies fuse themselves with the world, by creating *loci memoriae* of their deeds and adding their memory to locations in the form of *heroa* (tombs of heroes). Achilles does not cover many places in his heroic career since his field of action is focused on Troy, but he is in a special contact with the entire world through the forged metal of the blacksmith god. Achilles' body is, thus, unique. He already wears the World on his shoulders, in the form of the traditional Homeric shield fashioned by Hephaestus to be an *imago mundi*. In this paper I will try to show that the reason why Ulysses was able to secure his succession in the legacy of the armor is due largely to his understanding of its cosmic relevance, his unique kourotrophic relationship to Achilles' body, and his predisposition for polymorphism. Ulysses understands the armor as cosmos, he appreciates its architectural intricacies, and is closer to Achilles in body than others give him credit.

By the end of Book XII (604–612) of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Achilles is killed. Once his body dissolves in the fire, there is a fear of the complete dissolution

[1] The complete sources are quoted in another chapter of my project, entitled *"Ta Klea Andron,* (Dis)embodiment and Heroic Peregrinations at Ovid", paper published in the proceedings volume of the International Colloquium *Aproape, departe, pretutindeni, nicăieri. Glose perpetue la tema exilului (Close, Far, Everywhere, Nowhere. Perpetual Glosses on the Theme of Exile),* eds Theodor Georgescu and Alexandru M. Călin, Bucharest University Press, 2021, pp. 115–146. The sources are: Thomas FUCHS, "Das Gedächtnis des Liebes Phänomenologische", in *Forschungen,* 5, 2000, pp. 76–89, Aleida ASSMANN, "Canon and Archive", in *Cultural Memory Studies, An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 97–106, Astrid ERLL (ed.), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, Elisabeth H. SUTHERLAND, "Writing (on) Bodies: Lyric discourse and the Production of Gender in Horace *Odes* 1.13", in *Classical Philology,* Volume 100, No. 1, January 2005, Dan CURLEY, *Tragedy in Ovid: Theater, Metatheater, and the Transformation of a Genre,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, and Erika ZIMMERMANN DAMER, *In the Flesh: Embodied Identities in Roman Elegy,* Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2019.

[2] Charles SEGAL, "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the *Metamorphoses",* in *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics,* Third Series, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Winter 1998), pp. 9–41. The quotation comes from page 9.

[3] This paper is part of a book project on Ovid, mythical heroes, and their bodily metamorphosis. For this larger project I had the generous help of the Eugen Lozovan Foundation, Denmark, and the Society of Classical Studies, USA. Their fellowships helped me travel to Copenhagen and Rome to consult the library of Saxo Institute at the University of Copenhagen and the "Black Diamond" Royal Library. In Rome I had access to the Capitoline Museum and the Vatican Museum, experience that greatly helped my bibliography and my research. This is a work in progress and the final format might be further enhanced with references and sub-chapters.

of the hero. Ovid suggests that once dead, Achilles might vanish into nothing (XII, 615–616 *iam cinis est, et de tam magno restat Achille / nescio quid paruum, quod non bene conpleat urnam*)[4]. So dangerous and so extraordinary in his physical might, he is now reduced to a pile of ashes at the hands of a cowardly womanizer, Paris, an unworthy adversary. There is a subtle implication that the memory of Achilles, once his body is gone, might vanish into nothing as well. His armor remains as his life's testimony, but it is in danger of degenerating into an empty receptacle, a hollowed mold. Ovid specifies that Achilles' frame is completely lost to the fire. *Arserat* in enjambement (XII, 612), the poet's insistence on the small quantity of ashes, Achilles' impossibility to even fill an urn with his now reduced substance (XII, 616), all these push the reader to think of the so-called "heroic exceptionalism" as a perishable condition. Heroes' relevance appears prone to futility. It is so tempting to read the discarded armor in the same terms as the half full urn containing now only traces of Achilles. The weaponry and armor left behind would now look for many like discarded, molted *exuuiae*, emptied carriers of a once magnificent body, now reduced to residue.

A Special Anatomy and a Special Geography: Armor between Exoskeleton, Automaton*, and Map*

When Achilles is cremated, Ovid mentions Vulcan to remind the reader of forged breastplates, molds, and shields, but also of the destructive force of fire and the fragility of human flesh (XII, 612 *arserat: armarat deus idem idemque cremarat*). In Segal's words,

> [t]he body is the constant reminder of our creatureliness, our kinship with other living, and dying beings, and so our distance from the undying gods, who, in Ovid's highly anthropomorphic world, have physical bodies with the needs, desires, and satisfactions of our bodies, but with limitless power and without death or decay (Segal, 1998, p. 13).

Hephaestus' dissolving of Achilles' body is even more interesting when one thinks that he forged in the same fire an armor meant to keep it intact in war. Achilles' remains are now pulled apart though the same craft which constructed his armor and shield. The blacksmith's fire fashions solid weaponry for heroic frames, but also equally demolishes any such structure, be it metal or bone. In the blazing fire the two structures now look interchangeable, as the limits between Achilles' body and his armor blur. His body appears to be just another automaton forged and ultimately melted down by the god. Dan Curley has similar thoughts about the shirt of Hercules and his body: "The personification of the peplos also entails the

[4] The Latin text used belongs to a Latin edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, ed. Elizabeth Styron, University of Virginia, http://etext.virginia.edu/conditions.html.

depersonalization of Heracles: the body, which should ideally be the subject of all action, has been reduced to an object, a place in which to dwell, mere fodder"[5]. Similarly, Achilles' corpse was only a container for his departed spirit.

By mentioning Vulcan, the poet sends us back to Book IX of the *Metamorphoses,* and the funerals of Hercules[6]. This hero once claimed that the only valid identifier of heroic worth is the might of his body (IX, 30–31). Yet, at the end of Book IX (161–169), the body that carried the World on its shoulders turns to ashes. The fusion between body and heroic identity becomes less obvious, as his frame is now only *materies,* consumable tissue or "wood" for the pyre (*robur*). A similar fate awaits Achilles in Books XII–XIII. Ovid is quick to notice, though, that neither Achilles nor his weapons are truly endangered by the "great equalizer" that death is (XII 617 *at uiuit totum quae gloria conpleat orbem*). In similar fashion, Hercules' body, who carried the World on his shoulders, was melted down to ashes, only for Hercules to finally be free. Vulcan is thus a purifier, an ally force, releasing the true force of heroes, setting them free from their bodily bonds to now roam the world and permeate the universe with their superhuman vitality. The pyre is once more the vehicle for heroic apotheosis, the one that eliminates unnecessary fleshy residue to reveal the divine essence. Achilles will not even go underground (XII, 617–619 *at uiuit totum quae gloria conpleat orbem / haec illi mensura uiro respondet, et hac est / par sibi Pelides nec inania Tartara sentit*) but continues to live, acquires size (*mensura*) in death, covers and fills (*conpleat*) the whole world with his fame. He remains a great presence in absence, at the same time ponderous and fluid. *Conpleat* (XII, 617) gives the impression of a liquid, subtle substance permeating the universe. In a paradox, heroes have to spend themselves somatically in order to fill the world like a suit. Hercules and Achilles meet each other in this paradox of immortality through immolation, through their ability to fill and dominate the World postmortem, when there is not enough residue of them to fill a small urn[7].

Achilles' weapons, his shield, javelin, and armor have a similar glamorous fate. They become treasured *memorabilia*. Even more: unlike Hercules who left behind only arrows and a bow, Achilles gives the world a unique reminder of himself. He leaves behind an armor, a faithful item bearing the shape of him, and a shield depicting the world through equally impressive sculptural means (XII, 110 *clipeus uasti concretus imagine mundi*). Curley sees heroes' clothes as anthropomorphic (and even personalized) entities[8]. Here, Achilles left behind an actual body print – a hollowed glyph of himself fused with the World. After his death, other heroes are fighting for these arms, as they would for the legitimacy to inherit Achilles' "mold", to bring forward his legacy and perhaps hold a palpable piece of him. The discarded

[5] D. CURLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 168. This work was quoted in another chapter of my project (C. POPESCU, *op. cit.*, 2021, pp. 122–125).

[6] More about this particular chapter is detailed in C. POPESCU, *op. cit.*, 2021, pp. 115–146.

[7] C. SEGAL, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles,* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 289, sees a paradox between the presence of Orestes' strong, living body next to the small urn fictitiously containing his remnant ashes, in Sophocles' *Electra*. Also, in C. POPESCU, *op. cit.*, 2021, p. 116.

[8] D. CURLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 168. Also quoted in C. POPESCU, *op. cit.*, 2021, pp. 122–125.

armor of a hero is not a simple bodily cover. In the commerce of honor between heroes, this prized relict carries Achilles' worth. His armor and weapons are his heroic "identification documents" and wearing them means wearing Achilles. Through such prosthetics, his heir will literally re-embody Achilles inside the *imago mundi*, partake in an act of transhumanism, and "recycle" his memory.

Ovid plays with volume, receptacles and cores. It plays with the solid, the empty form, and the fluid. It makes his reader question which one is the cover, and which one is the content. Solid bodies and empty armors are just concentric receptacles of each other. As mentioned before, Achilles' body, empty of his soul, was perhaps nothing more than hollow armor. The reciprocal is also true: if Achilles body melted down like a breastplate, his empty armor, the one that escaped such fire, is now a living body. Once their master is dead, his weapons are capable of replacing him, endowed with a will of their own: Ovid specifies that Achilles weapons can wage wars of their own (XII, 620–621 *ipse etiam, ut, cuius fuerit, cognoscere posses, / bella mouet clipeus, deque armis arma feruntur*). Like automata, they seem to have their own destiny, once separated from Achilles' form. Once treated like bodies and complex organisms, such weapons can get wounded (see Ajax testimony, XIII, 117–118), and many of them are constructed of other bodies, which the hero seems to be adding to his own. For example, Ajax carried in his own right hand the backs of seven oxen (XIII, 346–347 *Telamone creates / gestasset laeua taurorum tergora septem*), in the guise of an impressive tower shield made out of their hides. His shield thus reunites the architectural and the organic, in one act of power and display. Armors act as bodies and bodies act as mere vessels for the untamable and elusive heroic essence. Thus, both bodies and armors are also *places.* Armors in general are protective enclosures, safe spaces against the violence outside, they are *loci,* particularly when they carry miniature representations. This armor however is not only a hollowed mold of Achilles' body, but also a detailed image at scale of the World that his spirit now infuses. Even when alive, Achilles' body carried on the shoulders the Earth (like once Hercules) as well as the sea and the sky, albeit in a miniature format. Owning Achilles' armor is owning a shell that is a *locus* by excellence, a vast place with a unique geography. Any hero inheriting such weaponry will contain a piece of Achilles while at the same time, will be contained by him: inheriting Achilles means replacing a now cosmic being.

The passage reminds us of Augustus' Earth-encompassing ambitions when he wore the armor and posed for the youthful heroic look of the statue of Primaporta[9]. The body of the emperor is similarly fused with the World in a stone representation where the marble medium mixes the "true" body lines and the sculptural, "fictitious" additions adorning it. On his breastplate, the World is again recomposed and personified with the Sky (Caelus) and the Sun (Sol) resting gracefully on his chest

[9] As Ioannis ZIOGAS ("Introduction: Power, Puns, and Politics From Horace to Silius Italicus", in P. MITSIS and I. ZIOGAS [eds], *Wordplay and Powerplay in Latin Poetry*, Boston/Berlin, De Gruyter, 2016, p. 8) asserts, it is not surprising that Achilles, a hero with such complex and problematic character should be compared indirectly to Augustus in literary texts of the time: "Achilles is an excellent model for composing poetry that can be interpreted both as apparent praise and veiled criticism of Roman emperors".

while other deities are nodding at his new political arrangement[10]. His ambitions were never far from epic. As Julia Fischer (2020) noticed, Augustus is youthful in his statuary representations, in an athletic-heroic "contrapposto pose": "So far the message of the Augustus of Primaporta is clear: he is an excellent orator and military victor with the youthful and perfect body of a Greek athlete". Like many other heroes, including the competing Ajax and Ulysses, Augustus told his story and spoke about his ancestry through his armor. He is supported by Diana and Apollo as well as connected to Venus through his relationship to Julius Caesar; the statue makes sure to reveal such affiliations, but also reveals his world pacifying ambitions with Sol and Caelus represented at the top of the cuirass, and bountiful Mother Earth at the bottom. One might read the message that Augustus' empire was so successful because Octavian, like the ancient mythical hero, was able to carry on his shoulders the World in symbolism: "At the very bottom of the cuirass is Tellus, the earth goddess, who cradles two babies and holds a *cornucopia.* Tellus is an additional allusion to the Pax Romana as she is a symbol of fertility with her healthy babies and overflowing horn of plenty" (Fischer, 2020).

To return to the *Metamorphoses,* the shield and armor are still only a shell of the complex hero that Achilles was, in spite of their intimidating cosmic associations. Patroclus died while wearing one of Achilles' breastplates, unable to reproduce Achilles' greatness. At best, this armor is a faithful print of his body. Curley elevated Heracles' shirt to the level of a true *locus* of Hercules' greatness, intimately connected to him, like a second skin[11]. In my view, the armor is similar and yet different from this viewpoint. It is at the same time more and less connected to Achilles, because of its material, form, and rigidity. Tailored around the hero's exceptional shape and able to maintain it even in its absence, the armor is a more faithful mold than a shirt, but also less intimately connected to the hero's skin and warmth. Since its job is to protect from harm and keep blows at a distance, such contraption is defined by stiffness and coldness. It can preserve its shape under pressure and resist harshness, but such rigidity makes it rather alien to the body it protects. Of all the garments, the armor is the closest to a statue in terms of artwork and likeness to its owner. While not as intimate to the hero's skin as the undergarments, this protective layer is the closest connected to the heroic aspect of its owner, for it is solely worn in the battle; it is splattered with blood and covered in blows and speaks volume about how one is perceived in war. This garment itself concentrates the warrior role, ignoring all other more domestic moments of a hero. Most of the men in the Achaean camp would fight to be cladded in something that bears the memory of Achilles' war success. It is interesting that much like Hercules after death, Achilles does not need to turn into a reminder of his worth, a flower or a tree. As a paradox, physically intact heroes like Cycnus (XII, 106–121), are in fact lesser to Achilles and easily morph into animal forms once they die, thus,

[10] Julia FISCHER, "Augustus of Primaporta", in *Smarthistory,* November 6, 2020, accessed October 31st, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/augustus-of-primaporta/.

[11] D. CURLEY, *op. cit.,* p. 168: "Heracles' description of the actual robe shares this somatic interest. As a covering for the human body, the peplos is already anthropomorphic; in the hero's account it becomes personified and embodied". Also quoted in C. POPESCU, *op. cit.,* 2021, pp. 122–125.

diminishing the memory of their human identity. When Achilles' body is gone, his weapons (like those of Hercules) are left behind as faithful prints and true receptacles of memory.

Ajax: The Armor, between an Honorary Item and a Companion

Being inside the personal space of a hero is a rather intimate experience. The winner will have to show that he has a somatic claim to the armor, a special connection to Achilles' memory, and a true grasp of the miniature world depicted on the shield. Only then, this exoskeleton will become his second skin.

Ajax is the first who claims it. His idea is that his valiant body is most compatible to such a fierce shield. He was always brave and acted in the open while Ulysses succeeded through cunning and smooth words (sometimes calumny, too, when he accused Palamedes, XIII, 56–62), or by sneaking into cities and temples under disguise (XIII, 99). Ulysses' body is not worth the shield of Achilles, first because he never does jobs that need a shield; in fact, his own shield is still intact (XIII, 118–119 *integer est clipeus: nostro, qui tela ferendo / mille patet plagis, nouus est successor habendus*). Also, a shield of this weight and magnitude can only hinder and crash his meek frame when he tries to sneak around through stealth or run under the cover of the night (XIII, 105–112). According to Ajax, what unites him and Achilles, besides courage and an impressive stature (since they are compatible in size and strength), is their consanguinity: Achilles and Ajax are, in fact, cousins (XIII, 21–33), so it is only natural that the former's armor stay in the family, thus continuing its heroic, warrior destiny. Ajax strongly believes that he and Achilles are heroic "twins" supposed to match each other in stature and worth. If he is not an identical Achilles, he comes quite close.

After presenting his genealogy, Ajax emphasizes his body and bodily worth above anything else. And while constantly alluding to the vulnerability of heroes during war, he subtly avoids presenting himself as prone to wounding. On the contrary, he presents himself as undefeatable, indispensable and invulnerable, always in demand for those comrades in need of help. Ajax is, thus, twice as worthy: he is courageous enough to risk his skin, but also skilled enough to not be actually wounded or weakened in any way. He protects his companions, and the Achaean ships (XIII, 93–94). He even offered help to Ulysses, when he was completely lost, shaking in a ditch and in need of protection. Ajax simply came and covered him with his huge shield:

> *…adsum uideoque tremente*
> *pallentemque metu et trepidantem morte futura;*
> *opposui molem clipei texique iacentem*
> *seruauique animam (minimum est hoc laudis) inertem.*
> *Si perstas certare, locum redeamus in illum:*
> *redde hostem uulnusque tuum solitumque timorem*
> *post clipeumque late et mecum contende sub illo!* (XIII, 73–79)

For him, a heroic body is always glamorous, performs extraordinary acts of might in the sunlight, with the armor being both its trusted companion and its natural protective cover. For Ajax, the shield is a heroic tool, an extension of his body, a badge of honor, but the relationship between his shield and his body is ambiguous. Preoccupied with emphasizing his agency in the fight, he rarely presents what his shield does for him, how he prevents his body from being hurt, wounded, disfigured or desecrated. The shield is presented in action in order to emphasize his stature and his dutiful help to others. The shield appears rather as a protective capsule for a fallen ally than as a cover for Ajax. When in such circumstances, the difference between the safe space of the shield covering a distressed ally and Ajax' physical strength in action blur. Ajax is not only a body, but also a protective vault himself. The hero even suggests that it was in fact his body (his chest, in particular, *pectus*) that morphed into a shield for others. His armor is completely ignored in such descriptions of superhuman strength (XIII, 93 *nempe ego mille meo protexi pectore puppes*). Ajax gives the impression that he protected the ships with his bare chest. The shield and armor fully disappear in such moments under the impressive presentation of heroic might. It is either because the armor is as comfortable to Ajax as his own skin (and its gleaming shine is somewhat consubstantial to his own radiance), or because Ajax really thinks of himself as impenetrable. *Pectus* which can designate so many things, beginning with "seat of emotions" (much like *phren*), represents here valor and physical strength.

Ajax appreciates intactness and impenetrability when it comes to warrior bodies. He would not be an isolated case in this sense: "If the female body in the *Metamorphoses* is characterized by its status as a visual object, its passivity, its appropriation by the male libidinal imagination, and its role as a vessel to be 'filled' by male seed to continue a heroic lineage, the ideal of the male body is impenetrability. The stories of Cycnus and Caeneus, both in Book 12, are paradigm cases" (Segal, 1998, p. 23). A. Everett Beek also suggests that the theme of gender, sexuality, and virility is essential in the story of Achilles in Ovid, given his brush with femininity while disguised as a girl in Skyros and his subtle concern of emasculation when he cannot plunge his sword in the impenetrable body of Cycnus (XII, 106–121)[12]. This is not an abnormal view regarding men in Latin poetry. It even permeates the bodily identities in Latin elegies, as Erika Zimmermann Damer points out:

> Traditional Roman masculinity, by contrast, required active maintenance of bodily integrity and sexual, physical, and emotional mastery and autonomy

[12] A. Everett BEEK, in his *"Manus est mea debilis ergo?* Deliberative Soliloquies and Gender-Bending in Ovid's *Metamorphoses",* North-West University, paper presented at SCS 153rd Meeting, 2022, mentions that Achilles fails to wound Cycnus, whose skin is naturally impenetrable and questions his weapons and abilities in a soliloquy, a "stereotypical feminine speech":

> "This display of feminine mannerism plays into a larger picture of Achilles' gendering: though Achilles is a nigh-unconquerable warrior, and himself mostly impenetrable (and he does, in this episode, defeat Cycnus by crushing him to death), his masculinity is complicated by feminine behaviors. Not only did he attempt to avoid fighting in the Trojan War, but he did so by disguising himself as a girl (as is alluded to at *Met.* XIII, 162–170)".

> in social and public settings. Roman society distinguished social status and full integration into the position of citizen on the basis of bodily impenetrability, and Roman manhood needed to be jealously guarded. A Roman man who suffered bodily vulnerability – by being penetrated sexually or by being beaten or wounded – faced social diminution from fully male to not-man: he became socially feminized[13].

For Ajax the armor has an architecture, a bright space for opened and fearless performance when Ulysses only looks for a shady place to hide. Thus, the armor functions as a space with its own architecture. Here Ovid thinks like a Roman. Paul Connerton asserts:

> Nowhere, in fact, was the mimetic projection of bodily attributes onto topographical features more elaborately developed, more geographically diffused, or more long-lasting in its historical influence than in the case of the classical Roman city, where architectural method was conceived of as the transposition into stone of the body's favourable states, its balanced articulation, its symmetry and its standards of proportion[14].

While being an enclosure, the armor is also a stage for display and showmanship. It offers the hero to the world. Its flashing tones are attractive to avid performers: *ipse nitor galeae claro radiantis ab auro / insidias prodet manifestabitque latentem* (XIII, 105–106). In his speech, he asserts that heroes are not only fearless, but also highly social creatures, naturally prone to showmanship and best covered in these gleaming metal suites, through which they communicate their worth to the world. From second skin and protective layer, the armor becomes an interface between a hero and the world, whether as a protective layer or as a tool of social interaction. It is inscribed with symbols, itself sign to be read by enemies and friends alike, a document of identification. Within this commerce of virtue and manly worth, the armor is not only a social token, but a complex tool of communication, an intricate glyph telling the story of its owner through its sculpted stories and through its cuts and bends. The armor follows the body frame and at the same time, fits the character. Ajax emphasizes the powers of his towering shield, its mass and weight that are a double of Achilles': even their weapons are twins.

Ajax' shield once worked for Ulysses, though he only used it as a protective amorphous mass (*molem clipei*, XIII, 75); from conspicuous prop, it turned into a place of concealment where light cannot penetrate, emphasize any shape or reveal any pattern. The shield lost its shape and glamour when protecting Ulysses, for its beauty and radiance were lost on a coward who prefers darkness and invisibility. He himself seemed crushed by his fear (*trementem… pallentem metu… trepidante…*

[13] E. ZIMMERMANN DAMER, "Introduction: Embodied Selves and the Body in Elegy", in *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[14] Paul CONNERTON, *The Spirit of Mourning: Memory, History and the Body,* Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 157.

morte futura… inertem… iacentem..., XIII, 73–76), reduced to an inert hype of wounded flesh, hiding underneath a mound of ox skin. *Locum redeamus in illum* (XIII, 77), says Ajax jokingly, referring both to this episode as a *locus memoriae*, and to the cavity of his shield as a place of respite for the "photophobic" Ulysses. Thus, Ajax concludes, Achilles' bodily traits, mimicked by his shield, are completely incompatible with Ulysses' weak and timid frame. Physical incompatibility, as an expression of a weaker character, is what advocates for the shield to be in the hands of Ajax.

When he asks for Achilles' weapons while emphasizing his own invulnerability, it almost looks like Ajax wants a tool he does not need for self-protection. Even when he talks about the need to replace his shield, presenting the logistics which recommend him for the weapons of Achilles, he talks about his shield as being the one wounded, almost personifying it, turning it into a trusted, but vulnerable companion, in need of timely retirement: *nostro, qui tela ferendo / mille patet plagis, nouus est successor habendus* (XIII, 118–119). The shield suffered wounds, but Ajax never specifies that it was done when protecting his body from violence and maiming. It is the shield, not him, that the audience contemplates as weakened and violated. Thus, Ajax talks about his courage in facing dangers, without depicting himself in a debile position.

By bringing in his old shield covered in wounds, Ajax does not only turn armor and shields from protective layers into members and organs of a one's body, but also treat them as living bodies and even humanizes them: much like the heroes themselves, the weapons can suffer wounds, they ache, they grow old and need successors for the noble arts they perform. Weapons are both part of bodies, ID cards, and fellow soldiers, with a personality of their own. Since weapons can have will and preferences, Ajax asserts that it is not him who chooses Achilles' arms, but rather that the weapons choose him: *atque Aiax armis, non Aiaci arma petuntur* (XIII, 97). The armor is vulnerable to predation as it can be lost in the battlefield. Ajax suggests that the best way to test the might of Achilles' true heir is thus to toss the armor back in the middle of the enemies and see who is able to fetch it.

Heroism is exposure, whether as glory or risk. Heroes do everything in the open, use the power of deeds, not words, and need only the protection of weapons, not that of the night. A hero is thus a self-sufficient mechanism, and only needs an armor and his courage when in the throes of war. Ulysses shies away from any such prominent role: he delayed arriving in Troy, attacked others only through the power of his words and calumnies, went into the enemy camp at night, shied away from some battles, and also could not partake in that holy camaraderie other heroes have. Nestor called him in vain to be his defender, when his old body was wounded and weakened, for Ulysses did not appear (XIII, 65–70). In opposition to Ajax' bright ubiquity in war, Ulysses' body effaces himself in the landscape. Ajax is everywhere, Ulysses is nowhere. The only time when we see Ajax' weapons saving someone's skin, it is to protect this lesser companion. When he is not invisible, Ulysses is inert somewhere in a ditch, in an inconspicuous location, always in need of an ally, always

in need of a protective cover. The way Ajax sees it, a worthy heir of Achilles' weaponry has to mimic the characteristics of the shield and of the World represented there: for him the world is round, huge (*uastus*, XIII, 110), heavy (*onerosa grauisque*, XIII, 108), and full of shine (*nitor*, XIII, 105); he too strives to be wider-than-life, ponderous, bright, and omnipresent. Thus, Ajax suggests that his body could mimic the weight of the World and is thus worthy of a shield representing it. That is his vision of the cosmos: first and foremost, the World has mass and size and is conspicuous. So is his shield, impossible to ignore and ready for display with its mass and roundness. The world is big and heavy, but he is able to carry it. He, too, has weight and mass, is conspicuous and not afraid to embrace its splendor on a worldwide stage. Conversely, there is nothing worse than hiding in the shadows. Men like Ulysses are meant for spy work in the dark, away from the gleaming light of the shield and the shine of glory. Achilles' armor can only slow him down by its weight when he tries to run or give him away by its conspicuous form, when he attempts to hide:

> *ipse nitor galeae claro radiantis ab auro*
> *insidias prodet manifestabitque latentem;*
> *sed neque Dulichius sub Achillis casside uertex*
> *pondera tanta feret, nec non onerosa grauisque*
> *Pelias hasta potest inbellibus esse lacertis,*
> *nec clipeus uasti caelatus imagine mundi*
> *conueniet timidae nataeque ad furta sinistrae:*
> *debilitaturum quid te petis, inprobe, munus…* (XIII, 105–112).

A hero's armor implies splendor which is the natural enemy of a lover of shade. The gleaming implies also a form of moral transparency, where everything is in the open, whatever is concealed becomes manifest and whatever is treacherous lies exposed. If Ulysses is comfortable with such practices, Philoctetes perhaps deserved more in Ajax's eyes. Due to Ulysses' treacherous words, he now lies in squalor away from the glory of Troy and withers in misery and festering. It is not only physical decay that Ajax is worried about, but the slow degradation of Philoctetes' heroic *persona*. One can notice that the cruel fate of Philoctetes is described from the perspective of his weaponry:

> *pars una ducum, quo successore sagittae*
> *Herculis utuntur, fractus morboque fameque*
> *uelaturque aliturque auibus, uolucresque petendo*
> *debita Troianis exercet spicula fatis* (XIII, 51–54).

His bow and arrows carried with them the rich legacy of Hercules and now they are robbed of their destiny in Troy. Location is everything once more. A hero, who should be a traveler by vocation, is thus forced to lay in one dull location. His weapons only serve to level his name and to blend the memory of a worldwide hero into the flat and unkept landscape of Lemnos. Philoctetes who could have tied down his glory to

many lands in the Trojan world, is now confined to a tiny place of quarantine, and the weapons that were a sign of Herculean virility and civilizing force, now devolved into archaic tools of primitive hunting, contributing to his meager sustenance. He is not even seen as a hunter: the birds, the usual victims of hunters, are depicted here as agents of nursing, caring for the fallen hero (XIII, 52–53). Philoctetes is fed by nature like a helpless cub or a chick. This imagery of the idle weapons and their incapacitated owner fully emasculates Philoctetes in Ajax' eyes: he concludes with a focus on his weapons that are "owed" a better destiny at Troy.

Heroic bodies and weaponry are memorable and essentially unreplaceable. The words of memory in Ajax speech are quite intense and Ajax constantly replies by indicating that everyone remembers the good warrior and the coward. Ajax keeps invoking memory of great deeds, genealogies, and also scenes where Ulysses performed poorly (*nec memoranda tamen uobis mea facta / esse reor,* 47, *ut memorant,* 58, *memor iste,* XIII, 13–14). His memory is narrowed down on the war of Troy and the generations that led to it. Since Ulysses always operated in the dark, Ajax implies that he is forgettable, easily effaced from the cultural memory, since there are never witnesses for his deeds. Ulysses belongs to the obscurity of forgetfulness, as he is *latens,* hiding in the crepuscule that oblivion (*lethe*) is[15]. Since his deeds are disreputable, Ajax assumes that visibility, public awareness, and memory can only harm Ulysses. The armor, through its brilliance (metaphorical and literal), can only expose him as unfit and unworthy.

Ulysses: Heroic Fluidity and the Armor as a World

Polytropos Ulysses believes there is more versatility to heroes than meets the eye of Ajax. Heroes are not exact copies of each other, and armors are not necessarily their exact bodily molds. Rather, heroes have complementary traits that help them become matches for each other. One such example was Patroclus. He was no Achilles, but he helped out by temporarily filling out his impressive armor to face Hector (*reppulit Actorides sub imagine tutus Achillis / Troas ab arsuris cum defensore carinis,* XIII, 273–274). As Nagy suggests, Patroclus was a double of Achilles, but a sacrificial double, a lesser twin[16]. And he fulfilled his role exemplarily. So, other

[15] Marcel DETIENNE, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece,* tr. Janet Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1996, pp. 81–83.

[16] Regarding the *therapon* function of Patroclus, as "subservient to Achilles and to none else", see Gregory NAGY, "Achilles and Patroklos as Models for the Twinning of Identity", in *Gemini and the Sacred: Twins and Twinship in Religion and Mythology,* edited by Kimberley C. Patton, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, https://chs.harvard.edu/curated-article/gregory-nagy-achilles-and-patroklos-as-models-for-the-twinning-of-identity/: "Such a meaning, 'ritual substitute', must be understood in the context of a Hittite ritual of purification that expels pollution from the person to be purified and transfers it into a person or an animal or an object that serves as a ritual substitute; the act of transferring pollution into the victim serving as ritual substitute may be accomplished either by destroying or by expelling the victim, who or which is identified as another self, *un autre soi-même.* According to the logic of this Hittite ritual of substitution, the identification of the self with the victim serving as the other self can take on a wide variety of forms: the victims range from humans to animals to figurines to ceramic vessels".

lesser warriors can share a hero's armor without improper use of it. At first sight, that would imply that the armor recedes in worth, as a mere tool, an empty shell without its own memory or imprint. It can be stolen, discarded, reused, returned home to the hero's father, and when valued, it becomes a symbol of the man who once owned it. Ulysses explains that the armor is fully transmissible and easy to wear by one who is not the exact match of the original. But this not the whole extent of his belief system.

Since he claims the armor, Ulysses first wants to show that he has indeed a body. If Ajax' speech only allowed him the visibility of one body part, the infamous left hand (*timidae nataeque ad furta sinistrae,* XIII, 111), Ulysses wants to prove that he has more: shoulders (284), arms (176 *dextra*, 170, 230, 262, 264 *manus*), and chest, in particular (264–265 *"aspicite! en" uestemque manu diduxit et "haec sunt / pectora semper" ait "uestris exercita rebus!",* also 369), since his opponent cannot stop talking about his own *pectus*. But Ulysses changes his somaticism into something more. He claims to have not just a mere body, but a canvas inscribed with scars and memories of war: *sunt et mihi uulnera, ciues, / ipso pulchra loco; nec uanis credite uerbis, / aspicite!* (XIII, 262–264). Ulysses seems to have inscribed his chest as *locus memoriae* (263–264 *ipso pulchro loco*), thus charging it with a myriad of functions, from vessel of his spirit, to weapon, and to social signifier. He has also inscribed more than a few other bodies himself (238–262). For Ulysses, unlike Ajax (266–267 *at nihil inpendit per tot Telamonius annos / sanguinis in socios et habet sine uulnere corpus!),* memory does not travel through paraphernalia and shiny tokens of honor, but through painful inscriptions directly on the skin. It is Ulysses' body, not his shield, that dared to endure blows. In fact, through blows and pains, his skin is now a hide, a shield in its own right, fit for display. When he speaks such words, Ulysses pulls his shirt and reveals the harm which was previously concealed, unashamed to face the light of scrutiny, despite Ajax' accusations. His skin is now a communicator. As Connerton asserts:

> There is an outside-facing skin and an inside-facing skin, and these two sides form an indivisible structure. The outside of the skin creates a boundary between the self and the world, a boundary that is especially sensitive to the world, and one which over time accumulates a complex texture of marks which remain as witness to the ways in which external forces have impinged upon the skin (Connerton, 2011, p. 133).

Ulysses believes that heroes are more than solid, impenetrable bodies: they are vulnerable, covered with meaningful scars[17]. Heroic bodies are meant for inscription through war wounds. Thus, he contests the idea of heroic intactness and even heroic invincibility. They all deal blows and harm, and disfigure, but are also exposed to such violations. Heroes do not always succeed in harming the enemy

[17] A similar vision of soldiers appears in elegy; see E. ZIMMERMANN DAMER, "Naked Selves: Sex, Violence, and Embodied Identities", in *op. cit.*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvfjczk3.11, pp. 145–147.

bodies. Sometimes the target is missed (*Hector abit uiolatus uulnere nullo*, XIII, 279, with all the sexual puns of *uiolatus*). Heroes lay down defeated and wounded, *procubuunt*, suffer violation, are fully penetrable and completely inert once killed. Achilles, too, finally succumbed to a blow. They all descend into the humble ground. Achilles, the model they fight to emulate, was no different, and Ulysses brings about the rushing scene of his devastating demise: *Graium murus, Achilles / procubuit! nec me lacrimae luctusque timorque / tardarunt, quin corpus humo sublime referrem* (XIII, 281–283). Through the poignant imagery of his untimely entombment, Ulysses displays what Phillip Hardie called "the pressure of the mourner's desire in the Metamorphoses to create illusions of presence against the fact of loss" (Hardie, 2002, p. 62)[18]. We see once more Achilles as a wonderous body (sublime corpus) and even as a wall (murus). Once more, his body embraces both architectural and organic elements in a mixture which turns him superhuman, intense, present… yet lost and irreplaceable. Before mixing himself with the soil of the land, Achilles is once more his impressive bodily frame. Regardless of this brief and personal homage to Achilles' physical strength, Ulysses is aware that heroes are more than their bodies and more than their tales of glory. They can also hide and lay low in the domesticity and anonymity of "inglorious" lands, when family relationships and love call for it (*me pia detinuit coniunx, pia mater Achillem*, XIII, 301). If Ulysses cannot mimic Achilles in bodily might, at least he echoes some of his actions when it comes to non-heroic acts: Achilles hid on the island of Skyros, for the sake of his mother, while Ulysses pretended insanity in Ithaka for the sake of his wife. Achilles is thus not only a twin of Ajax, but also a double of Ulysses. They both covered their true selves at some point. When it comes to the heroic *persona*, Ulysses once more allows for fluidity. In his view, heroes are not born pillars of strength like it seems to Ajax, but they grow into such roles. They are flexible entities who can be molded, fashioned, and layered. Achilles was no valiant hero at the beginning of the war, but was hiding in the guise of a girl inside the female quarters of the king on Skyros. And in such process, Ulysses was there to make Achilles change his clothes, physically and symbolically (XIII, 198–204). This is a unique relationship that has nothing to do with bloodline or bodily resemblance.

> *arma ego femineis animum motura uirilem*
> *mercibus inserui, neque adhuc proiecerat heros*
> *uirgineos habitus, cum parmam hastamque tenenti*
> *"nate dea", dixi "tibi se peritura reseruant*
> *Pergama! quid dubitas ingentem euertere Troiam?"*
> *iniecique manum fortemque ad fortia misi.*
> *ergo opera illius mea sunt* (XIII 165–171).

[18] Phillip HARDIE, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 62. Also, see C. POPESCU, *op. cit.*, 2021, p. 145.

Ulysses suggests that while his ancestry and abilities are far from Achilles', he contributed to the creation of his valiant body. He brought Achilles to Troy as an immature (even virgin!) boy in female clothes (167 *uirgineos habitus*). He took him by the hand and taught him his worth. The gesture appears rather intimate: Hardie even believes that Ulysses "claims Achilles as if he were an elegiac *puella"*[19]. In my view, the scene echoes wedding iconography as well as traces of Greek pederastic love. Ulysses was removing him from the *gynaikeion* of Skyros, by holding his right hand (as if he was a *nupta*). In the meantime, he was inviting him to capture Troy ("virginal" itself), like an *erastes* would guide an *eromenos* into physical and emotional maturity (*iniecique manum fortemque ad fortia misi*, XIII, 170). Ulysses helped Achilles trade the silky attire for the exoskeleton of a breastplate: he even offered him weaponry to encourage his emergence from such a chrysalis. His actions symbolically hardened Achilles' gentle skin into the tough mold of an armor: he fashioned Achilles's body which later filled the impressive breastplate. He asserts that he has found Achilles: and in this act of discovery (*inuenire*) one can also see an act of conscious construction. Simply put, he was not only a useful proxy to Achilles; he rather "invented" Achilles (pun intended). Such acquisition in body and spirit was different than any proximity Ajax could claim: it involved a *kourotrophic*, paternal, and even homoerotic relationship. As an artisan who fashioned the body of the young hero, he is now entitled to keep its memorabilia. Ajax negotiates the armor with the other Greeks, treating it like an object of commerce in an exchange for the saved ships (*date pro tot nauibus arma,* XIII, 94). The exchange is simple: he desires a foreign object, Achilles' weapons, in return for his services in saving the Greek fleet. As for Ulysses, he requests an object that is essentially his. He contributed the weapons that formed Achilles' warrior lifestyle, so any of Achilles' weapons are essentially loans due to him (*arma peto: uiuo dederam, post fata reposco,* XIII, 180). Ulysses is a life-giving force with kourotrophic abilities who was there to introduce this hero to war and to remove him from war at the end of his natural life. Achilles' warrior life started and ended with Ulysses. The echoes of Achilles are further visible in Ulysses' behavior, as they appear to have shared a deeper bodily connection. Achilles is sent to glory in a way that reminds one of the fetching of a bride who keeps herself (*se reseruat*) for her groom. It is a wedding, but a deadly one, because the conquered land lies dead after such "nuptial" encounter: *"tibi se peritura reseruant / Pergama!"* (XIII, 168–169). If Achilles was encouraged to take Troy as a bride, Ulysses anticipates the act by snatching the statue of Minerva, capturing this virginal feminine representation, and carrying it away in an act of maiden abduction. Without saying it, he paved the way and modeled to Achilles the manly behavior expected from him. While not always obvious, in truth, they formed a deadly pair.

[19] Philip HARDIE, in *A Commentary on Ovid's* Metamorphoses, edited by Alessandro Barchiesi and Gianpiero Rosati, Volume 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024, pp. 28–29, argues for a more playful scene with erotic undertones, while I see in this a rite of passage where eroticism meets legitimate union.

In fact, Ulysses claims to have been acting through Achilles all along and even speaks of Achilles' deeds as his own (XIII, 171–178 *ergo opera illius mea sunt... per me iacet inclitus Hector!*). Thus, through his protégé, Ulysses "laid down" in a gesture of virile aggression numerous cities and lands (*mea concussa putate / procubuisse solo Lyrnesia moenia dextra, / utque alios taceam,* XIII, 175–177) and inscribed his deeds into the register of cultural memory (*este mei memores!* XIII, 380, he shouts). Once more, like in the case of Cadmus, we see the ambiguous relationship between a hero and a piece of conquered land: military and erotic tones overlap[20]. Minerva's statue, now a symbol of the Trojan city, is finally in the Greek camp and duly receives Ulysses' devoted attention: he even wants to dedicate her the disputed weapons, almost in a gesture of spousal affection (*"aut si mihi non datis arma, / huic date!" et ostendit signum fatale Mineruae,* XIII, 380–381). War changes the customary rules of courtship and treatment of "brides" from sweet and lawful nuptial rituals to maiden abduction. In the end, Ulysses claims the ultimate "bride," initially reserved for Achilles, since he knows that Troy is a as good as taken due to his intellectual efforts (*obstantia fata remoui, / altaque posse capi faciendo Pergama, cepi,* XIII, 373–374). Once more, the similarities between the two heroes become manifest, since Achilles in death passed the symbolic torch back to his former mentor. If Ajax treats the armor as part of a living body, or at least as an extension meant to enhance, flatter, and advertise a physique that is already exceptional, Ulysses, too, treats it as part of one's body. When Paris shot Achilles dead, Odysseus carried in his arms his corpse encapsulated inside that miniature version of the World on his shield. To contradict Ajax's view on him, he emphasizes their weight and the labor he had to endure to bring Achilles' corpse to safety:

> *his umeris, his inquam, umeris ego corpus Achillis*
> *et simul arma tuli, quae nunc quoque ferre laboro.*
> *Sunt mihi, quae ualeant in talia pondera, uires,*
> *est animus certe uestros sensurus honores* (XIII, 284–287).

Thus, in one Herculean feat, he contained Achilles weight and the heft of the world itself in his embrace. In a way, his deed is compatible to that of Ajax who covered Ulysses by his shield and would not let him forget the favor. Ulysses had the chance not only to redeem himself to Ajax, but to surpass his act by carrying a greater hero on his shoulders. Ajax might have thought that Ulysses' body was too weak for such weapons, but he shows that he had already succeeded in wearing the armor on his shoulders, even when it was still containing Achilles' body. Covered by these layers of metal, flesh, and bones, Ulysses appears consubstantial with

[20] Genevieve LIVELEY, *Ovid's 'Metamorphoses': A Reader's Guide,* London/New York, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, p. 43, as well as others (see C. POPESCU, *op. cit.*, 2021, p. 118) assert that conquered lands are treated as virgins, "a common metaphor in colonial contexts".

Achilles' body and the cosmic order on his shield. Once he proved that he had a body of his own and also "fashioned" Achilles', Ulysses seems more comfortable to embrace his more subtle nature and extoll it. His *logos* is unmatched, and his sharp art of negotiation has its own weight and is a weapon in itself. He persuaded Clytemnestra (184–188), he discussed with the elders in Priam's court (*Mittor et Iliacas audax orator ad arces, / uisaque et intrata est altae mihi curia Troiae*, 196–197), he convinced Philoctetes to take his rest on an island (313–318) and persuaded Achilles to come to Troy (165–171), he convinced the soldiers not to abandon fight when Agamemnon tested their loyalty (216–237) and Ajax shamefully joined them, turning his back (237 *tergum*) to the war, instead of his valiant chest. He also denies that he is only in charge with shady, covert, one-man operations. His deeds are connected to the noble and very public art of speech, persuasion and politics, all done in the open: his work is performance, in front of a serious audience. When speaking of his embassy to the Trojans, he uses the term *curia* (197) to denote the respectability of his audience and the official and opened nature of his mission. His work was done in a bright hall, in plain view (in full light, even, *lux*) where nothing was concealed and the danger was real (*primaque lux nostri tecum fuit illa pericli,* XIII, 204). Ulysses wants to prove that he was just as transparent and solar as any other hero. He too had friends and witnesses to his worth. If his acts did not permeate Ajax' memory is because Ajax himself is oblivious and faulty. Ulysses has no problem reminding him that he forgot of his war duties at least once and needed reminding from him. Ulysses is not only a memorable hero, but also one who remembers and reminds everyone any act of cowardice. In such context, Ajax appears forgetful and even emasculated in his inability to remember his duty, when Agamemnon tested the soldiers' loyalty to war. As a result, Hector's body was left inviolate by Ajax' oblivion and "impotency" (XIII, 275–279 *oblitus regisque ducumque meique, / nonus in officio et praelatus munere sortis. / Sed tamen / euentus uestrae, fortissime, pugnae / quis fuit? Hector abit uiolatus uulnere nullo!*). Additionally, if Ulysses' body might be imperfect, his mind is better than any of Ajax' body parts:

> *…tu tantum corpore prodes,*
> *nos animo; quantoque ratem qui temperat, anteit*
> *remigis officium, quanto dux milite maior,*
> *tantum ego te supero. nec non in corpore nostro*
> *pectora sunt potiora manu: uigor omnis in illis* (XIII, 365–369).

In his denigration of Ajax, Ulysses plays with volume, weight, and consistency, to show that contrary to stereotypes, his softness is ultimately more substantial than Ajax' physical impenetrability. He reevaluates the meaning of body parts to capture their subtle essence which escapes Ajax' description of worth. He now emphasizes the importance of heroic fluidity in mind and spirit. He uses the word *pectus* to emphasize the spirit and the dominance of the spirit

over the body Ajax idolatrizes. The physical frame of Ajax seems now just a contraption, a boat or even a raft (*ratis,* 366) void of a captain which the spirit is. Ajax is a hand, while Ulysses is the heart and mind inside one's body. It is plastic that he explains such abstract concepts using metaphors from the concrete world. The body truly becomes a place which the spirit inhabits and leads. *Pectus/pectora* (369) are now the seat of intelligence, not just the center of vital force, physical strength and courage. The core is now the true agent and not the outer bodily layers Ajax relied on. Even *uigor* (369), earlier meant to define physical power or vitality, is now fully an intellectual strength, the spiritual core guiding the body. The automaton that Ajax wanted to emulate earlier appears now as an inert machine void of spirit. Ulysses even believes that his own chest (the harbor of his intellect) did the heavy work and ordered around the plans of war, while Ajax contribution was only *in rebus* (326). The weaponry extolled before converts from essential identity cards to indefinite "things". After earlier affirming his physicality, Ulysses is now busy denying Ajax his. By recharging *pectus* with a different meaning, he denies Ajax one of his dearest qualities: Ulysses has a heart in his chest while Ajax loses his. If Ulysses' physical frame earlier vanished in front of Ajax' mighty chest, Ulysses makes sure that Ajax's *pectus* vanishes now in front of his much more substantial spiritual core. According to him, his adversary has not real "chest" (*rudis et sine pectore miles,* XIII, 290, *uires sine mente,* 363). To further devalue the relevance of Ajax' objects of honor, he makes "light" of Ajax' shield (347 *laeua taurorum tergora septem)* which the owner earlier deemed prominent and heavy. Instead of being consubstantial to his body the way Ajax wanted, his shield is simply a patch of borrowed *tergora* from oxen (346–347). It is interesting if we notice that he refuses to use the word *clipeus* for Ajax' shield, reducing it instead to an amorphous slice of animal skin. In a grotesque imagery, Ajax carries on his right arm just some light pelts from the skinned backs of docile beasts of burden (346–347, *Frustra Telamone creatues / gestasset laeua taurorum tergora septem*). The heroic scene is thus ridiculed, even more so, if we remember that Ajax bragged about protecting the ships with his courageous "chest", only for Ulysses to underline that he only had seven "backs" (*septem tergora*) and no true *pectus* whatsoever. Ulysses intentionally uses the word "back" to echo furthermore that at some point Ajax turned his back on the army and wished to return home with many others. After he tried hard to prove that he had a physical and even a canonical heroic body, Ulysses now fully embraces his evanescence. Contrary to being a fault, Ulysses' reproached invisibility is a precious asset which can be weaponized, since it increases his chances to cross thresholds and boundaries. His stealth technique led to the capture of the statue of Pallas, and the safe return of Achilles body, as well as of his weapons, in a situation where no one else could have succeeded. His own body, through its ability to morph, change, adapt and erase itself from view, has pulled off some of the greatest tricks in capturing Troy and inscribing the war in the cultural memory of legends. His fluidity and ability to blend in his environment makes him a successful agent who can penetrate any

walls and pave the route to military success for others. Just like his ancestor, the messenger of Jupiter, Ulysses will always be mercurial, defying thresholds in body and mind, and switching the fate of the war in favor of the Greeks. If Ajax is only identifiable by his body as the exact match of Achilles' splendid frame, Ulysses shows everyone that such identification is a limitation. Achilles' flesh disappeared in the fire, proof that it is not essential for heroic worth. His fluidity and adaptability can find forms of military success that the heavy frame of courageous Ajax cannot. Ulysses weaponizes his exceptional mercurial mind. Through such invisible asset, he can penetrate not just halls and temples, but invisible thresholds between worlds. He also pushes it beyond the limits of the Trojan war, in contemplation of higher realities:

> *…neque enim clipei caelamina nouit,*
> *Oceanum et terras cumque alto sidera caelo*
> *Pleiadasque Hyadasque inmunemque aequoris Arcton*
> *diuersosque orbes nitidumque Orionis ensem* (XIII, 291–294).

Ulysses understands the intricacies of the armor of Achilles, which are in fact the intricacies of the cosmic order, the secret mechanisms of the sky, the earth and the sea. Achilles' mother (290) surely cannot approve of Ajax as his heir, since such intricate designs can only be appreciated by a spirit that can permeate everything without being bordered by the body. If for Ajax the shield is a mass (*moles*), emulating the world just through size (*ingens*) and shape, Ulysses sees their extraordinary details and intricacies: Pleiades, Orion, Ursa, etc. (293–294). Ulysses is not myopic to all these shapes, unlike Ajax who detects only weight, and broad strokes. If for Ajax anything hidden from immediate view was fit for cowards, in Ulysses' cosmic view, *caelamina* (291) reveal hidden wonders that the mind is called to contemplate and decipher. Such concealed treasures should not be a repellent for heroes, but an invitation to a sidereal quest totally appropriate for those who want to emulate the ethereal destiny of Achilles and Hercules. Far from representing humble artisanal details, the reliefs of the shield reveal great heroes and their weaponry hidden in the intricacies of this miniature world (294). What initially appears obscure, upon closer inspection, proves to be radiant (Ulysses uses *nitidus,* 294, from the same family as *nitor,* a word Ajax used to earlier describe the shield and armor, XIII, 104). The secrets of the universe are no longer incompatible to light, glamor or heroic quest, as long as the huge and shining sword of Orion lays there in the folds of the micro-universe. To Ajax' simplification of the *vastus imago,* Ulysses replies with the complex *diuersi orbes* (294) where the minute and the gigantic embrace and contain each other. Through his unique weapon, his omnipotent *logos,* Ulysses tries to turn Achilles paraphernalia into a narrative of memory. As Barbara Boyd notices:

> The more familiar of the two, memory, has a long history as the subject of ancient ideas about the organization of thought and the preservation of identity; the development of these ideas over millennia allows us to recognize

> memory as something that helps us to define our existence as participating in a network of shared language and experience[21].

Indirectly, through such speech, Ulysses confirms that heroes should not hide under shells, or limit themselves to one land. But heroes reach their potential when their spirit (rather than their body) permeates the world and *orbis* becomes their *urbs*. Ulysses covers such space by becoming elusive and fluid, permeable and shapeshifting in his efforts to fill with his inquisitive mind the secrets of the shield. Achilles' name permeated the universe, and his spirit filled the *oikoumene*, immediately after his death. Ulysses, still alive, tries to mimic this post-mortem survival with the aid of his extraordinary skill, so that he may prove that one does not need to wear his weaponry, in order to follow Achilles' cosmic extension (*orbem conpleat,* XII, 616). Ajax insisted on weight and size, but the correct answer to wear the World as a suit is to allow oneself to be fluid. Ulysses' adjustability in body and mind makes him a suitable bearer of Achilles' memory. As a *polytropos* of many identities, he is the ideal medium for heroic memory and the best carrier of this miniature cosmic mold in the likeness of Achilles.

Once he wins the weapons, Ovid intentionally depicts Ulysses metamorphosed into the protagonist who deals Troy its fatal blow: such dynamic portrait is carefully constructed to single out his agency in Achillean fashion, all the way to his brutal removal of Hecuba clasping the ashes of Hector (XIII, 399–428). Achilles passed his fierce legacy back to his mentor once he passed Ulysses his bodily *exuuiae.*

Instead of Conclusion

In the end, Ulysses will secure the weaponry and Ajax will kill himself. While the winner's mind and soul will embrace the cosmic realm of the shield, the loser's body will recede into earth under the shape of a small flower, a tender (and unlikely!) terrestrial memento of his sorrow and demise (XIII, 382–398). Much like we saw before, this flower is not uniquely Ajax' (*tellus / genuit de caespite florem, / qui prius Oebalio fuerat de uulnere natus,* XIII, 394–396). Heroic *memorabilia* are often recycled, and this hero, too, (who fell short of being Achilles) will not earn a token of his own.

Ajax stabbed himself in the chest, the body part he was most proud of, as if confirming through his gesture the futility of his might. His body, once a symbol of impenetrability, is now a hollowed mass with a gaping wound. The sword intended for display and visibility is now buried deep into his heart. Through such impalement, his body is finally pinned to the ground, the earth absorbing his blood into the Underworld (394 *tellus*). While Achilles could fly through the world, embracing higher heights, Ajax' ponderous frame is now reduced to dead weight and stuck at ground level. His last image is one of heaviness and hollowness, the opposite

[21] Barbara W. BOYD, "Still, She Persisted: Materiality and Memory in Ovid's *Metamorphoses",* in *Dictynna,* 17, 2020, pp. 1–17. The quoted text is on page 2.

of his living self. Yet, one takes comfort in the fact that only Ajax was mighty enough to kill Ajax (*dixit et in pectus tum demum uulnera passum, / qua patuit ferrum, letalem condidit ensem. / Nec ualuere manus infixum educere telum*, XIII, 391–393). To emphasize an even brighter silver lining, Earth herself responds with life to this untimely sacrifice, preserving a piece of his vitality, and even commemorating in writing his name for years to come, through the delicate symbol of floralinscription. The last word about Ajax is his immortal name echoed in the sighs of Hyacinthus and etched for eternity into the pigment of petals: *littera communis mediis pueroque uiroque / inscripta est foliis, haec nominis, illa querellae*, XIII, 397–398. Once more, the subtle essence wins in front of bodily might, for memory thrives in physical evanescence.

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