

In this paper I will argue that Statius' description of Achilles at *Achilleid* 1.158-168 enacts features of the rhetorical tradition of ekphrasis, namely the description of people, places, and objects of all kinds (on ancient versus modern ekphrasis see Webb). In particular, I will suggest that Statius' formulation *tranquillaequae facies oculis* is more than just an interesting oxymoron, but a complex allusion both to other epic figures and to the ekphrastic tradition of describing such figures.

Statius' description of Achilles activates many intertextualities, some of the most striking of which serve to link Achilles to various erotic and gender-ambivalent mythological figures (cf. Heslin 181-184). Viewed in these terms Statius' description of Achilles combines the features of several specifically-defined literary traditions in a new way. I suggest that there is a further intertextuality here that allows us to understand the description as a piece of rhetorical ekphrasis of the sort found in the literature of the Second Sophistic. Statius' description obviously contains conventional elements, as can be seen in its numerous verbal parallels with his description of Parthenopaeus at *Theb.* 9.701-711. Statius also implies a kind of visual aesthetic in his description when he asserts that Achilles is *dulcis adhuc uisu* (*Ach.* 1.161). Such an emphasis on the visual is prominent both in imperial rhetorical theory, where ekphrasis is defined as the ability of speech to make the thing being described visible (e.g. Theon, *Progymnasmata* 2.118.7-8 Sp.; cf. Dubel 249-254, Webb 11-12, Zanker), and in ekphrastic writing, where one of the principal aesthetic criteria is visual pleasure (e.g. Philostr. *Imagines* 1.4.2; cf. Bryson 266-267 and Leach). Moreover, a specific connection between the *Achilleid* and ekphrastic writing of the Second Sophistic may be established: Dilke (96) noticed a striking parallel between Statius' formulation *coma gratior auro* and a phrase used by the Elder Philostratus to describe Achilles in the *Heroicus*: κόμην... χρυσοῦ ἠδίω (48.2). This description of Achilles' hair in the *Heroicus* is itself clearly based upon Philostratus' ekphrastic practice in the *Imagines* where he describes paintings of various mythological figures with nice hair (e.g. 1.10.3=Amphion; 1.28.4=an unnamed youth; 1.30.3=Pelops; 2.2.2=Achilles himself). Hence we may understand the intertext between the *Achilleid* and the *Heroicus* in terms of these formal ekphrases. Now Philostratus' ekphrasis of a painting of Achilles (2.2.2) also emphasizes the artist's ability to render both Achilles' youthful appearance and his later exploits as a mature epic hero (cf. *A.P.* 1.291-296). Here ekphrastic language constitutes a textual interpretation of a static visual image, itself informed by a textual tradition. In other words, we have a description of an imagistic version of Achilles, an image that itself tries to convey in a single visual moment elements of his entire life. Indeed, this is a quality of the *Imagines* generally (see Beall 351-352). Returning to Statius' text I will argue that the phrase *tranquillaequae facies oculis* essentially acts as a re-narrativization of an image of Achilles. The oxymoron presents Achilles both as the young man about to be concealed on Scyros and as the older warrior of the Trojan War within a single moment of visibility, and hence prospectively "translates" formal ekphrastic practice.