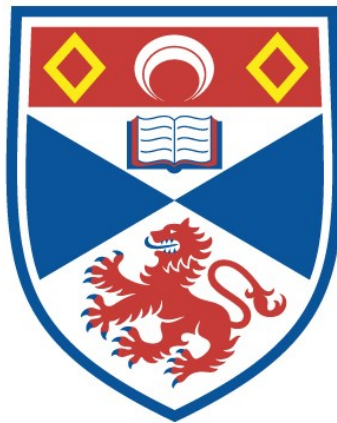


A COMMENTARY ON STATIUS' 'THEBAID' 1.1-45

James Manasseh

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews**



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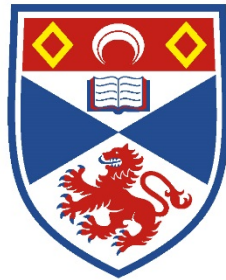
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A Commentary on Statius' *Thebaid* 1.1-45

James Manasseh



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of MPhil
at the
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22/11/16

ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the proem of Statius' *Thebaid* (1.1-45) and the analysis of the text is split between an introduction, three extended chapters and a lemmatized commentary. Statius' acknowledgements of his literary debts, in particular Virgil, encourages, if not demands, an intertextual reading of his poetry. As such, my first chapter, **Literary Models**, looks at how Statius engages with his epic models, namely Homer, Virgil, Lucan and Ovid, but also how he draws upon the rich literary Theban tradition. Like all Roman poets, Statius is highly self-conscious of his craft, and draws upon Hellenistic and lyric models to enrich his epic and define himself as an exemplary poet. I will argue that the proem offers a useful lens for analysing the *Thebaid* and introduces his epic in exemplary fashion, in the sense that he draws attention to the concept of opening his epic with the use of traditional tropes (namely, the invocation of inspiring force; a *recusatio*; an imperial encomium and a synopsis of the poem's narrative). Considering the importance of origins in the *Thebaid*, and the inability to escape them, I consider the proem, in this sense, the origin of the poem itself insofar as elements of it are constantly 'remembered' and reiterated throughout the poem. The central feature of the proem is the encomium to Domitian, in which Statius advises Domitian to realize his own limits and hence retain order of the world he rules over, articulating contemporary concerns about succession and empire. Statius, in a similar manner, expresses intent to impose limits upon his own poem, which prompted me to write the chapter entitled **Restraint**. The third chapter, **Characterisation**, draws upon the discussions in **Literary Models** and **Restraint** in an analysis of the heroes introduced at 1.41-45.

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Prefatory Notes

This dissertation is comprised of an introduction, a lemmatised commentary and three extended chapters on Statius' *Thebaid* 1.1-45. My study offers an intertextual and intratextual approach to reading the text, and so the lemmata point to other (primarily poetic) classical sources and identify significant motifs and imagery in the proem that are developed in the rest of the poem. The lemmata both point to, and serve as a point of reference for, the discussions in the chapters. Although I have attempted to avoid overlap where possible between the chapters themselves, any overlap between the lemmata and the chapters is designed to allow for some stand-alone use of the lemmata. I have used the text edited by D. R. Shackleton-Bailey (2003) supplemented with the *sigla* from the Apparatus Criticus of E. Courtney's (1990) edition of the *Thebaid*.¹ I have used the Oxford Latin Dictionary edited by P. G. W. Glare (2012) and the 1962 edition of the Liddell and Scott Journal. With the exception of the two commentaries on *Thebaid* 1 by H. Heuvel (1932) and R. Caviglia (1973), I have, regrettably, only benefitted from the study of secondary literature in English. When quoting Latin I have printed *v* instead of *u* and *i* for *j* throughout, and all translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

¹ For a recent discussion of the textual tradition of the *Thebaid*, see Augoustakis (2016) lxxiii-lxxv.

Introduction

Stattius was born in the Greek colony of Naples, as he tells us in his *Silvae* (3.5.12-13, 4.7.17-20), at some point in the mid-first century CE,² and lived as a professional poet principally in the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE).³ Stattius completed his *Thebaid* around 91-92 CE,⁴ and taking his own remark in the poem's envoy about the twelve years of work spent upon its composition (12.811-12, *o mihi bisennos multum vigilata per annos, / Thebat*),⁵ he would have begun writing what he considered his *magnum opus* around 78-80 CE.⁶ His second epic, the *Achilleid*, remains unfinished.⁷

Domitian was the last *princeps* of the Flavian Principate, a period which lasted from 69 to 96 CE. After Domitian's father, Vespasian, emerged victorious over the forces of Vitellius in the civil war, he was declared emperor by the Senate and ruled until his death in 79 CE. Vespasian was succeeded by his eldest son, Titus, whose reign lasted only a couple of years before he died in 81 CE, at which point Domitian began his rule.⁸ Since the Flavian dynasty emerged from a period of immense civil unrest, namely, the civil war and swift changing of power in the 'year of the four emperors' (68-69 CE) following Nero's suicide in 68 CE,⁹ the circumstances which gave rise to the Flavian regime resembled those from which Augustus established the Principate itself.¹⁰ As such, the Augustan precedent of peace as an end to civil war and the hope of stability in the form of succession were crucial self-legitimizing elements of Flavian propaganda.¹¹ Though the reality of, and necessity for, the Principate had become largely accepted,¹² the Flavians lacked the credentials of aristocratic ancestry the Julio-Claudians had possessed,¹³ and so the need for them to legitimate their rule was a constant and urgent concern.¹⁴

Compared to Vespasian and Titus, however, Domitian also lacked a proven record of military prowess,¹⁵ and without any children,¹⁶ he had no hope of succession within the family.

² For the dating of Stattius' birth, see Coleman (1988) xviii.

³ Stattius' poetic career had probably begun prior to the beginning Domitian's reign; see Newlands (2012) 2; Gervais (2013) vii n. 17 also points out that Stattius must have died *ca.* 96, since none of his poetry mentions Domitian's death in September 96.

⁴ E.g. Nauta (2002) 196 n. 8, states the '*terminus ante quem* at the end of 92, the date of Domitian's campaign against the Sarmatians, which is not mentioned in Stattius' survey of the emperor's military achievements in the proem (*Theb.* 1.17-24).⁷

⁵ Nauta (2002) 196 remarks that 'the real gestation time may well have been a year more or less.'

⁶ For Stattius' assertions of pride about his *Thebaid*, cf. *Silv.* 4.7.25-28; *Ach.* 1.12-13; for the hard work required of him to write it, see **Literary Models**, 43-45.

⁷ For the *Achilleid* as a short but completed epyllion ending at Book 2.167, see Gervais (2013) x, following Heslin (2005) 57ff.

⁸ On the establishment of the Flavian dynasty, see Levick (1999) and Mellor (2003).

⁹ Between June 68 and the accession of Vespasian in December 69 CE Rome saw the rise and fall of Galba, Otho and Vitellius; for key dates in the Early Imperial Period, see Levick (1999) xx-xxi.

¹⁰ For Vespasian's self-presentation as a successor of Augustus, see Flower (2010) 7.

¹¹ See McNelis (2007) 5-7.

¹² Gowings (2005) 104; cf. Boyle (2003) 5-7.

¹³ Southern (1997) 2 notes that Vespasian and his brother Sabinus were the first generation of their family to achieve senatorial status; see also Levick (1999) 4ff. on the social circumstances behind Vespasian's rise to prominence.

¹⁴ Rebergiani (2013) 189 rightly remarks: '[b]y Stattius' time the question of succession is felt even more dramatically than under the Julio-Claudians [insofar as] [t]he Julio-Claudian dynasty had proved how dangerous succession could be: it could produce a Caligula or a Nero.' Levick (1999) 1 remarks that Nero's fall in 68 was 'a portentous blow for stability.'

¹⁵ See Boyle (2003) 43 on Domitian's longing for military glory; see also **Commentary ad** 1.21-22 for Domitian's role in the civil war.

The overall lack of credible grounds for Domitian's rule has been seen to cause him to assert himself upon Rome, for instance, in the form of a magnificent and imposing building program,¹⁷ and the cultivation of an ideology of divine leadership that surpassed that of his predecessors.¹⁸ Much of the information about Domitian's life and the nature of his rule comes in the form of accounts written after his assassination and the subsequent *damnatio memoriae*,¹⁹ in works by Pliny, Tacitus, Juvenal and Suetonius. These authors offer a consistent picture of Domitian as a cruel despot, his Principate as a reign of terror and paranoia, censorship of artistic expression, and executions of writers, philosophers and senators. It seems that in the latter period of his reign (89-96 CE), Domitian had in fact begun to 'lose his grip on governance,'²⁰ which explains the overwhelmingly negative accounts of his rule in antiquity. However, important studies have sought to re-evaluate his reign by drawing attention to the senatorial bias of these accounts.²¹

A distinct and, on the whole, positive element of Domitianic Rome was the emergence of a flourishing literary climate instituted by the emperor himself.²² In this period, the emperor actively supported, while carefully controlling, artistic and literary activity, through the establishment of festivals such as the Capitoline and Alban Games, and provision of institutional support for poets in the form of patronage.²³ Statius was a beneficiary of this literary milieu, and his *Silvae*, which provide us with most of the biographical information we have about Statius,²⁴ offer a far more nuanced approach to Rome under Domitian's reign than the aforementioned authors.²⁵ In her study of the perspective Statius offers on Domitianic culture, Newlands proposes that the *Silvae* 'celebrate and explore in all its variety and ambiguity a flourishing literary and artistic culture which the condemnation of Domitian's memory after his assassination has largely suppressed.'²⁶ There, Statius remarks upon his participation in the literary festivals, in particular, his victory at the Alban Games in March 90 with his poem on the emperor's triumphs over the Germans and Dacians (*Silv.* 3.5.28-29, 4.2.65-67, 5.3.227-29), but also his regret for his defeat at the Capitoline Games in the same year (cf. *Silv.* 3.5.31-33, 5.3.233ff.).²⁷

In the *Silvae*, Statius also comments upon the production of his epic compositions,²⁸ and

¹⁶ Suet. *Dom.* 3.1; Rebergiani (2013) 189 n. 9 notes that 'Domitian's only son (born in 73 CE) died before his accession (probably in 83 CE); Jones (1992) 33 and n41; cf. also Mart. 6.5 with Grewing (1997) 84-86 and Nauta (2002) 434-36. Flavius Sabinus' sons are adopted by Domitian not earlier than 90 CE (probably in 95 CE, cf. Jones [1992] 47-48).'

¹⁷ For an overview of Domitian impact on Roman urban landscape, see e.g. Southern (1997) 126-32 and Newlands (2012) 20-23; cf. D'Ambra (1993) on the relationship between architecture and social policy; cf. Fredrick (2003) on Domitian's architectural control of space as an invasive encroachment on the elite male-body.

¹⁸ See Newlands (2002) 11-17; Boyle (2003) 20-21; for Domitian's introduction of the title *dominus et deus* cf. Mart. 5.5; 7.34; 8.82; 9.28; Suet. *Dom.* 13.1-2; Dio Cass. 67.4.7, 13.4; cf. Jones (1992) 108-109, who suggests the title may be fictitious.

¹⁹ See Flower (2010) xix-xxii on the term *damnatio memoriae*.

²⁰ Newlands (2012) 3.

²¹ E.g. Coleman (1986); Jones (1992); Southern (1997); Wilson (2003); Flower (2006) 234ff.

²² For Domitian's personal interest in poetry cf. Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.91; Stat. *Ach.* 1.15-16; Tacitus (*Hist.* 4.86) and Suetonius (*Dom.* 2.2) insist that Domitian's love of poetry was feigned; see Coleman's discussion (1986) 3088-95.

²³ Coleman (1986) 3115 concludes that '[t]he literature of Domitian's period was determined by two opposing attitudes on the part of the emperor: a concern for literature and a tendency to smother it. But in any case the restrictions on independent expression were already implicit in the imperial system.'

²⁴ For Statius' representation of his career in the *Silvae*, see Newlands (2012) 2.

²⁵ Newlands (2002) 2; Newlands (2012) 2, recently dates Books 1-3 of the *Silvae* as a set in 93 CE, following the completion of the *Thebaid*; Book 4 in 94 CE, and Book 5 posthumously.

²⁶ Newlands (2002) 2.

²⁷ On the problematic dating of these festivals mentioned by Statius, see Gibson (2006a) 260-66.

²⁸ For the *Silvae* as an interpretative guide for Statius' epics, see Gibson (2006b); Newlands (2009).

in general, the self-referential details he provides in these poems express his preoccupation with his role as a professional poet in Flavian society. We are told that he enjoyed the opportunities and benefits offered by Domitian as his imperial patron, for instance, the water supply on his Alban estate (3.1.61-64); that the emperor ensured his victory in the Alban festival (3.5.28-31; 4.2.63-67); and that he was invited to a banquet at the imperial palace (4.2.5-10; cf. 4 *praef.* 6f.). Despite the favour Statius gained as a court poet, however, it seems that his profession did not grant him substantial financial circumstances. It seems that Statius and his father were below equestrian status,²⁹ and Statius himself points to his humble means (*Silv.* 1.4.126, *pauper*; 4.3.47, *utinam fortuna mihi*). Juvenal remarks upon the fact that, despite the success of Statius' epic recitations (7.82-86), he had to sell his mime *Agave* (now lost) in order to avoid starvation (7.86-87). While Juvenal's snide comment may overstate Statius' impoverished career as a poet,³⁰ the latter's dependence upon his patrons would have required him to fulfill his obligations as a court poet, including expressions of support for the emperor in the form of praise and celebration of his achievements. We know, for instance, that Statius composed a panegyric poem, the *De bello Germanico*, which celebrated the continuity of the Flavian order and the new emperor's capacity for military command.³¹

In both of his epic proems Statius announces his refusal to write contemporary panegyric epic (*recusatio*), but the inclusion of these statements alone also acknowledges the expectation to praise Domitian's exploits (cf. *Theb.* 1.17-33; *Ach.* 1.17-19; cf. also *Silv.* 4.4.93-100). While these do not offer praise of Domitian, Statius directly engages with contemporary concerns in his *Silvae*, where he celebrates and praises his patrons and the flourishing literary climate. Looking forward, therefore, to the discussion of Statius' somewhat muted praise of Domitian in the *Thebaid's* proem,³² it must be emphasized that Statius would have supplied praise for Domitian, as well as his non-imperial patrons,³³ in the recitals of his *Silvae* - if not to express his genuine appreciation, at least to retain support, recognition and publicity of his poetry by voicing praise at an official level.³⁴

Theban Literary Tradition

Statius' father was a successful poet in his own right,³⁵ as well as a *grammaticus* in Naples, before moving to Rome to teach the Roman elite and probably the imperial family as well (*Silv.* 5.3.178-80).³⁶ Statius praises his father's broad literary knowledge (cf. *Silv.* 5.3.148-58), and remarks upon the influence he had upon his own poetic career, especially for the composition of his *Thebaid* (*Silv.* 5.3.209-14).³⁷ Of particular interest is Statius' remark that his father guided him in his

²⁹ Nauta (2002) 203; Newlands (2011a) 2.

³⁰ For Juvenal's remark in the context of rivalry between epic and satire, see Markus (2003) 433; in the context of literary patronage, see Nauta (2002) 3-4, 202-203.

³¹ Hardie (2003) 141.

³² E.g. **Commentary** ad 1.17-33; **Literary Models**, 47-49; **Restraint**, 62-64.

³³ See Nauta (2002) 327-440 for Statius and imperial patronage and 193-323 for non-imperial patronage in Domitianic Rome.

³⁴ Dominik (1994) 142-43; for discussions of praise in Statius' *Silvae*, see Newlands (2002); Coffee (2015); Rühl (2015).

³⁵ See e.g. Augoustakis (2016) xvii nn. 5-6.

³⁶ For the Elder Statius as a successful *grammaticus*, see Newlands (2012) 88-90; for the possibility that *Silv.* 5.3.179-80 refers to Domitian, see Gibson (2006a) 334-35.

³⁷ See Gibson (2006a) on Statius' remarks about his father in *Silv.* 5.3.

engagement with a variety of authors and genres from the literary past (*Silv.* 5.3.233-34, *te nostra magistro / Thebais urgebat priscorum exordia vatum*). Statius' origins in Campania, a region of strong Hellenic culture, and his father's knowledge of Greek literature are significant when considering his *Thebaid*, an epic recounting a Greek story of the war between Argos and Thebes.³⁸

The war is caused by a dispute over the Theban throne between Polynices and Eteocles, the sons of Oedipus. Terms of alternating rule are arranged for the brothers, but Eteocles, who is appointed king first, refuses to hand the throne over after his allotted tenure. After rallying the help of his father-in-law, the Argive king Adrastus, and five other leaders (traditionally,³⁹ Tydeus, Amphiaraus, Capaneus, Parthenopaeus and Hippomedon), Polynices marches upon Thebes in a war doomed to bring about the deaths of all the leaders except Adrastus, and which culminates the mutual fratricide of Polynices and Eteocles. Clearly the story was well known by Homer's time,⁴⁰ and it was recounted and referred to frequently in both Greek and Latin literature by the time Statius began his epic.⁴¹ The war was the subject of the Cyclic epic *Thebaid*, which no doubt provided stimulus for the 4th century BCE epic of Antimachus, both now fragmentary.⁴² In Greek tragedy, Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* treats the dispute between Polynices and Eteocles over the Theban throne, and the advent to the march on Thebes, whereas the subsequent Argive expedition to Thebes itself is the subject of Aeschylus' *Septem Contra Thebas* and Euripides' *Phoenissae*. A significant feature of the war's aftermath was the denial of burial for the Argive dead, the moral concerns of which form the crux of Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Supplikes*. In Latin literature, fragments of Accius' *Antigona*, *Eriphyla*, *Phoenissae* and *Thebais* have survived, and Propertius makes reference to an epic composed by Ponticus on the subject.⁴³ Most recently, Seneca treated the Argive-Theban war in his *Phoenissae*.

The story of the Argive-Theban conflict and Polynices and Eteocles' mutual fratricide, constituted a part of a series of well-known Theban stories.⁴⁴ Chronologically preceding the Argive-Theban war was the infamous tale of Oedipus, namely his tragic fulfilment of the prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother.⁴⁵ Although the revelation of Oedipus' true identity was most famously the subject of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and later, Seneca's *Oedipus*,⁴⁶ he is also causally connected to Argive-Theban war, insofar as he issues the curse that incites fraternal strife between his sons.⁴⁷ The horror of Oedipus' patricide, incest, and curse upon his sons, however, was similarly presented as a continuation of his own father, Laius, who was also cursed in some accounts for his abduction of Chrysippus, the son of king Pelops,⁴⁸ or for ignoring the oracle which foretold that his son would kill him and marry his wife,

³⁸ For Statius' intertextual relationship with Greek literature in particular, see Hulls (2014) and Marinis (2015); see Newlands (2012) *passim* on Statius and Naples; cf. Bessone (2014) 220-28 on Statius' self-presentation as a 'transnational vates.'

³⁹ E.g. Aesch. *Septem* 458ff. Eteocles is introduced as one of the 'Seven' instead of Adrastus.

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 4.370ff., 5.800-813, 6.222-23, 14.113-25.

⁴¹ See Braund (2006) 260-65 on the central place Thebes occupied in the ancient literary imagination.

⁴² Ganiban (2007) 47; see Finglass (2014) 358-67 on the tradition of the *Thebaid*.

⁴³ Prop. 1.7.1-2; Ganiban (2007) 47 supposes that Ponticus may have offered the first treatment of the war in Roman epic.

⁴⁴ References to the war elsewhere cf. e.g. Stesichorus *PGMF* 180-83; 213-18; Pind. *Ol.* 2.41-42; 6.13-17; 9.8-27; Lucr. 5.324-329; Prop. 1.7.1-2; Luc. *BC* 4.552.

⁴⁵ Mentioned by Homer at *Od.* 11.271-80.

⁴⁶ Aeschylus and Euripides had also composed an *Oedipus*, both now lost.

⁴⁷ Cf. **Commentary** ad 1.1-2, *profanis / ... odiis*.

⁴⁸ Cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 13-31; Apollod. 3.5.5; the story was the subject of Euripides *Chrysippus*, now lost; see Collard and Cropp (2008) 459-71 for details of the play.

Jocasta.⁴⁹ The fraternal strife between Polynices and Eteocles, then, is bound in a chain of causation, firstly, from their father Oedipus, and ultimately from Laius. The entire mythological history of Thebes follows - or, at least, often presented as following - this pattern of causation, tracing back to the city's founder, Cadmus.

In antiquity, then, Thebes endured as an object of fascination in both Greek and Roman literature.⁵⁰ To quote Edmunds, 'each telling of the same story, because it has a particular motivation, has a new focus. So, against the reification of myth as a collective expression of society's beliefs must be set the consideration that a traditional story can only survive if it can be retold, and it can be retold only if it can be applied to new circumstances.'⁵¹ Following Edmunds, it has been shown how Thebes represents a topos in the civic context of Attic drama for the exploration of political, social and erotic "otherness", that is, to provide a negative ideological model for the Athenians.⁵² For the Romans, however, Thebes functioned as point of identification, offering a pertinent space for articulating concerns about the constant looming threat of civil war, caused by origins-in-fratricide.⁵³ Since the Argive-Theban conflict stood for the enmity between Polynices and Eteocles, it was understood as the archetypal civil war in which two brothers fought against and killed each other. Just as Rome had been founded by Romulus, and was tainted with the killing of his brother Remus, the foundation of Thebes was inaugurated with the internecine conflict of the autochthonous Spartoi, which is portrayed as a precursor for the fraternal war between Polynices and Eteocles.

Considering the recent civil war of 68-69 CE, which Rome had just witnessed first-hand, and from which the Flavian regime was established, the choice to write a Theban epic was historically and politically resonant. In Statius' engagement with the Theban civil war topos, there is also a particular emphasis on the roles of autocratic power and dynastic succession. In the opening lines, Statius' approach to engaging with these concerns through a Theban lens is immediately obvious. He introduces the themes of "fraternal battle-lines" (1.1, *fraternas acies*), standing for civil war, and the intrafamilial contest for regal power (1.1-2, *alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiis*) pointing to its problems and instability. Following these generalized topics, Statius adds the mythological setting of "guilty Thebes" (1.2, *sontesque Thebas*), which asserts that his engagement with political concerns will be carried out in the indirect, though familiar, typological medium of Thebes.⁵⁴ The association of Thebes with guilt is significant, since it introduces the motif of causation and inescapable origins, which is central to the ideological connection between Thebes and Rome. The principal themes of Statius' poem, the fraternal war between Polynices and Eteocles, and the house of Oedipus, exemplify the return to origins.

⁴⁹ Cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 742ff., 801-802, 842; Eur. *Phoen.* 867-79; Apollod. 3.5.7; cf. Stat. *Theb.* 4.610-18 for Laius' curse of Oedipus.

⁵⁰ Other notable treatments of Theban mythology include: the Cyclic *Oidopodeia* and *Epigonoï*; Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Hercules*; Seneca's *Hercules Furens*; extensive accounts also provided by the mythographers Apollodorus (3.4.1-3.7.4) and Hyginus (*Fab.* 6, 178 on Europa, Agenor and Cadmus; 7-8 on Amphion; 167, 179, Semele, Bacchus, Pentheus; 2, 5 on Juno, Athamas and Ino; 67, on Oedipus; 67- 68 on Polynices and Eteocles; 68-70 on the Seven). Many Theban tragedies of Aeschylus (*Laius*, *Oedipus*), Sophocles (*Amphiarus*, *Eriphyle*) and Euripides (*Oedipus*, *Hypsipyle*, *Antigone*) no longer survive.

⁵¹ Edmunds (2005) 31-32.

⁵² Zeitlin (1990) 131.

⁵³ Discussed in **Literary Models**, 40-42.

⁵⁴ Quintilian (*Inst.* 9.2.65-66) remarks upon *emphasis*, a figure of speech employed so extensively that a reader would have searched for hidden meaning beneath the surface of the text; cf. e.g. Roche (2009); for *emphasis* in Flavian literature see e.g. Boyle (2003) 49-56 and Penwill (2013); for a nuanced discussion of the freedom of expression see Rutledge (2009).

Through his oblivious re-entry into his mother's womb, Oedipus represents a literal return to his origins,⁵⁵ a paradigm followed by Polynices and Eteocles at a figurative level, their fraternal strife repeating the conflict of the Spartoi in the city's foundation.

Statius and Ovid⁵⁶

In the Roman epic tradition before Statius, Ovid had included an extensive Theban narrative in his *Metamorphoses*, and the allusions to the Theban past in Statius' *praeteritio* (1.5-14) have been seen to evoke Ovid's Theban books as a model.⁵⁷ Statius distils a significant number of Ovid's Theban sequence,⁵⁸ namely the pre-foundational tale of Europa's abduction by Jupiter (*Theb.* 1.5, *Sidonios raptus*; cf. *Met.* 2.833-3.2) and Cadmus' unsuccessful search for her (*Theb.* 1.5-6, *inexorabile pactum / legis Agenoreae scrutantumque aequora Cadmum?*; cf. *Met.* 3.3-6) which leads to his establishment of the site of Thebes, including the internecine conflict of the Spartoi (*Theb.* 1.7-8, *trepidum... Martis operti / agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis*; cf. *Met.* 3.7-137). The post-foundational stories alluded to in *Theb.* 1.11-14 refer to Bacchus and Pentheus (*Theb.* 1.11, *unde graves irae cognata in moenia Baccho*); cf. *Met.* 3.528-71, 3.692-733) and Juno's trickery of Semele (*Theb.* 1.12, *quod saevae Iunonis opus*; cf. *Met.* 3.253-315); Juno's maddening of Athamas and Ino, in turn, causes Athamas to murder their son Learchus (*Theb.* 1.12-13, *cui sumpserit arcus / infelix Athamas*; cf. *Met.* 4.464-519), and Ino to jump into the sea with Melicertes, their other son, before their transformation into the sea deities Leucothoë and Palaemon (*Theb.* 1.13-14, *cur non expaverit ingens / Ionium socio caesura Palaemone mater*; cf. *Met.* 4.519-42).

Considering the evocation of Ovid's model in these lines, Statius' allusion to Amphion's construction of the Thebes walls with his lyre in 1.9-10 is anomalous according to Ovid's presentation of events. In the *Metamorphoses*, Amphion's foundation is only briefly mentioned within the story of his wife, Niobe (*Met.* 6.152, *coniugius artes*; 6.158-59, *divino concita motu / ... vias*), whose hubris leads to the death of their sons and daughters. Moreover, in Ovid's story, Amphion's life is decidedly miserable, and he commits suicide (*Met.* 6.271-72). There was also the well-known myth of Amphion and his brother Zethus, who murdered their stepmother Dirce.⁵⁹ Statius' allusion to Amphion, then, is not only the only positive element of his *praeteritio*,⁶⁰ but also the only positive element of Amphion's own mythography. The allusion to Amphion and the power of his poetry is brought into prominence, as a divergence from, or expansion of, Ovid's Theban narrative.⁶¹

The themes of Statius' epic, the Argive-Theban war and the house of Oedipus, expand upon the elements of the Theban saga untold in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁶² Statius' choice seems to suggest that a continuation of Ovid's epic treatment of Thebes requires him to avoid duplicating

⁵⁵ Cf. the remarks of Jupiter (*Theb.* 1.233-35) and Laius (*Theb.* 4.630-32); cf. also Sen. *Phoen.* 331, *meorum facinorum exempla appetunt*.

⁵⁶ This section serves as a point of reference for the **Commentary ad Theb.** 1.5-14.

⁵⁷ In particular, Hardie (1990) and Keith (2002); for the influence of both Ovid and Seneca's Theban tragedies in these lines, see Seo (2013) 104-107.

⁵⁸ Hardie (1990) 226 n. 13 points to Statius' *longa series* recalling Ovid's *serieque malorum* (*Met.* 4.564); Seo (2013) 105 remarks that Statius' condensed list is 'surprisingly comprehensive and rigorously Ovidian in its order.'

⁵⁹ See **Commentary ad 1.15** on the myth concerning Amphion, Zethus and Dirce.

⁶⁰ Bessone (2014) 230; Augoustakis (2016) 159.

⁶¹ See discussion in **Literary Models**, 45 on the significance of Amphion.

⁶² Micozzi (2015) 339.

material already familiar to the reader via the *Metamorphoses*. However, considering the centrality of inescapable origins in the Theban saga, the stories alluded to in Statius' *praeteritio* appear frequently in the *Thebaid* as an explanation for the present action in the narrative.⁶³ Thus there is a parallel between the ideological return to origins in the narrative and the reiteration of the proem as the beginning of the poem. This metapoetical dynamic points to the significance of the proem's introductory function. In 1.1-17, Statius expresses a protracted concern with beginnings, and in 1.33-45, he provides a particularly detailed synopsis of the action to come.⁶⁴ The combined effect of this is programmatic, in the sense that the proem anticipates the narrative's progress towards its inevitable outcomes,⁶⁵ but also that these horrific outcomes should be understood as the reenactment of inescapable origins. This dynamic also ties in with the highly literary and allusive nature of Statius' project, the retelling of a story so well-known that the reader's appreciation of his version is informed by recalling previous treatments from the enormous literary tradition he is drawing upon.

The Proem and the *Thebaid*⁶⁶

The opening words, *fraternas acies*, introduce the anticipated *telos* of the poem. In Book 1, the hatred between Polynices and Eteocles is established, firstly by Oedipus and Tisiphone, and then by Jupiter, who announces his desire to destroy both Thebes and Argos. At all levels, human, infernal and divine, there is a determination for the war and mutual fratricide. The issue of alternated rule is developed in Book 2, when Eteocles refuses Tydeus, as Polynices' envoy, to hand over the throne. Eteocles sends an ambush upon Tydeus, which is unsuccessful, and in Book 3 the ensuing *furor* for war prompts Adrastus to consult Amphiaraus for omens, who confirms that war and widespread destruction are inevitable. The Argives' progress to Thebes is delayed over the course of Books 4 to 6; Book 4 includes the catalogue of Argive troops, and their arrival at Nemea; there follows in Book 5 Hypsipyle's story of the Lemnian women, and the death of her nursling Opheltes, the funeral games for whom occupy the narrative in Book 6.⁶⁷ Frustrated with the lengthy delay,⁶⁸ Jupiter re-incites war, and battle begins in Book 7. Amphiaraus is the first hero to die, swallowed up by the earth (foretold at 1.42), and his arrival in the underworld alive at the beginning of Book 8 angers Pluto, who inflames war and *nefas* via Tisiphone. Book 8 ends with the death of Tydeus (cf. 1.41-42). Book 9 contains Hippomedon's fight with Ismenos (cf. 1.39-40, 1.43-44) and the death of Parthenopaeus (cf. 1.44-45). Capaneus' ascent of the Theban towers and his death takes place in Book 10 (cf. 1.45). The mutual fratricide of Polynices and Eteocles occurs in Book 11 (cf. 1.34), followed by Creon's denial of burial (cf. 1.36-7). The final book of the poem is concerned with fulfilling rites for the dead, at which point the split flame in the pyre of Polynices and Eteocles occurs (cf. 1.35-36). The book

⁶³ Cf. 1.173-96, an anonymous Theban connects present misery to past misfortune; 3.179-80, Aletes laments the Thebans slain by Tydeus, measuring the level of grief against the weight of past calamities; 8.227-39, the Thebans remember their origins in song, following the death of Amphiaraus (esp. 8.227, *revolunt*, which recalls *evolere* at 1.2).

⁶⁴ See **Literary Models**, 50-52.

⁶⁵ The episodes foretold in 1.33-45 are frequently reiterated; e.g. the denial of burial at 4.639-41; 7.776-77; 8.72-74; the deaths of the heroes anticipated by Amphiaraus (3.516-45), Laius (4.639-41) and Pluto (8.69-77).

⁶⁶ For other useful summaries of the *Thebaid*'s plot, see also e.g. Dewar (1991) xvii-xxii, Dominik (2005) 515-18 and Parkes (2012) xv-xvii.

⁶⁷ See Lovatt (2005) for the games as a microcosm of the war.

⁶⁸ See **Restraint**, 61 for the delay in the *Thebaid*.

continues with the intervention of Theseus, who kills Creon, thereby ending the house of Oedipus (cf. 1.16). The poem ends in lament, which is followed by Statius' envoy.

Structure

Statius' proem is long (45 lines), compared to those of Homer (*Il.* 1.1-7; *Od.* 1.1-10), Apollonius (1.1-4), Virgil (*A.* 1.1-11), Ovid (*Met.* 1.1-4), Valerius (1.1-21) and Silius (*Pun.* 1.1-20). This is partly due to his inclusion of the imperial encomium, which we find in the similarly lengthy proems of Lucan (*BC* 1.1-66) and Virgil's *Georgics* (1.1-42). In the cases where an encomium is included in the proem, it is commonplace for the poet to close the proem with the encomium,⁶⁹ especially if the emperor was also invoked as an inspiring force for the poetic venture.⁷⁰ By contrast, Statius' encomium occupies the centre of the proem (*Theb.* 1.22-30), which is carefully symmetrical:

- (i) *exordium* (1-3)
- (ii) search for starting point and *praeteritio* of material (4-14)
- (iii) establishment of poem's scope (15-17)
- (iv) *recusatio* (17-22)
- (v) **encomium** (22-30)
- (vi) *excusatio* from panegyric and return to Theban narrative (31-32)
- (vii) *narratio*-synopsis of poem (32-39)
- (viii) invocation of Clio and introduction of heroes (41-45)

In the lines preceding the encomium (1.1-17), Statius is concerned *about* commencement of his Theban narrative, and the lines following the encomium (1.33-45) offer a summary (*narratio*) of the plot that he has decided upon. Although Statius asserts that the Roman present will be absent from his poetry, the structural placement of the encomium within the Theban past perhaps suggests otherwise.⁷¹ Statius integrates the two separate spheres with the *recusatio-excusatio* trope, which frames the encomium itself. There is a parallel between Statius' *recusatio* in 1.17-22 and his deliberation of Theban material in the lines preceding it (1.1-16) in the sense of looking back. In the *recusatio* Statius refers to events in Domitian's life beginning with his most recent triumphs (1.17-20), then tracing back to the civil war when he was younger (1.21, *prius vix pubescentibus annis*). Similarly, the way Statius' *excusatio* looks to the future (1.32, *tempus erit*; 1.33, *canam*) parallels the synoptic nature of the remaining lines of the proem (1.33-45).

The structure of the proem is also significant when considering Statius' presentation of his inspiration. As I shall expand upon,⁷² Statius presents two conflicting positions of poetic authority insofar as he claims to be both divinely inspired and poetically autonomous. For now, our interest lies in observing the neat dynamic that exists between these two conflicting stances:

⁶⁹ Verg. *G.* 1.24-42; Luc. *BC* 1.45-66; V.Fl. 1.7-21; cf. Stat. *Ach.* 1.14-19.

⁷⁰ Verg. *G.* 1.40-42; Luc. *BC* 1.63-66; V.Fl. 1.20-21.

⁷¹ See e.g. Dominik (2003) 98.

⁷² See **Literary Models**, 45-47.

- (a) 1-3: **Compulsion**
- (b) 3-6: participation
- (c) 7-14: organization of material
- (d) **15-33: Autonomy: *Recusatio* / *Encomium* / *Excusatio***
- (c) 33-40: organization of material
- (b) 41-42: participation
- (a) 43-45: **Compulsion**

Over the course of lines 1.1-14 Statius gradually displaces the authority of the Muses before expressing the autonomy he has gained at 1.15-17. Following the encomium, he reiterates his poetic autonomy before being re-arrested by the same divine inspiration which he has just displaced, and closes the proem in the same state of compulsion as he began **(d)**. The alternation of poetic authority occurs at an almost identical metrical rate within the proem, and the encomium acts as the central axis around which this dynamic is structured. As the scheme above shows, the proem is bookended with expressions of compulsion **(a)**, with Statius acting as a passive recipient of the Muses' song. In 1.1-3 (*Pierius menti calor incidit*) Statius' *mens* is the object of the verb *incidit*, the subject of which is the divine *Pierius calor*. Likewise, at 1.43-45 Statius ends the proem being "urged" (1.43, *urget*) and compelled to "lament" and "sing" about his heroes' exploits, this compulsion being expressed in gerundives (1.44, *ploranda*; 1.45, *canendus*).⁷³ The 'energizing flow' is directed from Muse to poet to delivery.⁷⁴ At both ends of the proem, the Muses are expressed abstractly: in 1.3, the force is an unspecific heat from Pieria, the locale of the Muses (rather than the Muses themselves), and in 1.44-45 they are abstracted into gerundives. Hence, the impetus for the poem is a force invisible to Statius, whose own authority is subsumed: at 1.3 *mens* is enveloped in the word order by *Pierius calor*; at 1.43, only *urget*; at 1.44-45, he is encased within gerundives.

From both poles of the proem **(a)**, the state of Statius' passivity is reduced into a more participatory relationship with the Muses, expressed in the form of dialogue between poet and Muses. The abstract forces in **(a)** become the recognizable goddesses of poetry in **(b)** (1.4, *deae*; 1.41, *Clio*). In 1.3-6, Statius is no longer an outlet for overwhelming divine force, instead he engages with the Muses expressing his concern for narrative selectivity and makes a request to Clio for the order of his poem's heroes. At 1.3-6 and 1.41-42, then, the Muses remain the stimulus for Statius' poetry, but the unidirectional flow of interaction from Muse to poet in **(a)** is modified in **(b)** whereby the poet becomes involved in the process of selection.⁷⁵

In **(b)** Statius' poetic authority is shared with the Muses; in **(c)** the presence and influence of the Muses disappears, and so we notice Statius articulating his role in the creative process of his epic. In 1.7-14, Statius deliberates upon possible commencement points for his narrative (*praeteritio*), which is mirrored in 1.33-40 where he provides a synopsis of events that will be recounted in his epic (*narratio*). There is an overall shift of Statius' authority from passivity **(a)**, to reliance upon, but more parity with, the Muses **(b)**, to the exercise of poetic autonomy in **(c)**.

⁷³ Myers (2015) 40.

⁷⁴ Fowler (2002) 150.

⁷⁵ Markus (2003) 442 argues that by using 'dialogic mode of communication with the Muses [Statius] takes on the pose of hesitancy.'

Finally in **(d)** Statius makes explicit assertions of his poetic autonomy. His language emphasizes choice and certainty, with verbs occurring only in the future tense (1.16, *sinam ... esto*; 1.32, *erit*; 1.33, *canam*), and he expresses rational control in terms of poetic craft (1.17, *limes mihi carminis*; 1.33, *satis referre*). It is in this state of poetic autonomy that Statius remarks upon his preference for mythological epic instead of panegyric. The case he makes is framed in terms of courage or daring, that he “would not dare” (1.18, *nec... ausim*) to sing contemporary themes at the moment, and that he will need to be “stronger”, or “braver” (1.32, *fortior*), in order to undertake the task.

Text

Book 1

fraternal acies alternaque regna profanis
 decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas
 Pierius menti calor incidit. unde iubetis
 ire, deae? gentisne canam primordia dirae,
 Sidonios raptus et inexorabile pactum 5
 legis Agenoreae scrutantemque aequora Cadmum?
 longa retro series, trepidum si Martis operti
 agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis
 expediam penitusque sequar, quo carmine muris
 iusserit Amphion Tyriis accedere montes, 10
 unde graves irae cognata in moenia Baccho,
 quod saevae Iunonis opus, cui sumpserit arcus
 infelix Athamas, cur non expaverit ingens
 Ionium socio casura Palaemone mater.
 atque adeo iam nunc gemitus et prospera Cadmi 15
 praeteriisse sinam: limes mihi carminis esto
 Oedipodae confusa domus, quando Itala nondum
 signa nec Arctos ausim spirare triumphos
 bisque iugo Rhenum, bis adactum legibus Histrum
 et coniurato deiectos vertice Dacos 20
 aut defensa prius vix pubescentibus annis
 bella Iovis. tuque, o Latiae decus addite famae
 quem nova maturi subeuntem exorsa parentis
 aeternum sibi Roma cupit (licet artior omnes
 limes agat stellas et te plaga lucida caeli, 25
 Pliadum Boreaeque et hiulci fulminis expers,
 sollicitet, licet ignipedum frenator equorum
 ipse tuis alte radiantem crinibus arcum
 imprimat aut magni cedat tibi Iuppiter aequa
 parte poli), maneat hominum contentus habenis, 30
 undarum terraeque potens, et sidera dones.
 tempus erit, cum Pierio tua fortior oestro
 facta canam: nunc tendo chelyn; satis arma referre
 Aonia et geminis sceptrum exitiale tyrannis
 nec furiis post fata modum flammisque rebelles 35
 seditione rogi tumulisque carentia regum
 funera et egestas alternis mortibus urbes,
 caerulea cum rubuit Lernaeo sanguine Dirce
 et Thetis arentes adsuetum stringere ripas
 horruit ingenti venientem Ismenon acervo. 40
 quem prius heroum, Clio, dabis? immodicum irae
 Tydea? laurigeri subitos an vatis hiatus?
 urguet et hostilem propellens caedibus amnem
 turbidus Hippomedon, plorandaque bella protervi
 Arcados atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus. 45

11 cognota P 12 arcum D. Cod. Coll. Magd. Oxon. 16 limen Baebrens 18 sperare Hensius, Bentley 21 prius sup. lin. Q 22 teque (u
 supascr.) o P; tuque o w: tuque ut Lachmann 23 mature Lachmann: maturi codd. 24 illas (omnes supascr.) P 32 laurigero w: Pierio P
 (laurigero supascr. rec. m.) 33 interpunct Bentley referte (r supascr.) Q 38 quam (u supascr.) P 45 alto Lachmann

Commentary

1 *fraternas acies*: these “battle lines” refer to those in the war between the Theban forces under Eteocles, the king of Thebes, and the Argive army led by his exiled brother Polynices (see **Introduction**, 9-10 for a summary of the narrative). The Argive-Theban war, therefore, is “fraternal” insofar as it is fought on behalf of the conflict between the two brothers (Stattius refers to the war as *civile* only once at 6.737). Before Stattius, the use of *fraternus* for the war between Polynices and Eteocles is found in Propertius (1.7.2, *arma fraternae tristia militiae*) and Seneca (*Phoen.* 321, *arma fraterna*). Bernstein (2015) 149 notes the motif of fraternal conflict in the *Thebaid*: ‘the frequent recurrence of paranarratives of fraternal conflict, such as those between Aegyptus and Danaus (6.290-93) and Atreus and Thyestes (4.305-308), suggest the inevitable interrelation of desire for power, bloody fraternal conflicts, and assaults by divinities who are themselves hostile to their siblings;’ cf. Bannon’s study (1998) on the centrality of the fraternal relationship, both discordant and cooperative, in Roman culture. Stattius reiterates *fraternas acies* at 1.184 to describe the fratricide of the Spartoi as an omen for the enmity between Polynices and Eteocles (for the Spartoi, see 1.7-9n.). The fraternal conflict of the Spartoi as an omen for the Argive-Theban war offers parallels in Romulus’ fratricide of Remus and Roman civil war (cf. Hor. *Epod.* 7.17-18, *acerba fata Romanos agunt / scelusque fraternae necis*; Luc. *BC* 1.95, *fraterno primi maduerunt sanguine muri*; see discussion in **Literary Models**, 40ff.). Stattius’ *fraternas acies* recall the *cognatas acies* of the Roman civil war between Caesar and Pompey in Lucan’s proem (*BC* 1.4; cf. also Verg. *G.* 1.490, *Romanas acies* and *A.* 6.829, *quantas acies*, both oblique references providing a model for Lucan’s epic), and the *agmina cognata* of the Spartoi in Seneca (*Oed.* 738), amplifying the horror of the civil conflict from the wider sense of kin (*cognatus*) to strife between two blood brothers (*fraternus*). The juxtaposed *fraternas acies* as the first two words of the proem add emphasis to the introduction of disharmonious family relations as a motif that permeates both the proem and the rest of the *Thebaid* (see 1.5-6n. and 1.13-14n.); cf. also Verg. *A.* 7.42, *dicam acies* the introduction of Virgil’s Latin Wars.

1-2 *alternaque regna... / decertata* are the terms of the agreement of Polynices and Eteocles’ alternation of the kingship each year, specified at 1.138-39 (*alterni placuit sub legibus anni / exsilio mutare duces*). In Euripides’ *Phoenissae* the arrangement of alternated rule is arranged by the brothers in order to escape their father’s curse (*Phoen.* 9ff., 473ff.). *decerto* is rare in poetry and *OLD* (s.v. 3) specifically cites *Theb.* 1.2 for *decertata* to mean “to compete over”. However the literal sense of *decerto* (*OLD* s.v. 1, “to fight an issue out, fight to a finish”; cf. also s.v. 2 “with adversary specified”) is important, since the *Thebaid* is concerned with the problem of shared rule between Polynices and Eteocles, which turns into war when Eteocles refuses to alternate the throne after his year’s rule (cf. *Theb.* 2.393ff.). Augoustakis (2016) 94-95 (*ad Theb.* 8.69-71) notes the ‘centrality of the adjective *alternus* with its reciprocal connotations (*TLL* i.1757.23-30, *alternus* = *mutuus*...cf. [*Theb.*] 1.37, 2.183, 2.643, 3.400, 4.560, 5.290, 6.675, 6.762, 9.61, 9.671, 11.528, 12.720’. Conflict (*certamen*) arising from the violation of pacts or treaties occurs in the proems of Lucan and Silius (Luc. *BC* 1.4-5, *rupto foedere regni / certatum*; Sil. *Pun.* 1.5-6, *sacri cum perfida pacti / gens Cadmea super regno certamina movit*; cf. also *Pun.* 1.9-10, *iuratumque Iovi foedus conventaque partum / Sidonii fregere duces*; 1.11, *rumpere pacem*; cf. also Eur. *Phoen.* 154, 259-60; Sen. *Phoen.* 588-90). The horror of the brothers’ conflict over the *alterna regna* lies in their determination to fight to the

grisly outcome of mutual fratricide rather than find any manner of resolution. As Conte (2010) 55 (*ad Luc. BC 1.5*) notes, ‘the verb [*certatum*] denotes not so much the fighting of men led by some necessity to war as the irresponsible frivolity of a ‘match’ between two men for power.’ Following the sense of *certatum* in Lucan, the Argive-Theban war is a magnified version of the personal dispute (*certamen*) between Polynices and Eteocles, although the war does not end with their death. Ganiban (2007) 45 n. 7 argues that *decertata* in this line ‘intensifies the nature of *odiis* [since] *decertare* in the military context often signifies fighting to the very end ... as opposed to *certare*, which does not necessarily imply an outcome.’ For alternate rule and uncertainty as a negative impact on the ruled in the *Thebaid*, cf. e.g. 1.173-96 and 2.442-47.

1-2 profanis / ... odiis: references to the enmity between Polynices and Eteocles appear in fragments of the Cyclic epic *Thebaid*. Athenaeus suggests that, according to the author of the Cyclic epic, Oedipus cursed his sons for placing a forbidden cup before him (see fr. 2 West); a scholiast on Soph. *OC* 1375, however, states that the author attributes the curse to them sending Oedipus ‘the haunch of an animal, a less honorific portion than their usual, the shoulder’ (Finglass (2014) 369 on fr. 3 West). In the former fragment, Oedipus calls upon one of the Furies to set the brothers against each other in battle and war (fr. 2.9-10 West, *ὡς οὐ οἱ πατρώϊ ἐνῆϊ <ἐν> φιλότῃ / δάσσαιντ’, ἀμφοτέροισι δ’ ἀεὶ πόλεμοί τε μάχαι*); in the latter fragment, Oedipus prays to Zeus and the other gods that his sons should go down to Hades at each other’s hands (fr. 3.3-4 West, *εὐκτο Διὶ βασιλῆϊ καὶ ἄλλοις ἀθανάτοισιν, / χερσὶν ὕπ’ ἀλλήλων καταβήμεναι Αἴδος εἴσω*). In Statius’ version, the cause of Oedipus’ insult is not mentioned (at *Theb.* 1.80 Oedipus merely states *insultant tenebris gemitusque odere paternos*; similar to Aesch. *Sept.* 785-91), but his prayer to Tisiphone resembles the version provided by Athenaeus (1.84-85. *i media in fratres, generis consortia ferro / dissiliant*). In contrast to the scholiast on Sophocles, Statius’ Oedipus specifically prays to Tisiphone because of Jupiter’s idleness (1.79-80, *et videt ista deorum / ignavus gentitor?*), a statement which anticipates the significant role the infernal deities will play in the epic; for instance, Oedipus’ wish for hatred between Polynices and Eteocles is reiterated by Pluto, who asks Tisiphone to see that their hatred materialises into mutual fratricide (8.70-71, *fratres alterna in vulnere laeto / Marte ruant*). For discussion of *odium* here see **Restraint**, 59-62. The sacrilegious element of their hatred (*OLD* s.v. *profanus* 3, “ceremonially unclean, polluted;” s.v. 4 “impious, sacrilegious”) lies in the enmity between two brothers (cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 681-82), which Statius ironically describes at 1.142 as a kind of *pietas* (*haec inter fratres pietas erat*). As such, the war destined for their mutual fratricide is classified as an impious conflict (cf. e.g. 2.459, *infanda ... proelia*; 3.71, *bellum infandum*; 4.392, *cognatumque nefas*; cf. *Silv.* 1.5.8, Statius refers to the *Thebaid* as *arma nocentia, Thebae*). For the association of civil war and impiety in Lucan’s proem see *BC* 1.21, *belli... nefandi*; 1.37, *scelera ista nefasque*; in Seneca, see *Phoen.* 327, *bellum et scelus*; 402, *impia arma*.

2 sontesque ... Thebas: *soms* typically describes people (*OLD* s.v. 1, “guilty; a guilty person, criminal, miscreant”), and the opposite adjective (*insons*) is generally more common. Statius uses *soms* relatively frequently in his poetry, but this line is the only instance where a city is described as *soms*, which points to the inescapable nature of Theban origins (cf. 1.7-9n.). Hence, it seems to be suggested that the Thebans are inherently guilty as a result of being inhabitants of the guilty city, rather than committing any particular crime. The guilt is also seen as hereditary, e.g. Polynices and Eteocles are said to inherit the “family fury” (1.126, *gentilis furor*), though it is not clear

whether from the city's origins in the Spartoi, or Oedipus (cf. **Introduction**, 6-7). Jupiter incites the war between Polynices and Eteocles as the next chapter of guilt in Thebes (1.241-42, *nova sontibus arma / iniciam regnis*), an 'unalterable decree of destiny' (Pollmann (2004) 25). The notion of collective guilt is also a central concept in Lucan's proem with regard to the Romans' participation in civil war (BC 1.6, *in commune nefas*). Caviglia (1973) 87 proposes that Statius' generic introduction of *fraternas acies* taking place in *sontes... Thebas* follows Virgil's introduction of the Latin Wars at *A.* 7.41-44 (*horrida bella ... Hesperiam*).

evolvere governs the whole clause, and replaces the traditional opening verb of singing, *canere* (e.g. Verg. *G.* 1.5, *A.* 1.1; 1.12; Luc. *BC* 1.2; V.Fl. 1.1), with the literal meaning "to roll out, roll away" (*OLD* s.v. 1). "Unfold" is the best translation here, since it carries the sense of "recounting" a narrative (*OLD* s.v. 7; cf. Enn. *Ann.* 164 Skutsch, *quis potis ingentis oras evolvere belli*; Verg. *A.* 9.529, *mecum ingentis oras evolvite belli*); Vessey (1986) 2968-69 also points to the literary practice "unrolling a papyrus" so that it can be read (*OLD* s.v. 6; cf. e.g. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.11.24; Hor. *Serm.* 1.3.112; Ov. *Fast.* 1.657). Accordingly, *evolvere* suggests that the Muses have inspired Statius to "unfold" his own Theban narrative, but also that his task requires study of the story's previous treatments, pointing to the poet's erudite handling of an already well-treated theme. The retrospective sense of *evolvere* associated with reading is developed further at 1.7, where the poet refers to the Theban history as a sequence that stretches far back (*longa retro series*). In temporal terms *evolvere* can also be used to mean "to unroll time" (*OLD* s.v. 5), e.g. how the Fates spin out the lives of mortals on their spindle (cf. Ov. *Her.* 1.24; cf. Vessey's remark (1986) 2969: 'the poet is to be like one of the Parcae 'spinning' a thread of words, which comprise the destiny of his characters, pre-ordained by only progressively disclosed, like a human life') and so *evolvere* can also be seen to point to the narrative's progression towards its inevitable *telos*, the war of *fraternas acies* and the mutual fratricide of Polynices and Eteocles.

3 *Pierius menti calor incidit* describes the force of divine inspiration on the poet. In Statius' *Silvae* (1 *praef.* 3, *subito calore*) *calor* carries its usual sense of extempore improvisation in performance (*OLD* s.v. 5, "vehemence, zeal, ardour, 'fire', enthusiasm;" cf. Quint. *Inst.* 10.3.7; Plin. *Ep.* 2.19.2). Here, however, *calor* denotes the poet's divine inspiration as a type of madness or fury sent from the Muses, explained by the adjective *Pierius*, "Pierian, of Pieria", relating to the locale of the Muses (cf. Hes. *Th.* 1.53ff.). The divine and external force of *Pierius calor* (cf. e.g. Hes. *Th.* 1.32-33, *ἐνέπνευσαν δὲ μοι αὐδὴν / θέσπιν*) is juxtaposed with *menti*, which typically indicates the autonomous poetry of craft (cf. e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 3.25.1, *mens nova*; cf. also Ov. *Met.* 1.1, *fert animus*). *incidit* (*OLD* s.v. 1, "to fall upon, rush into") suggests an external, but also accidental and unrequested (*OLD* s.v. 4, "to chance to meet or find, happen upon"), divine force acting upon the poet's *mens*, and therefore his dependence on the Muses for the creation of his *Thebaid* (see **Literary Models**, 45-47 for a discussion of Statius' inspiration). This line is echoed in the description of Amphiaraus' arrival in the Underworld in *Thebaid* 8 (8.1, *incidit*; 8.7, *calens*), the significance of which is discussed in **Characterisation**, 69ff.).

3-4 unde iubetis / ire, deae?: Statius addresses the Muses as "goddesses", a type of *invocatio* typical of an epic proem. Poets invoke the divine assistance from the Muses (Hom. *Il.* 1.1, *θεά;* Od. 1.1, *Μοῦσα;* Enn. *Ann.* fr. 1.1 Skutsch, *Musae;* Verg. *A.* 1.8, *Musa;* Stat. *Ach.* 1.3, *diva;* Sil. *Pun.*

1.3, *Musa*), other gods (“gods” at Ov. *Met.* 1.2, *dī*; Apollo at AR. 1.1, *Φοῖβε*; V.Fl. 1.5, *Phoebe*; Bacchus at Verg. *G.* 1.7, *Liber*), as well as the emperor (Verg. *G.* 1.25-42; Ov. *Fast.* 1.3-26; Manil. 1.7-10; German. *Phaen.* 1.1-4; Luc. *BC* 1.63-66; V.Fl. 1.20-21). The nature of Statius’ *invocatio* here is also similar to the aporetic rhapsodic questions in hymnic and lyric poetry (cf. e.g. Hom. *Hymn* 3.207-15; Pind. *Isth.* 7.1-15; see Race (1992) for ‘beginnings’ in Greek poetry). This is the first of three apostrophes directed at the divine and political influences upon Statius’ poetry in the proem: at 1.22-30 Statius addresses the emperor Domitian, and at 1.41 he addresses Clio, one of the Muses. Statius looks to the Muses for guidance about the limits (*unde... ire?*) and order (1.41, *quem prius?*) of his poetic material, and addresses the emperor in his *recusatio* about his choice of theme (see 1.17-18n.). As a request for a starting point (*unde*), this question resembles those made in both proems of Homer (*Il.* 1.6, *ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα*; *Od.* 1.10, *τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν*) and Hesiod (*Th.* 1.114-5, *ταῦτά μοι ἔσπετε Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχουσαι / ἐξ ἀρχῆς*); Virgil, Ovid and Valerius ask for the emperor’s approval to begin their epic (Verg. *G.* 1.40, *adhuc coeptis*; *Met.* 1.2-3, *dī, coeptis... / adspirate meis*; V.Fl. 1.21, *orsa iuves*). The first words of Apollonius and Valerius (AR. 1.1, *Ἀρχόμενος*; V.Fl. 1.1 *Prima*) point to ‘beginning’, in the poetical and meta-poetical senses of recounting the voyage of the Argonauts; see Zissos (2008) 71-73 for a comparison of the *exordia* of Valerius and Apollonius; cf. Verg. *G.* 1.5, *canere incipiam* and Sil. *Pun.* 1.1, *ordior arma*.

4 *gentisne canam primordia dirae*: Statius’ question here, whether he should sing about the “beginnings or origins” (OLD s.v. *primordium* 1) of the Theban race (cf. Hes. *Th.* 1.33, *μ’ ἐκέλονθ’ ὕμνεῖν μακάρων γένος*), is the first of a series of aporetic questions, in which he deliberates upon potential beginnings for his narrative (cf. 1.3-4n.). Race (1992) 23 notes that, ‘the word *πρῶτος* (*primus*) rings throughout classical literature to mark primary events for narration, from the *Iliad* (*ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε*, 1.6), to Herodotus (*τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας*, 1.5), to Virgil (*Troiae qui primus ab oris*, *A.* 1.1), to Propertius (*Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis*, 1.1.1).’ *primordia* is also aetiological, cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.3, *primaque ab origine mundi*; Verg. *A.* 1.8, *Musa, mihi causas memora*; Luc. *BC* 1.67, *causas tantarum... rerum*; Sil. *Pun.* 1.17; *causas*; 1.20, *repetam primordia*. The origins of Thebes and its mythical past is expressed in a *praeteritio* (1.1-14), suggesting that Statius will omit them, but throughout the *Thebaid*, tracing back, remembering, and returning to one’s origins are recurrent motifs (cf. e.g. 1.235, *revolvunt in ortus*; 8.227-28, *nunc facta revolvunt / maiorum veteresque canunt ab origine*; 9.333, *Aoniae caelestis origine gentis*; 11.210, *primordia Thebae*; cf. **Introduction**, 7-8). In the same manner as 1.2 (*sontesque Thebas*), the implication here is that the Theban race is cursed from its beginnings (OLD s.v. *dirus* 1, “(of things regarded as omens) awful, dire, frightful”; cf. 1.232, *gentemque profanam*; Aesch. *Sept.* 992, *τάλαν γένος*). Heuvel (1932) 58 observes how *primordia*, later in the *Thebaid*, describes the beginning of the war between Argos and Thebes (3.237, 3.489, 6.171, 7.1). This points to the *Thebaid*’s concern with ‘demonstrating that one cannot escape one’s origins’ (Pollmann (2004) 17), i.e. that Thebes’ past is a cause for the present war.

5-14 *praeteritio* of Theban material (see **Introduction**, 8-9 for the influence of Ovid here). Considering the sequential nature of these allusions, the following lemmata (1.5-14) will refer to Ovid as Statius’ primary model for convenience.

5 *Sidonios raptus* refers to Jupiter's abduction of Europa; by disguising himself as a bull and enticing her to climb onto his back before carrying her off into the sea across to Crete (cf. Ov. *Met.* 2.833-3.2). This is the first of a series of Theban myths evoked in 1.5-14, so well known that, as Heuvel proposes (1932) 58, Statius can refer to them in an allusive manner. Heuvel (1932) 59 also notes that poets often describe the Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre as the cities of king Agenor and so "Sidonian" is used here to describe Europa, the daughter of Agenor. In Ovid's recent treatment of the story, the abducted Europa is similarly described as *raptam* (*Met.* 3.3; cf. Sen. *Oed.* 717, where Jupiter is referred to as *praedonem*). After asking the Muses where he should start in Thebes' history (1.3, *unde*), the first word that follows is the geographical origin of the Theban people, Sidon in Phoenicia. In Latin epic, the Carthaginians are also said to have originated from Phoenicia and, hence, also described as "Sidonian" (e.g. Dido at Verg. *A.* 1.446; cf. Sil. *Pun.* 1.6, the Carthaginians are referred to as *gens Cadmea*; *Pun.* 1.10, the Carthaginian leaders as *Sidonii... duces*; *Pun.* 1.14-15, Carthage as *arces / ... Agenoreas*). Statius follows Ovid and Seneca in the use of *Sidonius* in particular for Thebes' foundation via Cadmus (cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.129, *Sidonius hospes*; *Pont.* 1.3.77, *liquit Agenorides Sidonia moenia Cadmus*; Sen. *Oed.* 713, *Sidonio... hospiti*). *Sidonios raptus* is presumably a poetic plural, though Jupiter had also slept with two other Theban women: Semele, who became pregnant with Bacchus (cf. 1.11n.); and Antiope, who gave birth to Amphion and Zethus, the secondary founders of Thebes (see 1.15n.).

5-6 *inexorabile pactum / legis Agenoreae scrutantemque aequora Cadmum?*: Agenor orders his son Cadmus to search for Europa, threatening exile if he is unsuccessful (cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.3-5, *cum pater ignarus Cadmo perquirere raptam / imperat et poenam si non invenerit addit / exilium*). The verb *scrutor* (OLD s.v. 1, "to probe or examine (a place, etc.) for something hidden, search") in the form of a present participle here expresses the unending nature of Cadmus' unsuccessful search for Europa, since she had been taken by Jupiter (cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.6-7, *quis enim deprendere possit / furta Iovis?*; Sen. *Oed.* 716, *fessus per orbem furta sequi Iovis*). Elsewhere in the *Thebaid*, *scrutor* is the verb (cf. OLD s.v. 2c, "to thrust at, probe") for Oedipus' self-blinding (1.46, *impia iam merita scrutatus lumina dextra*) and Coroebus' slaying of Poine (1.614-15, *imas animae mucrone corusco / scrutatus latebras*). In this line, Agenor's order is described as *inexorabile* (OLD s.v. *inexorabilis* 1, "inexorable, relentless"), a rare word in poetry, reserved for the unchangeable nature of fate (cf. Verg. *G.* 2.491, *inexorabile fatum*; Stat. *Theb.* 6.48, *inexorabile pensum*; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 101.7, *inexorabilis fatorum necessitas*) and Achilles' disposition in Horace (*Ars* 121). Considering the association of *inexorabilis* with fate, the adjective is apt since Agenor's order leads to Cadmus' foundation of Thebes in exile. Cadmus finds the city on the spot where a cow lay to rest (cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 638-47; Ov. *Met.* 3.10-25); Berman (2016) 15 notes that Thebes 'is referred to as the "city of Cadmus", or "city of the Cadmeians," at least as often as "Thebes" in the poetic tradition;' cf. (ibid. n. 31); Aesch. *Sept.* 74, 120; Eur. Bacch. 61, *HF* 6, 1086; *Phoen.* 710, 712; *Supp.* 646, 930. Cadmus' exile and fate to found Thebes after crossing the sea (*Theb.* 1.5, *scrutantemque aequora*; 1.7, *condentem*) recall the nature of Aeneas' journey in Virgil's proem (*A.* 1.2-3, *fato profugus... / ... terris iactatus et alto*; 1.5, *condere*). Since Cadmus is forbidden from returning to his homeland, the nature of Agenor's order appears as a harsh treatment by a father towards his son (cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.7-8, *iramque parentis / vitat*), which Bernstein (2008) 66 sees as 'hostility between family members begin[ning] before the city is founded.' The nature of *pactum*, then, is curious, since it implies that Agenor's order was something mutually agreed (OLD s.v. 1, "arranged by negotiation, agreed")

between Agenor and Cadmus, but also that it carried the force of a “law” (*legis*). Whether or not Cadmus had any say in the negotiation of the agreement, the absolutely unchangeable quality of the order issued by the king as an enactment of his sovereignty perhaps points to the motif of the misuse of sole power, also seen later in the *Thebaid*. For instance, at *Theb.* 3.59ff., when Maeon returns from the unsuccessful ambush on Tydeus, he accuses Eteocles of “being moved to banish law and reign in pride” (*Theb.* 3.72-73, *movisti... pellerer leges ... / regnare superbus*), before committing suicide. Keith (2002) 389 notes that ‘Eteocles alone receives the patronymic *Agenoreus* (*Theb.* 3.31), which recalls Ovidian Cadmus’ epithet *Agenorides* (*Met.* 3.8, 81, 90, 4.563; cf. *Agenore natus*, 3.51, 97) and may be meant to associate Eteocles’ tyranny [...] with the cruelty and inflexibility of Cadmus’ progenitor.’

7 *longa retro series*: Statius’ proem is preoccupied with deciding upon a starting point for the poem (see **Introduction**, 10). In the next seven lines (1.7-14), Statius alludes to various parts of Theban prehistory as potential beginnings for his poem (following *unde* at 1.3), before deciding to pass over them and make the “confused house of Oedipus” (*Oedipodae confusa domus*) the focus of his Theban poem. In this *praeteritio*, Statius states that the series of Theban misfortunes is both long (*longa*) and continuous (*series*), recalling Ovid’s *serieque malorum* (*Met.* 4.564), also referring to Theban misfortunes (see **Introduction**, 8-9 on Statius and Ovid).

7-8 *trepidum si Martis operti / agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis* refers to the Theban foundation myth (see *Met.* 3.50-137 for Ovid’s account of the myth; cf. also Eur. *Phoen.* 657-75; Hyg. *Fab.* 178; Apollod. 3.4.1). Cadmus slew a serpent sacred to Mars, before sowing its teeth into the soil; from these teeth sprung soldiers, the ‘Spartoi’ (“sown men”; for the name cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 939, *Σπαρτῶν*; Hyg. *Fab.* 178, *Spartoe*; Apollod. 3.4.1, *ἐκόλεσαν Σπαρτούς*), and so *agricolam* here refers to Cadmus (cf. Berlincourt (2006) 139 for the Spartoi ‘designat[ing] the traditional portent of monstrous births’). Since he was unaware that the sown teeth would give birth to conflict among the Spartoi, their “war” is said to be “hidden” from Cadmus (*Martis operti*), and his fear (*trepidum*) perhaps expresses his surprise towards the unexpected battle, as in Ovid (*Met.* 3.106, *fide maius*), or towards the fratricidal nature of the conflict, as in Seneca (*Phoen.* 321, *paventes arma fraterna*). Statius seems to evoke references to the Spartoi episode made by Lucan (4.549-54) and Seneca (*Oed.* 724-42), in particular Lucan’s language (*BC* 4.554, *cognato tantos implerunt sanguine sulcos*; cf. Stat. *Theb.* 1.8, *sulcis*) and Seneca’s association of the earth with impiety as a result of the fratricidal conflict (*Oed.* 731-32, *feta tellus impio partu / effudit arma*; cf. Stat. *Theb.* 1.134, *nocentibus arvis*). Lucan explicitly refers to the internecine conflict of the Spartoi as an omen for the war between Polynices and Eteocles (*BC* 4.552, *dirum Thebanis fratribus omen*), whereas Statius’ connection is more subtle: Cadmus can be understood to have caused the *proelia* of the Spartoi, since he sowed the teeth. The way Statius immediately follows his introduction of the *fraternas acies* between Polynices and Eteocles with a question about Thebes’ origins (1.4, *gentisne canam primordia dirae?*), connects the present conflict to the city’s origins. Considering the recurrence of *primordia* as ‘the beginning of the war’ between Polynices and Eteocles in the *Thebaid* (see 1.4n.), a link is created between the Theban origins-in-fratricide and the fraternal war between Polynices and Eteocles. The causal connection between the Spartoi and Polynices and Eteocles is made clearly at 1.184, with reference to the conflict of the Spartoi as *fraternasque acies*, which unmistakably points to the *fraternas acies* of Polynices and Eteocles at 1.1. Similarly at 4.436 the mention of Cadmus and the Spartoi (*consanguineas acies sulcosque nocentes*) conflates *fraternas acies*

and *infandis sulcis* from the proem. For the figurative repetition of Cadmus' original sowing cf. also Aesch. *Sept.* 752-56, where Oedipus is said to sow the soil of his mother and create fraternal strife via his sons; cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 18, where Laius is warned against fathering Oedipus (tr. Kovacs [2002] 213): 'do not keep sowing the child-begetting furrow against the gods' will'.

8 *condentem*: with the verb *condere* for Cadmus' foundation of Thebes, Statius evokes Aeneas' foundation of Lavinium in Virgil's proem (*A.* 1.5, *conderet urbem*). Virgil's sense of *condere* in the context of Statius' line, however, is ironical insofar as Cadmus had intended to "found" (*OLD* s.v. *condo* 10) a city, but instead founded the *proelia* of the Spartoi. Similarly, whereas Aeneas conquered the native Rutuli in order to found Lavinium, the foundation of Cadmus' city was tainted by the mutual fratricide of the Spartoi. If we take *condere* to mean "sow" insofar as Cadmus puts the serpent's teeth into the soil (*OLD* s.v. 1, "to put or insert"), the verb also evokes the problematic way in which Aeneas "buries" (*OLD* s.v. *condo* 7b) his sword into Turnus' chest in the final scene of the *Aeneid* (12.905-906, *hoc dicens ferrum adverso sub pectore condit / fervidus*); Markus (2003) 455 *ad loc* suggests the verb 'conflat[es] the ideas of foundation and destruction.' As mentioned above (1.7-9n.), Cadmus' foundation of the city is seen to be an omen for the fraternal strife between Polynices and Eteocles, in the same way that Romulus' murder of Remus was expressed as an omen for civil strife in Rome (cf. 1.1n).

9 *expediam penitusque sequar*: *expedio* (*OLD* s.v. 4, "to give an account of, explain, expound") is a significant verb in Lucretius' didactic epic, especially common in the first person future at the beginning of the line (*expediam*, 4.634, 4.931, 5.77, 6.245, 6.641, 6.682, 6.739, 6.1093), and often in combination with the peremptory *nunc age* (2.62-66, 6.495-97, 6.738-39) to introduce a new argument (see Long (2011) 303 on *nunc age* 'marking the urgency of [Lucretius'] message;' cf. Markovic (2008) 70ff. on hortatory phrases in didactic poetry; Thomas (1988) 175 (*ad Verg.* 4.149-50, *nunc age... / expediam*) remarks upon the 'elevated tone' of *expediam* in Lucretius and Virgil). Tarrant (2012) 220 (*ad Verg. A.* 12.503) comments that the verb in the *Aeneid*, 'often used of speaking with authority or of dealing with a difficult or complex subject,' cf. Anchises at 6.756-59, (*nunc age... / expediam dictis, et te tua fata docebo*); Latinus at 11.314-15, *nunc adeo... / expediam et paucis (animos adhibete) docebo*; the scholar (ibid. 220-21) also notes the 'programmatic context' of *expediam* at Verg. *A.* 7.37-40, (*nunc age... / expediam*), as well as the use of the verb in 'formal historiographical prose,' e.g. Sall. *Iug.* 5.3; Tac. *Hist.* 1.51.1; elsewhere in epic cf. V.Fl. 4.558; Silius *Pun.* 11.103. Statius' use of *expediam* here evokes Virgil's aetiological account of origins at G. 4.285-86 (*altius omnem / expediam prima repetens ab origine famam*) but Statius chooses not to sing of Theban origins or Cadmus' descendants (see. 1.15n.). *expediam*, then, recalls the traditional future indicative but in the subjunctive indicates the story he could tell but will not. *sequar* (*OLD* s.v. *sequor* 18d, "to trace in narrative, recount; to go through") suggests giving an account of Theban history from its foundation forwards in time. Following 1.7 (*longa retro series expediam*), *penitus* (*OLD* s.v. 5, "completely, utterly, through and through") suggests that it would be a long story if the poet were to provide a full account of what followed after Cadmus, echoing the language of *A.* 1.341-42, where Venus expresses the length of the full story of Dido's flight from Tyre to Carthage (*longa est iniuria longae / ambages sed summa sequar fastigia rerum*). After alluding to elements of the *longa series* (1.9-14), Statius declares his decision to omit this material from his narrative (cf. 1.15-16n.). He asserts his concern for narrative selectivity in a similar manner when he abruptly ends the ecphrasis of Harmonia's necklace (2.296, *post longior ordo*).

9-10 *quo carmine muris / iusserit Amphion Tyriis accedere montes* is an allusion to the well-established tradition of Amphion and Zethus' secondary foundation of Thebes after Cadmus (e.g. Serv. *A.* 4.470, *a Cadmo et Zetho et Amphione constituta*; cf. Soph. *Ant.* 1155, *Κάδμου πάροικοι καὶ δόμων Ἀμφίονος*; AR. 1.735-41). In Homer, Amphion and his twin brother Zethus are said to have been 'the first to establish the seven-gated seat of Thebes' (*Od.* 11.262-64; cf. also Eur. *Phoen.* 115, 823-25). According to Pausanias (9.5.7) and Apollodorus (3.5.6), Thebes took its name from Zethus' marriage to Thebe. In a fragment from Euripides' *Antiope*, it is Hermes who instructs Amphion and Zethus to construct the city with seven gates (Eur. *Antiope* fr. 223.88 Collard and Cropp, *ἐπτάσ[το]μον πύλαισιν ἐξαρτύετε*). Statius, following other Latin poets (cf. Prop. 1.9.10; Hor. *Ars* 394-96, *Carm.* 3.11.2; Sen. *Oed.* 612), refers only to the power of Amphion's song in the building of the Theban walls and Zethus is not mentioned. Amphion is often given sole credit as a founder of Thebes (e.g. Ov. *Met.* 15.527, *Amphionis arces*; Hor. *Ars* 395, *Amphion Thebae conditor urbis*), which Statius retains throughout his *Thebaid*, with Thebes referred to as *Amphionis arces* at 4.357, 4.611, 7.456, 10.873. The multi-stage foundation of Thebes in the proem (Cadmus at 1.5-9, then Amphion at 1.9-10; cf. also *Theb.* 10.787-88, *Cadmum atque Amphiona supra / conditor*, where Menoeceus is praised as a "founder") offers parallels with the foundation of Rome presented in three stages in Virgil's proem: Aeneas founds Lavinium (*A.* 1.2-6, *Laviniaque... litora... urbem... Latio*); Ascanius founds Alba Longa (*A.* 1.7, *Albanique patres*); and the twins Romulus and Remus build the walls of Rome (*A.* 1.7, *altae moenia Romae*); in the *Thebaid*, Cadmus founds the site of Thebes (cf. 1.7-9n. above) and then Amphion constructs the walls. Furthermore, both cities are attributed an original founder who had been driven overseas as an exile (Aeneas and Cadmus) and then a secondary foundation by twin brothers (Romulus and Remus; Amphion and Zethus). There is a difference, however, between the presentations of these cities' foundations, namely, that in Virgil the stages are denoted in reference to the cities rather than their respective founders, whereas Statius provides the names of the founders. Horace hints at the possibility of discord between Amphion and Zethus (*Ep.* 1.18.41-44), but he does not elaborate. In Euripides' fragmentary *Antiope*, it appears that Zethus regards Amphion's dedication to music as an "idle" (fr. 183.1 Collard and Cropp, *ἀργόν*; 187a2.1, *μάτην καθαρίζεις μηδὲν ὠφελῶν*) and "womanly" pursuit (cf. fr. 185, *γυναικομίμω*), and criticises him for neglecting his own affairs as well as public duties (cf. fr. 185, *κοῦτ' ἂν δίκης βουλαῖσι προσθεῖ' ἂν λόγον*; fr. 187, *ἀργὸς μὲν οἴκοι κὰν πόλει γενήσεται*; fr. 187a2, *στρατιωτικὸν / βίον ζῆσον καὶ <εὐ>πόρησον καὶ τυράννησον*). Dio Chrysostom suggests (70.10) that Zethus criticised Amphion for neglecting his affairs by devoting himself to music (*ἔάσαντα τὴν τῶν ἰδίων ἐπιμέλειαν*), a pursuit Zethus regarded as "something absurd and useless" (*ἄτοπὸν τινα καὶ ἀσύμφορον*).

muris ... Tyriis accedere montes: the "Tyrian walls" (i.e. from Tyre, another Phoenician city) refer to the Theban walls built by Amphion with his lyre (cf. Eur. *Antiope* fr. 223.90-97 Collard and Cropp, for Hermes' instruction of Amphion; Paus. 9.5.8 for Hermes teaching Amphion the lyre), the metonym *Tyriis* functioning in the same way as *Sidonius* (cf. 1.5n.). Statius' allusion to Amphion's building of the Theban walls here recalls a memorable scene in Virgil, where Aeneas and his men watch the Carthaginians building their city (*A.* 1.423-24, *instant ardentem Tyrii pars ducere muros, / molirique arcem et manibus subvolvere saxa*). Amphion's song, however, was able to

move mountains (*montes*) in contrast to the mere rocks (*saxa*) moved by the Carthaginians; cf. Eur. *Antiope*, where Hermes remarks upon Amphion's song making the work of hands easier (fr. 223.95 Collard and Cropp, ὥστ' εὐμ[ά]ρειαν τεκτόνων θήσῃ χειρί). Considering that all other mentions of the stones moved by Amphion are either *saxa* (cf. Hor. *Ars* 394-95; Sen. *Her. F.* 262-63; *Oed.* 612; Stat. *Theb.* 8.232; Sil. *Pun.* 11.442) or *lapides* (Hor. *Carm.* 3.11.2; Sen. *Phoen.* 570), Statius, here, seems to be emphasizing the power of Amphion's poetry by referring to the stones hyperbolically as *montes*. Statius identifies himself with Amphion as a poet of Thebes in the proem of his *Achilleid* (1.13, *suo numerant Amphione Thebae*). Augoustakis (2016) 162 (*ad Theb.* 8.232-33) notes the contrast between the havoc of Cadmus' foundation and Amphion's peaceful fortification of the city.

10 *iusserit*: within the first ten lines of the proem, *iubeo* is used twice in relation to a poet. In the first case, Statius expresses his submission to the orders of the Muses (1.3, *unde iubetis*); in contrast here, it is the poet Amphion who "ordered" (*iusserit*) the mountains to become the walls of Thebes through the power of his poetry. In Horace, Amphion is said to have been able to lead the stones wherever he wished with the charming entreaty of his lyre (*Ars* 395-96; cf. Eur. *Antiope* fr. 223.92-93 Collard and Cropp); likewise Seneca points to the sweet sound of Amphion's lyre (Sen. *Oed.* 612); Propertius, Seneca and Silius emphasize Amphion's power to make the stones move of their own accord (Prop. 3.2.5-6; Sen. *Phoen.* 569-70; Sil. *Pun.* 11.443). Statius' allusion to the myth, then, contrasts with the established tradition, since Amphion "orders" the stones to move, rather than persuading them to move by their own choice (similar only to Silius *Pun.* 11.445, *iussit*). This contrast either lends more authority to the power of poetry, or perhaps casts doubts over the pleasantness of poetry alone to make an impact on its audience (cf. **Literary Models**, 44-45).

11 *unde graves irae cognata in moenia Baccho* refers to the story of Bacchus and Pentheus, most famously recounted in Euripides' *Bacchae*, and also Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.528-71; 3.692-733; cf. also Hyg. *Fab.* 184). As the son of Jupiter and Semele, one of the daughters of Cadmus, Bacchus was Theban (cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 1-2) and hence the walls are described here as "kindred" (*cognata*) to the god. Pentheus had denied Bacchus recognition of his divinity by banning worship to the god in Thebes. The *graves irae* in this line therefore allude to the part Bacchus plays in causing Pentheus to be torn apart by Bacchant worshippers, including his own mother Agave, as revenge. Bacchus is not usually associated with anger, a characteristic more commonly used for Juno (cf. Verg. *A.* 1.4, *Iunonis...irae*; 5.781, *Iunonis gravis ira*; Ov. *Met.* 4.448, *tantum odiis iraeque dabat Saturnia Iuno*; V.Fl. 4.55, *incertus, quid Iuno ferat, quas apparet iras*). As the direct grandsons of Cadmus (via Semele and Agave), Bacchus and Pentheus are related by blood, emphasised by the juxtaposition of *irae* and *cognata*, and so Bacchus' role in Pentheus' death is another example of kin violence in the proem (hence, *cognata* is thematically preferable to the possible variation *cognota* found in P). Later in the poem, when Bacchus addresses Jupiter, complaining about Jupiter's desire for war against Thebes (7.145-92), Jupiter remarks upon the contrast between Bacchus' part in the murder of Pentheus and the prayers and tears with which he now expressed concern for his native Thebes (7.214, *ubi hi fletus, ubi tunc ars tanta precandi?*).

12 *quod saevae Iunonis opus*: Juno's anger and ferocity are commonplace in Latin literature, and *saevus* in particular is often used to describe her (cf. Verg. *A.* 1.4, 2.612, 7.592; Ov. *Met.* 2.469-70,

4.547; V.Fl. 4.27; see also 1.11n.). Statius' reference to Juno's anger recalls Virgil's proem (*A.* 1.4, *saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*), which describes her famous hatred towards the Trojans. Considering the shared Phoenician ancestry of Carthage and Thebes (cf. 1.9-10n.), it is interesting to observe that Thebes is particularly hateful to Juno (*Theb.* 1.257, *illam odimus urbem*) whereas Carthage is especially dear to the goddess (*A.* 1.15-16, *quam Iuno fertur terris magis omnibus unam / posthabita coluisse Samo*). The reason for her hatred towards Thebes lies in the story of Bacchus: jealous of Jupiter's affair with the mortal Semele, Juno decided to trick Semele into asking Jupiter to appear before her in his divine form. When he did appear as a lightning bolt from the sky, Semele was unable to set her eyes upon the divine Jupiter and she was burned to a cinder (cf. *Ov. Met.* 3.273-309; *Eur. Bacch.* 3-9). The *opus* in this line refers to Juno's fatal trickery of Semele, an act that exemplifies her characteristic *saevitia*. Later in the *Thebaid*, when Bacchus himself sees the forces of Argos (one of Juno's favourite cities) march towards his native city Thebes, he provides precisely Semele's death resulting from Juno's trickery (*Theb.* 4.673-76) as his reason for delaying the Argive expedition.

12-13 *cui sumpserit arcus / infelix Athamas*: when Semele died as a result of beholding the divine Jupiter, she was pregnant with Bacchus. Jupiter managed to rescue the unborn Bacchus by stitching him into his own thigh (cf. *Ov. Met.* 3.310-12; *Theb.* 7.165-66; *Apollod.* 3.4.3), and the god was then brought up in secret by his mother's sister, Ino, and her husband Athamas (*Ov. Met.* 3.313ff.; cf. *Ov. Fast.* 6.485ff; *Apollod.* 3.4.3). Out of further jealousy towards Semele (i.e. still referring to *saevae Iunonis opus*), Juno drove Athamas and Ino mad as punishment for raising Bacchus. In his madness, Athamas killed his son Learchus (*cui*), and Ino fell from a cliff into the sea carrying their other son, Melicertes (cf. 1.13-14n.). In Ovid's account, Athamas kills Learchus by throwing him against rough rock (*Met.* 4.515-19), but Statius' allusion here suggests that Athamas uses his bow (*arcus*; or *arcum* offered by *Cod. Magd.*), a version of the myth found in *Apollodorus* (1.9.2, Ἀθάμας δὲ ὕστερον διὰ μῆνιν Ἴφρας καὶ τῶν ἐξ Ἰνοῦς ἐστερήθη παίδων· αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ μανεῖς ἐτόξευσε Λέαρχον; with Learchus as a deer at 3.4.3, καὶ Ἀθάμας μὲν τὸν πρεσβύτερον παῖδα Λέαρχον ὡς ἔλαφον θηρεύσας ἀπέκτεινεν). Heuvel (1932) 62 equates *infelix* to the Greek *τάλας* to describe madness, e.g. cf. *Aesch. Prom.* 567, *χρίει τις αὖ με τὰν τάλαιναν οἴστρος*, though *τάλας / infelix* is more associated with tragic misfortune than madness (cf. 1.32-33n. on *oestrus*).

13-14 *cur non expaverit ingens / Ionium socio casura Palaemone mater*: here Statius evokes Ovid's account of Ino falling "fearlessly" (*Ov. Met.* 4.529, *nullo tardata timore*) into the "huge" Ionian sea (*Ov. Met.* 4.535, *iactari ... in Ionio immenso*) with her son. Also in Ovid, Venus prays to Neptune to receive Ino and Melicertes as sea-deities and so they become Leucothea and Palaemon (*Met.* 4.539-42). The verb *expavescere* seems to be much more common in post-Augustan Latin, occurring only twice in Augustan literature (*Livy* 6.34.6.5; *Hor. Carm.* 1.37.23). Bernstein (2015) 144 notes the pattern of deaths caused by mothers in the *Thebaid*: Jocasta, 'the impious mother of war' (7.483), Agave (4.565-69), Niobe (4.575-79), Ino (9.401), and the Lemnian women are all mothers who 'cause the death of their children either as the result of the gods' hostility or through futile attempts to resist it.'

14 *Ionium*: in Latin literature, the Ionian sea is often noted for its size (cf. Verg. *A.* 3.211, *Ionio... magno*; Ov. *Met.* 4.535, *Ionio immenso*) and ferocity (Luc. *BC* 6.27, *Ioniumque furens*; Sen. *Phaed.* 1012, *furens Ionius... sinus*). Accordingly, the lack of fear Ino felt before throwing herself into this sea perhaps suggests that she was certain of her death, but deemed it preferable to facing her maddened husband; or, as Ovid speculates (*Met.* 4.520), that she was unable to feel fear as result of madness or extreme grief.

15 *gemitus et prospera Cadmi*: to explain *prospera*, Heuvel (1932) 63 points to Ovid *Met.* 3.131-35, which alludes to Cadmus' state of good fortune, owing to his marriage with Harmonia, the daughter of Venus and Mars (cf. also Paus. 9.5.2 for Cadmus' good fortune); thus Heuvel proposes *gemitus et prospera* should be taken together as the "fortune" of Cadmus himself. *Cadmi* here can also be a metonym for the Thebans, since they are Cadmus' descendants, which expresses the significance of the city's foundation as an omen for Cadmus' descendants. With the exception of Amphion (1.9-10), all the episodes that Statius alludes to in 1.5-14 are worthy of lament and so *gemitus* is clear. In contrast to Anchises' 'celebration of Roman people and Roman achievements [and] praise of Augustus and his family, the Julii' (Maclennan (2003) 28), Statius chooses to pass over an account of Theban misfortunes, which stem from Cadmus. It is interesting that Statius includes the wall-building element of Amphion's story in his overview of Theban history (cf. Ovid's brief mention at *Met.* 6.152, *coniugis artes*), considering the existence of more violent myths attributed to the mythical poet. Firstly, though there are different versions of the story, Amphion and his brother Zethus were the sons of Jupiter and Antiope. According to Hyginus (*Fab.* 7-8), Antiope was married to Lycus, king of Thebes, and exiled before being impregnated by Jupiter. Lycus' new wife, Dirce, suspected that Lycus had impregnated Antiope and violently mistreated her. When Antiope gave birth to Amphion and Zethus, they were reared by a shepherd on Mount Cithaeron, and avenged their mother's mistreatment by murdering Dirce, tying her to a bull by her hair, a fate alluded to by Propertius (3.15.11ff.), Seneca (*Phoen.* 19-21) and Apollodorus (3.5.5). Secondly, there was the story of Amphion and his wife Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus. After boasting to have produced more children than Latona, Niobe was famously punished by Diana and Apollo who killed her seven daughters and seven sons with their arrows (cf. e.g. Ov. *Met.* 6.146ff.; Stat. *Theb.* 6.124-25; 9.680-82; six sons and six daughters in Hom. *Il.* 24.602ff.). According to Ovid, after this tragedy Amphion committed suicide in his grief (cf. Ov. *Met.* 6.271-72). The other myths of Cadmus and his Theban descendants alluded to by Statius (1.11-14) are characterised by divine wrath (1.11, Bacchus towards Pentheus; 1.12, Juno towards Semele; 1.12-14, Juno towards Ino and Athamas) and kin violence (1.7-8, the Spartoi; 1.11, Bacchus and Pentheus; 1.12-14, Athamas and Ino killing their sons). Hence, the reference to Amphion building Thebes' walls (i.e. instead of Amphion and Zethus' murder of Dirce or the death of his children) is another way in which Amphion's poetic ability is emphasised. See discussion of Amphion in **Literary Models**, 45.

15-16 *atque adeo iam nunc ... / praeteriisse sinam: limes mihi carminis esto*: after proposing possible beginnings for his poem, Statius announces his intention to begin from a different point (*praeteritio*, a favoured stylistic practice of the Augustan poets, cf. e.g. Verg. *G.* 4.147-48; Ov. *Met.* 4.284). Considering Statius also ends the *Thebaid* with a *praeteritio* (12.797-809), the poem is bracketed by the apologetic stance of the poet's inability, or unwillingness, to tell the whole story (cf. also 1.9n above on *penitusque sequar*). Statius chooses to start *in medias res* rather than from the

beginning (a choice preferred by Horace at *Ars* 136-52). The assonance of *a* and *i* (*atque adeo iam; praeteriisse sinam limes mihi carminis*) and consonance of *m* (*sinam limes mihi carminis*) along with deixis (*nunc, mihi*) in these lines draw attention to the poet's choice of subject for his poem, following a series of allusions to potential starting points. Particular emphasis falls on *limes* as the only spondee in the line and occurring after the caesura in the third foot. Augoustakis (2016) 94 *ad Theb.* 8.69-71 points to the 'rather prosaic' nature of *atque adeo* (e.g. *atque adeo iam* at Cic. *Cat.* 2.27.1; *Quinct.* 47.1), which draws further attention to the poet's own choice of theme for his epic; cf. Sil. *Pun.* 1.20, *iamque adeo*; cf. also AR. 1.20, *νῦν δ' ἄν ἐγὼ*; cf. also Jupiter at *Theb.* 1.219-20, Tisiphone 11.108, both significant passages). *limes* is a significant programmatic word in the poem, and so, see discussion of *limes* in **Literary Models**, 43-44; **Restraint**, 62-64.

17 *Oedipodae confusa domus*: "confused" is a preferable translation to "troubled" (Mozley, 1928 and Shackleton-Bailey, (2003a) 41), since *confundo* entails a sense of "mixing together" (*OLD* s.v. 3), "disorder" (*OLD* s.v. 4, 5) and blurred distinctions (*OLD* s.v. 7, 8). As a result of the incestuous union between Oedipus and Jocasta, Oedipus is both son and husband to Jocasta, and both father and brother to his children. Heuvel (1932) 64 points to Sophocles' expression of the confused family relations (*OT.* 457-59, *φανήσεται δὲ παισὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ ζωνῶν / ἀδελφὸς αὐτὸς καὶ πατήρ, κάξ ἧς ἔφθ / γυναικὸς υἱὸς καὶ πόσις*; cf. also Sen. *Phoen.* 134-38). At *Theb.* 1.135-36, *confundo* occurs in the simile of Polynices and Eteocles as bulls that describes their strife (*in diversa trahunt atque aequis vincula laxant / viribus et vario confundunt limite sulcos*), recalling the fact that they belong to the *Oedipodae confusa domus*, as well as their descent from the fratricidal Spartoi (cf. 1.7-9n. on *infandis sulcis*).

17-18 *quando ... nondum / ... ausim spirare*: for this *recusatio*, see the discussion in **Literary Models**, 47-50. *nondum* implies that one day Statius would take up the task of a panegyric epic (cf. 1.32n., *tempus erit*); the poet similarly articulates the postponement of panegyric at *Silv.* 4.4.93-100 (esp. 100, *nondum*) and *Ach.* 1.18-19 (*te longo necdum fidente paratu / molimur*). The verb *spirare* (literally, "to breathe") here means "to mention", and as part of a *recusatio* it is preferable to the emendation *sperare* ("to hope for"). These lines produced a debate between Kytzler (1960) and Schetter (1962) over potential structural problems, though reconciled by Markus (2003) and Galli (2013); see also Caviglia (1973) 12 and Rosati (2002) 233-36 for the seemingly logical break created by the *recusatio*.

17-18 *Itala ... / signa ... Arctos... triumphos*: by the time of Statius' *Thebaid*, Domitian had celebrated two triumphs for his military campaigns (*OLD* s.v. *signa* 10 "military ensign or standard") against the Chatti and the Dacians (see Southern (1997) 79-100 for an overview). The "Northern triumphs" (*Arctos... triumphos*; cf. Sil. *Pun.* 3.614, *ab Arctoo currus aget*) here presumably refer to the triumphs celebrated by Domitian for successful campaigns against the Chatti (roughly 83-85 CE), since they were located in Germany i.e. North in relation to Rome. The Dacians were located East of Rome, but Statius may be referring to Domitian's triumphs in Dacia as "Northern" as well (cf. e.g. Luc. *BC* 8.424, where both Dacia and the Rhine are described as Northern). In this *recusatio* Statius announces his decision not to write a panegyric epic celebrating Domitian's military achievements. Statius had, in fact, written a historical epic praising Domitian's double triumphs over the Chatti and the Dacians, which he performed at the

Alban Games of 90 CE, but it is now lost. Statius perhaps refers to his victory at the Games for this poem at *Silv.* 4.2.65-67 (*lux... Troianae qualis sub collibus Albae, / cum modo Germanas acies, modo Dacca sonantem / proelia Palladio tua me manus induit auro*; see Nauta (2002) 330 n. 11 for discussion of the lost poem). Nauta (2002) 329-30 states that a ‘four-line fragment transmitted in the scholia to Juvenal and there ascribed to a poem *De bello Germanico* may well derive from Statius’ prize-winning composition.’

19-20 *bisque iugo Rhenum, bis adactum legibus Histrum / et coniurato deiectos vertice Dacos*: the two rivers mentioned here, the Rhine (*Rhenum*) and the Danube (*Histrum*), were natural markers of the Roman frontier. The Chatti inhabited a region neighbouring the Rhine, and the Dacians similarly lived near the Danube, and so the mention of these rivers develops the *Arctos triumphos* from the previous line. Lines 17-20 are ostensibly praiseworthy (Domitian is addressed as *Germanice* at *Silv.* 1.1.5; cf. *Sil. Pun.* 3.607), yet the impact of Domitian’s military achievements was contentious. Tacitus and Suetonius, for instance, dismissed the triumphs for conquering the Dacians as shams (*Tac. Ag.* 36; *Suet. Dom.* 6). The anaphora of *bis*, referring to the fact that each enemy was defeated twice, has been interpreted as a suggestion of the campaigns’ failure, since each enemy had to be conquered more than once. This implication is followed by e.g. Dominik (1994) 171 and Pagán (2015) 368; cf. Ahl (1986) 2819 for a balance. The phrase *coniurato deiectos vertice Dacos* is an allusion to Virgil (*G.* 2.497, *coniurato descendens Dacos ab Histro*; cf. also *Stat. Silv.* 1.1.79, *proelia Rheni... tardum in foedera montem*). Pagán (2015) 367 remarks that Virgil ‘includes Dacians in a list of things that do *not* bother his serene farmer. For Statius, the Dacians are a subject that he will *not* write about.’ Similarly in Lucan, the Romans mention the Rhine, the Danube and the Dacians as remote enemies, preferable to civil war between Romans (*BC* 2.50-54).

21-22 *aut defensa prius vix pubescentibus annis / bella Iovis: prius vix* (“earlier still”) i.e. if Statius were to go back further in time to when Domitian was younger. This line refers to the siege of the Capitoline Hill made by supporters of Vitellius on December 18th-19th 69 CE, from which Domitian emerged safely on December 21st. Located on the Capitoline Hill was the Temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and so the conflict is referred to here as *bella Iovis*. Since Domitian was born in 51 CE, at the time of this event he was eighteen years of age, and so he is described as being scarcely past the age of a *pubescens* (cf. *Sil. Pun.* 3.606, *primo ... in aevo*; 3.608, *iam puer*). The details of the conflict vary (see Southern (1997) 13-23), but, in any case, Domitian was eager to emphasize his own part in the defence of the Capitol referred to in this line (*defensa*). In the literature produced by Domitian’s court poets, the siege of the Capitol is mentioned by Martial (9.101.14, *prima suo gessit pro Iove bella puer*), by Statius in one of his *Silvae* (1.1.79, *bella Iovis*), and by Silius (*Pun.* 9.609, *nec te terruerint Tarpei culminis ignes*), always in heroic fashion. From another of Martial’s epigrams, we also know that Domitian himself composed a poem about his defence of the Capitol (5.5.7-8, *ad Capitolini caelestia carmina belli*). Penwill (2013) 40 *ad loc* argues that Statius’ placement of *bella Iovis* after the mention of Domitian’s northern campaigns creates a chronological anomaly that brings the Capitoline War into prominence. The scholar (*ibid.*) also argues that, since the *bella Iovis* are not introduced with another *et* but with *aut*, Statius offers ‘two alternative packages as the subject of the song that [he] will not be attempting: either the northern campaigns or the Capitoline War.’

22 *tuque o Latiae decus addite famae*: despite Statius' choice not to write about Domitian's achievements, the poem is addressed to the emperor, his literary patron. Addressing the emperor with the vocative *tu* is common in epic encomia (cf. Verg. *G.* 1.24, *tuque adeo*; Luc. *BC* 1.66, *tu*; V.Fl. 1.7, *tuque*; Sil. *Pun.* 3.607, *at tu*), and hence *tuque* seems preferable to *teque* (cod. *P.*); the exclamatory *o* is more likely than Lachmann's suggestion of *ut*, considering Verg. *G.* 2.40, *o*; V.Fl. 1.7, *tuque o*; Zissos (2008) 83 (ad V.Fl. 1.7-9) notes that 'in such addresses the interj. *o* creates a more elevated address than a voc. alone.' The inclusion of *fama* and *decus* in imperial address is common in Latin literature, e.g. Virgil's address of Maecenas (*G.* 2.40, *o famae merito pars maxima nostrae*); cf. V.Fl. 1.8, *fama*; Sil. *Pun.* 3.619, *decus*. Horace praises Augustus for increasing the fame of Rome and the power of Italy (*Carm.* 4.15.13-14, *per quas Latinum nomen et Italiae / crevere vires fama*), and Lucan promises Nero fame and eternity through his poetry (*BC* 9.980-86). In Statius' address, however, Domitian is not acknowledged as Statius' patron, unlike e.g. Maecenas in Virgil's address; nor does Statius celebrate Domitian's achievements as Horace does, and unlike Lucan's promise of Nero's immortality in his poetry, Statius announces that he will choose another time to commit his emperor to poetry. Similarly, at the end of the *Thebaid*, Statius addresses his own poem rather than his patron Domitian (who is briefly mentioned at 12.814, *iam te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar*), and he wishes immortality upon his epic (12.810-19) rather than his emperor.

23-24 *quem nova maturi subeuntem exorsa parentis / aeternum sibi Roma cupit* suggests that Domitian's reign directly followed that of his father Vespasian (emperor from 69 to 79 CE), omitting to mention the Principate of Domitian's brother, Titus (79-81 CE). Heuvel (1932) 68 remarks that *maturi* refers to the fact that Vespasian lived from 9 to 79 CE, though Lachmann offers *mature*, which would suggest Domitian's capable succession of Vespasian. Considering Silius' reference to Vespasian as *senex* (*Pun.* 3.600) in his encomium to Domitian, *maturi* in this line may be more likely on the basis of consistency between the poets. Statius' address to Domitian as a future god invites the emperor to delay (or forego, cf. 1.31n.) his ascent to heaven, in order to prolong the benefit of his presence on earth (cf. Ov. *Met.* 15.868, *tarda sit illa dies et nostro senior aevo*; Sil. *Pun.* 3.611, *nam te longa manent nostri consortia mundi*). The emulation of one's parent is a recurring motif in the *Thebaid*: Oedipus followed the example of his father Laius by joining Jocasta in marriage (cf. 1.232-35); on Parthenopaeus' shield is depicted Atalanta's famous battle with the Calydonian boar (9.267-68, *imbelli parma pictus Calydonia matris / proelia*), pointing to Parthenopaeus' anxiety to emulate his mother's military prowess with his participation in the war (cf. 1.44, *bella*). By becoming a god, Domitian would follow the example of Vespasian, whose apotheosis Suetonius mentions at *Ves.* 23; cf. Sil. *Pun.* 3.607, *at tu transcendes*, anticipating Domitian surpassing the exploits of Vespasian and Titus. Dominik (2003) 92-93 points to 'the wish that emperor inhabit earth for a long period before ascending late into heaven as *deus*' expressed by Statius (*Silv.* 1.1.105-107; 4.1.17-22, 34-39; 4.2.57-62; 4.3.159-64; cf. 4.8.61f.), Martial (4.1, 13.4) and Silius (*Pun.* 3.609-11, 625-29); cf. also Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.45, *serus in caelum redeas*.

24-30 Statius' anticipation of Domitian's apotheosis in these lines alludes to the story of Phaethon, whose destructive fall was well-known and frequently referenced (e.g. Lucr. 5.397ff. Cat. 64.290ff.; Hor. *Carm.* 4.11.25-26; Luc. *BC* 2.410-15; Sen. *Phoen.* 1090-92; V.Fl. 5.429; Stat. *Theb.* 1.219-23). Ovid's treatment of the myth (*Met.* 2.31-400) is clearly a model for Statius here,

as is Lucan's allusion to Phaethon in his encomium to Nero (Luc. *BC* 1.45-57; see **Restraint**, 62-64). In Ovid, Phaethon is anxious to prove that Apollo (identified with the Sun god) is his divine father (*Met.* 2.35-39), only to regret discovering his descent (*Met.* 2.183, *iam cognosse genus piget*) when he loses control of the chariot's reins, the very thing that his father had advised him against attempting. Apollo explains that he is the only one who can overcome the spinning motion of heaven (*Met.* 2.71-73), and moreover, that not even Jupiter is able to control the chariot (*Met.* 2.60-62). In Statius' proem, Domitian is aligned with Phaethon insofar as the remark about his succession of his divine father (1.24, *subeuntum exorsa parentis*) is followed by the suggestion of Phaethon's fateful assumption of his divine father's chariot. Statius, therefore, presents himself as Apollo, warning Domitian to forego divine aspirations, and to focus instead on his governance of earth.

24-27 licet artior omnes / limes agat stellas et te plaga lucida caeli / Pleiadum Boreasque et hiulci fulminis expers, / sollicitet: here *limes* means "track, path" (OLD s.v. 3; cf. also s.v. 5, "line left by the passage of a shooting star"), which foresees Domitian's journey as a god in the "shining region of heaven" (*plaga lucida caeli*). The narrowness of Domitian's track (*artior*) recalls the itinerary Ovidian Apollo provides for Phaethon, where he remarks upon the narrow path Phaethon must take (*Met.* 2.130, *limes*) in order to avoid the northern and southern heavens (*Met.* 2.131-32, *polumque / effugit australem iunctam aquilonibus arcton*; cf. Luc. *BC* 1.53, *sed neque in arctoo sedem tibi legeris orbe*). The Pleiades are the northern stars and Boreas the god of the north wind (cf. Man. 1.371-72, *Pleiadisque Hyadesque, feri pars utraque Tauri, / in borean scandunt. haec sunt aquilonia signa*); in combination with "forked lightning" (OLD s.v. *hiulcus* 2, "gaping cracked"), they represent the dangers of straying from the narrow path, which is safely free from these dangers (cf. OLD s.v. *expers* 1b). In Ovid, Boreas is associated with anger (*Met.* 6.685-86, *horrida ira, / quae solita est illi*), and fraternal strife (*Met.* 6.693-4, *idem ego, cum fratres caelo sum nactus aperto / nam mihi campus is est*). In the *Thebaid*, we find Boreas as part of a simile to describe uncertainty of alternate rule between Polynices and Eteocles (cf. 1.193-96). The "forked lightning" here refers to Jupiter's intervention to stop Phaethon (cf. *Met.* 2.311-18), but it is a cause of death for Semele (cf. 1.12n.) and for Capaneus later in the poem (cf. 1.45n.).

27-28 licet ignipedum frenator equorum... / ipse refers to Apollo, who controlled (hence *frenator*; cf. OLD s.v. *freno* 3, "to keep in check, curb, restrain, govern") the horses of the sun. The adjective *ignipes* ("firefooted") occurs only twice elsewhere in Latin literature, in each case specifically referring to the horses of Apollo and found in the genitive plural at the end of the line (Ov. *Met.* 2.392-93, *tum sciet ignipedum vires expertus equorum*; Verg. *Culex* 127, *at quibus ignipedum curru proiectus equorum*; cf. Luc. *BC* 1.48-50, *te flammigeros Phoebi conscendere currus*). In Ovid's account, Apollo emphasizes the difficult task of controlling the horses, in particular, the practice of yoking them and bringing them under control (cf. *Met.* 2.84-87).

28-30 tuis alte radientem crinibus arcum / imprimat aut magni cedat tibi Iuppiter aequa / parte poli: In Ovid's version of the story of Phaethon, Apollo places his shining crown on Phaethon's head (*Met.* 2.124, *inposuitque comae radios*), which he had removed from his own head (*Met.* 2.41, *deposuit radios*) when his son approached him to prove his divine parentage (cf. Plin. *Pan.* 52.1; see 1.23-24n. above regarding parental emulation). Statius' laudatory expectations of Domitian's apotheosis are announced with *licet* ("even though") in epanalepsis after caesuras in

both cases (1.24; 1.27), which adds a reserved tone to the sentiment (see **Restraint**, 62-64 for Statius' reservation in the encomium). In this line Jupiter (*Iuppiter*) and Domitian (*tibi*) are juxtaposed; in the same way, the apostrophe at 1.22 (*tuque*) comes after the caesura following *Iovis*, and both cases perhaps draw comparison between Domitian and Jupiter, with whom the emperor himself chose to identify. Domitian had restored the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in the second year of his reign (82 CE), which Silius mentions in his encomium to Domitian (*Pun.* 3.662-64, *ille etiam, qua prisca, vides, stat regia nobis, / aurea Tarpeia ponet Capitolia rupe / et iunget nostro templorum culmina caelo*). Cassius Dio (64.4.7) and Suetonius (*Dom.* 13.2) allege that Domitian insisted upon the title of *dominus et deus*. The anticipation of Jupiter yielding to Domitian (*cedat tibi Iuppiter*) echoes the praiseworthy remarks in the encomia of Virgil, Lucan and Silius (Verg. *G.* 1.35, *Scorpis et caeli iusta plus parte reliquit*; Luc. *BC* 1.50-51, *tibi numine ab omni / cedetur*; Sil. *Pun.* 3.615, *Baccho cedente, 3.627-28, Quirinus / concedet*; cf. also Verg. *G.* 1.35, *Scorpis et caeli iusta plus parte reliquit*).

30 maneat hominum contentus habenis: refers to Domitian's rule as *princeps*. Rebggiani (2013) 188 n. 4 notes that '[t]he idea of the chariot of state is at least as old as Plato (*Rep.* 566d). In Latin, the metaphoric use of *habena* [is] attested very early and extremely common'; for the use of *habena* to denote the "reins" of government (*OLD* s.v. 1b) cf. Verg. *A.* 7.600, *habenae rerum*; Ov. *Met.* 15.481, *habenae populi*; Ov. *Pont.* 2.5.75, *succedatque suis orbis moderator habenis*; for a similar wish that Domitian would rule on earth, cf. also Sil. *Pun.* 3.615-16, *beatas / imperio terras patrio rege*). Statius' advice to Domitian here emphasizes the amount of power and responsibility Domitian has been entrusted in his succession of Vespasian (cf. 1.23-24n. above). *habenae* ("reins" i.e. for horses), however, also resumes the metaphor of Phaethon, with Domitian holding the reins of mankind on earth, instead of the unmanageable reins of the fire-footed horses of the Sun's chariot (cf. *Met.* 2.87, *repugnat habenis*; 2.151, *contingere habenas*; and 2.390, where Apollo challenges Jupiter, *temptat habenas*). Phaethon's desire to undertake his father's duty (cf. 1.23, *exorsa parentis*) and, moreover, his *inability* to handle what was entrusted to him (cf. Ov. *Met.* 2.169-70, *ipse pavet nec qua commissas flectat habenas / nec scit qua sit iter, nec si sciat, imperat illis*) brings ruin to the whole world (Rebggiani (2013) 188).

31 undarum terraeque potens et sidera dones: as *princeps*, Domitian reigns over the entire world and mankind, and this is the realm which Statius advises Domitian to rule before entertaining thoughts of becoming a deity (*sidera dones*). *undarum terraeque* is a variation of *terra marique*, which denoted Roman *imperium* in literature (e.g. Sall. *Cat.* 10.1.4; Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.15; Liv. 1.19.3.5; Luc. *BC* 1.200-201), and was especially prevalent in imperial ideology (e.g. Aug. *Res Gestae*, 13). It is associated with greed and lust for power in Lucan (*BC* 1.109-11, *populique potentis, / quae mare, quae terras, quae totum possidet orbem, / non cepit fortuna duos*).

32-33 tempus erit cum Pierio tua fortior oestro / facta canam: Statius' *excusatio* (see **Literary Models**, 47-50). *oestrus* is a Greek loanword (*οἴστρος*) for "gadfly" (*LSJ* s.v. I, cf. e.g. Hom. *Od.* 22.300; Aesch. *Supp.* 541), and due to its painful sting also comes to mean "madness caused by pain" (*LSJ* s.v. II1, Soph. *Trach.* 1254; Eur. *Her.* 862; *IT.* 1456), "insane passion" (*LSJ* s.v. II2, cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 1300), or "frenzy" (*LSJ* s.v. II2, Soph. *Ant.* 1002; caused by a divine force cf. Eur. *Or.* 791; *Bacch.* 665; *IA* 548). In Latin literature *oestrus* is rare, found only in Virgil, Seneca and Pliny as the word for "gadfly" (*OLD* s.v. 1; cf. *G.* 3.148, quoted by Sen. *Ep.* 58.2.1; Plin. *Nat.* 11.47).

Stattius' use of *oestrus* here is the first instance of the word to describe divine inspiration (its other sense in Latin, cf. *OLD* s.v. 2, "a wild desire, passion, frenzy"; cf. Stat. *Silv.* 2.7.3 for *oestrus* as a term for poetic inspiration). Considering the Theban setting for his epic *oestrus* might be seen as sort of Bacchant madness (e.g. Eur. *Bacch.* 665; Sen. *Oed.* 442). *fortior* i.e. when Stattius is "stronger" (*OLD* s.v. *fortis* 6, "(of speakers, their words, style, etc.) vigorous, forceful, bold, strong"), or perhaps "braver" (*OLD* s.v. *fortis* 10), with the influence of divine inspiration (cf. Stattius' praise of Lucan at *Silv.* 2.7.53, *carmen fortior exeris togatum*). Stattius' anticipated praise of Domitian's deeds alone (*tua facta*) has less of a dynastic focus than Valerius and Silius, both of whom praise all three members of the Flavian family (cf. V.Fl. 1.7-17; Sil. *Pun.* 3.597-629).

33 *nunc tendo chelyn*: *chelyn* is a Graecism (from *χέλυς*), which ties in with the Greek subject matter of Stattius' epic. Zissos (2008) lvii notes that 'Virgil's general policy was to restrict the use of Greek declensions;' by contrast, Stattius, like Valerius, often retains Greek declensions (in the proem alone, examples of this occur at 1.33, *chelyn*; 1.40, *Ismenon*; 1.42, *Tydea*, 1.44, *Hippomedon*; 1.45, *Arcados*). The use of Greek inflection 'emphasizes the learnedness of the poet, and is particularly favoured by post-Augustan poets' (Pollmann (2004) 49). *chelys* originally means "tortoise" (*OLD* s.v. 1; cf. *LSJ* s.v. *χέλυς* I), but it is synonymous with "lyre" (*OLD* s.v. 2; *LSJ* s.v. *χέλυς* II) since Hermes made the first lyre by stretching strings (hence *tendo* here; cf. *OLD* s.v. *tendo* 5, "to tighten the strings of, i.e. tune (a musical instrument)") on a tortoise shell (cf. Hom. *Hymn.* 4.25, 39-56, 133; Arat. *Phaen.* 268; cf. 1.9-10n. above, for Hermes and Amphion's poetry). In Latin, *chelys* is a term for the lyre reserved for the greatest poets, for example, Amphion (cf. 1.10n. above), Chiron and Apollo. Before Stattius, the word *chelys* appeared once in Ovid (*Her.* 15.181) as a gift from Sappho to Apollo; once in Valerius (1.139) to describe Chiron's lyre; and five times in Seneca's tragedies (*Tro.* 321 for Achilles' lyre; *Oed.* 611 for Amphion's lyre; *Ag.* 326 for Apollo's lyre; *H.O.* 1033 and 1063 for Orpheus' lyre), but the majority of instances of *chelys* in Latin literature are found in Stattius' poetry. In the *Thebaid*, *chelys* occurs at 1.33 referring to Stattius' own lyre; at 6.366 for Apollo's lyre; at 8.233 for Amphion and the building of Thebes; and at 8.374 when Stattius invokes Apollo for fresh strength to recount the battle. In Stattius' *Achilleid*, *chelys* appears once (*Ach.* 1.186) for Chiron's lyre, and Stattius uses the word frequently in his *Silvae* (e.g. 1.5.1). The presence of two Greek loanwords in the same statement (*oestro* and *chelyn*) may be intended to draw attention to Stattius' mythological Greek subject in contrast to the panegyric Roman epic, from which he has just excused himself.

33-34 *satis arma referre* / *Aonia*: the suggestion of this statement is that Stattius makes a choice between panegyric poetry about the Roman present and poetry about the mythological Theban past, and furthermore that these spheres are detached. Considering the similar word order and placement, there is perhaps an opposition between the chosen mythological Theban material (*arma* / *Aonia*) and the rejected panegyric (1.17-18, *Italia nondum* / *signa*). *referre* carries a sense of "renewal" or "return" (cf. *OLD* s.v. *refero* 3b), which further suggests a departure from contemporary themes, and a return back to the mythological past of Thebes, with which he had begun the proem at 1.1-16. *Aonia* was a region in Boeotia and serves as a metonym for Thebes (e.g. 3.1, *Aoniae* ... *aulae*). Since Helicon was situated in *Aonia*, the region is also closely associated with the Muses. Stattius echoes this line when he asks the Muses for inspiration in order to begin the battle narrative, with a form of the same verb at line end and the place name

(rather than its adjective) at the beginning of the following line: 7.629-30, *vestras acies vestramque referte / Aoniam*. Newlands (2012) 48 *ad loc* remarks that '[a]lthough the word declares the poet's attempt to impose some control upon his material, it also introduces a litany of the horrors of Theban civil war (33-45)... [m]oreover, as Bessone [(2006) 94-96] has pointed out, *satis* programmatically recalls Oedipus' curse at Seneca's *Phoenissae* (354-55), defining the strife between Polynices and Eteocles as a terrible escalation of civil war: *non satis est adhuc / civile bellum: frater in fratrem ruat.*'

34 et geminis sceptrum exitiale tyrannis: a *sceptrum* was a royal staff, and hence symbol of regal power, especially in Homer (e.g. for Agamemnon cf. *Il.* 2.101; *Od.* 2.231, *σκηπτουχος βασιλεύς*; cf. Luc. *BC* 1.47, *seu sceptrum tenere*). The *sceptrum* (*σκήπτρον*) was passed down the generations from one ruler to the next, conferring absolute power to its holder (cf. Hom. *Il.* 2.102-108; Soph. *Phil.* 140-43). The *sceptrum* referred to here stands for the throne of Thebes (cf. Eur. *Antiope* fr. 223.110 Collard and Cropp, where Cadmus' sceptre is passed to Amphion and Zethus, *λαβόντε Κάδμου σκήπτρα*; Polynices demands the sceptre at Eur. *Phoen.* 80; for the Theban sceptre passing down generational guilt, cf. Sen. *Phoen.* 274-79, 647-49; cf. Stat. *Theb.* 11.649-51, *res Amphionias alio sceptrumque maligna / transtulerat Fortuna manu, Cadmique tenebat / iura Creon*; 11.656, *sceptri malesuadus amor*). In this line, the chiasmic arrangement bringing together *geminis* and *tyrannis* underlines the crux of the epic that there can only be one king of Thebes, and that the two brothers' mad desire to hold the sceptre (*Theb.* 1.127-28, *regendi / saevus amor*) leads to their mutual fratricide, also suggesting the inherently "destructive" (*exitiale*) nature of power itself. For the 'doubleness' of their death in tragedy see e.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 884-85, 971-73; Eur. *Phoen.* 1424.

35-36 nec furiis post fata modum flammisque rebelles / seditione rogi refers to the flames rising above Polynices and Eteocles' funeral pyre, which remain divided as they attempt to outstrip each other (12.429-32), symbolizing the brothers' hatred for each other even after death. Roche (2012) 331: 'the scene is frequently treated: Callim. *Aet.* 105; Paus. 9.18.3; Hyg. *Fab.* 68; Ov. *Tr.* 5.5.33; Philostr. *Imag.* 2.29; Sil. *Pun.* 16.546-68.' Since the funeral pyre (*rogus*) marked the end of a mortal's existence on earth (cf. Prop. 3.5.46; Ov. *Tr.* 5.14.6), the fury that existed between the two brothers was excessive since it continued past its "proper limit or measure" (OLD s.v. *modus* 4), emphasized in litotes (*nec furiis... modum*). *seditio* (OLD s.v. 2, "(transf.) turmoil, discord") describes the brothers' flames fighting rebelliously in the pyre, but also the widespread turmoil their hatred has created. Bernstein (2015) 149 observes that '[p]airs of brothers joined in an embrace at the moment of death (3.167-68, 8.448, 10.314), like the loving Thespiads killed by Tydeus (2.640-43), create a punctual contrast to the divided pyre of Eteocles and Polynices.' The distinction Seneca makes between the *tyranni* and *reges* is that the former are 'cruel to serve their pleasure', whereas the latter are cruel 'for a reason and by necessity' (*Cl.* 1.11.14, tr. Basore (1928) 391).

36-37 tumulisque carentia regum / funera foretells Creon's law denying burial to the Argives at 11.661-64, reiterated in the prophecies of the ghost of Laius (4.640-41), Apollo (7.776-77) and Pluto (8.71ff.). The crux of Sophocles' *Antigone* is the moral concern caused by Creon's decree (as another harsh edict of a king, cf. 1.5n); Pollmann (2004) 29 n. 105 notes that 'only from Sophocles' *Antigone* is Creon specifically singled out as the agent,' a version that Statius follows

(Eur. *Phoen.* 1625ff. it is Creon's order; cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 1005f., the decision of the people). Creon adds the penalty of death as the punishment for breaking his law (12.100-103), and so *caerentia* here is best translated as "denied" (OLD s.v. *careo* 5) to convey the immorality of Creon's law (described as *infandi leges... regni* at 12.180), instead of simply "lacking" (OLD s.v. *careo* 1, 2) which would apply to "corpses" (OLD s.v. *funus* 2) which are yet to be buried as an inevitability of war (e.g. 10.6-7; cf. also Virgil's introduction of war at *A.* 7.42, *in funera reges*). Although Polynices' unburied corpse was the most significant in Sophocles' *Antigone* and in Statius' *Thebaid*, *regum* here presumably refers to the Argive "kings" since Polynices never becomes king (cf. 1.1n.). In any case, the burial rites due to all the dead (i.e. not just kings) are a significant concern in the epic, both for mortals and gods. The model outcome expected by the gods occurs when Capaneus kills Hypseus and returns his body to the Thebans (9.557-58, *non infitiamur honorem / mortis*). The return of a corpse and its burial, however, was not guaranteed e.g. when Dymas is caught trying to recover Parthenopaeus' body from the Thebans at the end of the night raid, he begs Amphion to allow Parthenopaeus the minimum burial rights due to him (10.427-28, *angusti puero date pulveris haustus / exiguamque facem*). See Pollmann (2004) 32-36 on the burial of the dead as a fundamental human duty in antiquity; cf. Van der Keur (2013) 333-39 for alternative or unusual poetic burials of the heroes in the *Thebaid*, and Statius' condemnation of the tyrants' edicts.

37 et egestas alternis mortibus urbes refers to the deaths sustained by both sides of the conflict between the Thebans and the Argives (cf. Sen. *Phoen.* 435, *in alternam necem*). OLD s.v. 1b *egero* cites this particular line as "carried out for burial" i.e. that the number of men taken by death left the cities empty. *egestas... urbes*, however, could be understood more generally as the cities emptied by the soldiers being discharged from their homes to the battlefield, with death preventing their return; cf. e.g. *Theb.* 4.36, *quantas populis solaverit urbes*; 11.273-75, where Eteocles is blamed for emptying the Theban city (*urbem... / hausisti, vacuumque tamen sublimis obumbras*; cf. Luc. *BC* 1.503-504, *sic urbe relicta / in bellum fugitur*). The cities can also be described more figuratively as "emptied" by war in the sense that they are drained of their lifeblood due to the slaughter of their men (cf. e.g. Ov. *Met.* 10.136, *egesto sanguine*; cf. Stat. *Theb.* 3.359-60, *iacent in sanguine mixti / ante urbem vacuum*). Augoustakis (2016) 203 (*ad* 8.349, *laxantur*) notes that the phrase 'combines the idea of emptying the city... with that of undoing, loosening the bolts of the gates [of war].'

38 caerula cum rubuit Lernaeo sanguine Dirce: Dirce was most commonly known as a fountain North West of Thebes in Boeotia (dried up by Phaethon in Ov. *Met.* 2.239), but throughout the *Thebaid* it is a metonym for Thebes (and consequently *Dircaeus* is used for "Theban" e.g. *Theb.* 2.142, *Dircaeus Polynices*). The stream is named after Dirce, the stepmother of Amphion and Zethus (see 1.15n.). According to the prevalent version, which Statius follows (e.g. at *Theb.* 3.201-205), Dirce was thrown into the water and changed into the fountain which took her name (Eur. *Antiope* fr. 223.115 Collard and Cropp, *Δίρκη πρὸς ἀνδρῶν ὑστέρων κεκλημένη*; Prop. 3.15.15-40; Hyg. *Fab.* 7; cf. Pl. *Ps.* 199, where Dirce's transformation into a stream is not mentioned); Berlincourt (2006) 136 notes that 'the name Dirce... is, quite remarkably, never used in Statius' works to designate the queen, but always the spring.' Lerna was a forest and marsh near Argos, and so *Lernaeus* is metonymical for "Argive" (e.g. *Theb.* 5.499, *Lernaei reges*). Dirce's change from blue (*caerula*) to red with "Lernaean blood" therefore refers to the blood of the Argives shed into the Theban fountain. Berlincourt (2006) 136-37 also points to the recurrence

of *sanguine Dirce(n)* at end of line 4.374 as a ‘terrifying portent of war,’ evoking Sen. *Oed.* 177, *bis turbatam sanguine Dircen* and Heracles’ threat at Eur. *HF* 573, *Δίρκης τε νᾶμα λευκὸν αἰμαχθήσεται*; cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 101-102, Dirce and Ismenos as features on the battlefield. As an anticipation of war’s horrors, cf. also the Sibyl’s prophecy at Verg. *A.* 6.87, *Thymbrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno*. The image of Argive blood infusing into the Theban river symbolizes the Argive army converging on the Theban landscape, which Newlands (2012) 47 sees as a dramatized collapse of the differences between Argos and Thebes as ‘models of the well-governed and the tyrannical city.’

39-40 *et Thetis arentes adsuetum stringere ripas / horruit ingenti venientem Ismenon acervo*: like Dirce (see 1.38n.), Ismenos was a defining feature of the Boeotian landscape (e.g. Ov. *Met.* 2.244; Sen. *Her. F.* 334). These lines refer to Hippomedon’s battle with the river-god Ismenos at *Theb.* 9.315-539 (see 1.43-44n.). In two of Seneca’s plays, the river Ismenos is described as flowing with a small stream (*Oed.* 42-43; *Her. O.* 140-41) and so Ismenos is said to be “accustomed to skirting dry banks” here to express the increased size of the river god during his battle with Hippomedon (cf. 9.225-26, *solito tunc plenior alveo / (signa mali) magna se mole Ismeno agebat*). Thetis, a fellow water-deity, is said to be “horrified at Ismenos” presumably because of his greater size owing to the additional water sent from Asopus and Cithaeron (9.455-56), but also because of the gruesome contents carried in the water, a heap of corpses and weapons (9.429-30, *aspice quas fluvio caedes, quae funera portem / continuus telis alioque adoportus acervo*); cf. Eur. *HF* 572, *νεκρῶν ἄπανθ’ Ἴσμηνὸν ἐμπλήσω φόνου* as another grim presage of war (cf. 1.38n.).

41 *quem prius heroum Clio dabis?* This is another *invocatio* (cf. 1.3-4n.), here to Clio, one of the Muses, requesting the first hero to be recounted in the narrative. Of the nine Muses, Clio (from the Greek *κλέω*, *LSJ* s.v. I, “to celebrate, make famous”) was connected to praise or celebration in poetry (cf. Diod. 4.7.4, *ὀνομάσθαι τὴν μὲν Κλειὴν διὰ τὸ τὸν ἐκ τῆς ποιήσεως τῶν ἐγκωμιαζομένων ἔπαινον μέγα κλέος περιποιεῖν τοῖς ἐπαινουμένοις*). In Latin literature before Statius, only Horace (*Carm.* 1.12.1-2) and Valerius Flaccus (3.14-18) invoke Clio in particular. Both of Statius’ invocations to Clio in the *Thebaid*, here in the proem, and at *Theb.* 10.628-31, foreshadow the manner of the warriors’ deaths in the narrative. *κλέος* was the “renown” sought by a hero fighting in war but also bestowed upon him by the poet celebrating his heroism; as Currie (2005) 71 puts it: ‘κλέος is frequently presented as a compensation for mortality, and a spur for human actions.’ *heroum* (*ἡρώων*) and *Clio* (*Κλειώ*) are both Greek words that point to the poet’s traditional celebration of heroism (e.g. cf. Pind. *Ol.* 2.2, *τίνα θεόν, τίν’ ἥρωα, τίνα δ’ ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν*). In the following lines, Statius refers to the deaths of Tydeus (1.41-42), Amphiaraus (1.42), Hippomedon (1.43-44), Parthenopaeus (1.44-45) and Capaneus (1.45). At *Theb.* 10.628, Statius asks Clio to remind him of the “glorious death” (*pulchrae... mortis*) of Menoeceus. In contrast to Horace’s invocation of Clio, to help him “celebrate” the heroes (*Carm.* 1.12.1-2, *quem virum aut heroa lyra vel acri / tibia sumis celebrare, Clio?*), Statius uses *urguet* (1.43), as well as the gerundives *ploranda* (1.44) and *canendus* (1.45), suggesting reluctance towards commemorating the heroes in his poetry. In the *Thebaid*, *heros* is applied to Tydeus at 1.476, 5.661; Amphiaraus at 4.197; Hippomedon at 9.165 and 9.248. Neither Parthenopaeus nor Capaneus are denoted as heroes. Though not mentioned here as members of the ‘Seven’, Adrastus is described as a *heros* twice (4.441, 7.91) and Polynices at (1.376, 1.673, 2.142, 2.307,

3.366, 7.492); nowhere, on the other hand, is Eteocles called a *heros*.

41-42 *immodicum irae / Tydea?* as one of the ‘Seven against Thebes’ (see **Introduction**, 5-6), Tydeus is characterised as notably ardent for war in Homer, Aeschylus and Euripides (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 4.373; Aesch. *Sept.* 380ff.; Eur. *Phoen.* 134), an idea Statius expresses at e.g. 7.538-59, *institae Tydeus memor... irae*, 8.458, *furens ... Tydeus*. In Virgil, Tydeus (along with Adrastus and Parthenopaeus) is met by Aeneas in the underworld among men distinguished in war (*A.* 6.478-79). Ovid mentions Tydeus as an exile (*Her.* 9.155; *Fast.* 1.491) who had fled from Calydon to Adrastus in Argos (*Pont.* 1.3.79, *venit ad Adrastum Tydeus Calydone fugatus*), which Statius follows in his version at *Theb.* 1.401-402, *ecce autem antiquam fato Calydona reliquens / Olenius Tydeus*). This line foretells Tydeus’ cannibalism at 8.735-66 (discussed in **Characterisation**, 66-68).

42 *laurigeri subitō an vatis hiatus?* refers to the Argive seer, Amphiaraus (cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 609ff.; Eur. *Phoen.* 173, ὁ μάντις Ἀμφιάραος; referred to as a *vates* fifteen times in the *Thebaid*), being swallowed up by a gaping hole (*hiatus*) in the earth at *Theb.* 7.794-824, as well as his “unexpected” (*subitō*) arrival into underworld (cf. 8.1 *ut subitō vates pallentibus incidit umbris*). The opening of the earth was unexpected to all the men on the battlefield (7.794ff.), but also to Pluto (8.31), and the shades in the underworld (8.1-11). Even the Fates, who knew that Amphiaraus’ death was imminent, were surprised (8.11-12, *quin communis ipsa / Fatorum deprensa colus*). *vates* here means “seer”, but it was also the term for poet (cf. Luc. *BC* 1.63, *vates*; V.Fl. 1.5, *vatis*) since Apollo was the god of prophecy and poetry (cf. next note on *laurigeri* below). Roche (2012) 145 notes: ‘the idea of the poet as prophet is presented early in Greek poetry and most probably grew from the notion of the poet as one whom the Muses loved (cf. Alc. 30; Thgn. 769; Pind. fr. 94a, *Pae.* 6.6, fr. 150; Pl. *Ion.* 534e; Callim. *Hymn* 3.186; Theoc. *Id.* 16.29, 17.115. 22.116f.; AR. 4.1381). In Latin, the word *vates* described a seer who uttered prophecies in verse [and] the term became an elevated (but essentially synonymous) alternative to *poeta* in the Augustan period, when it was used self-consciously to imply their own inspiration (cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 7.25-28, 9.33f.; G. 2.476; *A.* 7.41; Hor. *Epod.* 14.44; *Carm.* 1.1.35, 1.31.2, 1.3.1, 4.9.28; *Ep.* 2.1.119f.; Prop. 3.1.3, 4.6.1; Ov. *Am.* 3.9.17f.; *Met.* 15.622f.).’ See **Characterisation**, 68-70 on Amphiaraus in the *Thebaid*.

laurigeri: the laurel-wreath worn by Amphiaraus was a traditional symbol of Apollo as the god of prophecy (cf. e.g. Prop. 4.6.54 *ducam laurigeram Iulia rostra manu*; Verg. *Ecl.* 7.62, *sua laurea Phoebō*; Ov. *Ars* 3.389, *laurigero sacra Palatia Phoebō*), and thus associated with both prophetic seers (e.g. Tib. 2.5.63-64, *sic usque sacras innoxia laurus / vescar, et aeternum sit mihi virginitas*; Stat. *Theb.* 3.105, *laurique sua dignatus Apollo est*) and poets (V.Fl. 1.5-7, *Phoebe, mone, si Cymaeae mihi conscia vatis / stat casta cortina domo, si laurea digna / fronte viret*; Stat. *Ach.* 1.15-16, *cui geminae florent vatūque ducūque / certatim laurus*). The laurel-wreath was also a martial symbol of victory worn by generals in triumphal processions (e.g. Cic. *Fam.* 15.6.1, *quem ego currum aut quam lauream cum tua laudatione conferrem?*; Ov. *Met.* 1.559-61, *laure... / tu ducibus Latiis aderis, cum laeta Triumphum / vox canet*). However, with the exception of two instances in Propertius (3.15.53, 4.6.54), and one in Ovid (*Ars* 3.389), *lauriger* does not occur in pre-Domitianic literature. Most instances of the word occur in the poetry of Statius and Martial to describe elements of a triumph (Mart. 3.66.3, *laurigeros... triumphos*; 7.6.6, *Martia laurigera... pila*; 10.10.1 *laurigeris... fascibus*), in particular, triumphal chariots (Stat. *Theb.* 12.520, *laurigero curru*; Mart. 7.8.8, *laurigeros... equos*) or the palace of the victorious

emperor (Mart. 8.1.1, 12.2.11). The use of *lauriger* for Amphiarus, then, is aptly ambiguous: the seer is wearing laurel as a servant of Phoebus, but the military connotations of *lauriger* (used also of his chariot at 8.174, *laurigeri currus*), point to his change from prophet to warrior.

43-44 *urguet et hostilem propellens caedibus amnem / turbidus*: following 1.39-40 (cf. note *ad loc*), this line anticipates Hippomedon's battle with Ismenos, an episode invented by Statius as far as Theban tradition was concerned, but modelled on Achilles' battle with the river Scamander (*Il.* 21.136-381). On his way to recover the unburied corpse of Tydeus Hippomedon kills Crenaeus, the grandson of the river Ismenos, causing the river god to confront Hippomedon, and hence the river becomes his "enemy" (*hostilem... amnem*; cf. intimations of Hippomedon's giant or theomach qualities at Aesch. *Sept.* 486ff.; Eur. *Phoen.* 125ff., 1113ff.) Rather than withdrawing from the fight, Hippomedon advances against the river (*propellens*), which is filled with corpses (*caedibus*). The adjective *turbidus* normally describes winds, storms or rivers (*OLD* s.v. 1; cf. Verg. *G.* 3.350, *turbidus ... Hister*), but Statius' use of *turbidus* here (*OLD* s.v. 5 "(of persons) disorderly in movement, behavior, speech, wild, impatient") for Hippomedon (also used at *Theb.* 7.669 and 10.738 for Capaneus; 8.538 for Tydeus; and 12.697 for Theseus) is similar to Virgil's description of warriors fighting angrily in battle (e.g. Turnus at *A.* 9.57 and 12.10; Mezentius at 10.763). The use of *turbidus* in reference to Hippomedon fighting with Ismenos (himself described as *turbidus* at *Theb.* 9.420), then, limns both the force of Hippomedon's opposition to the river while he manages to resist him (9.469-80), and also the wildness he displays in his taunt to the god that brings about his downfall. On Hippomedon in the *Thebaid*, see **Characterisation**, 71-73.

44-45 *plorandaque bella protervi / Arcados* refers to the *aristeia* and death of Parthenopaeus at 9.683-907. Parthenopaeus, the son of Atalanta, was a native of Arcadia (hence *Arcados* here) who moved to Argos (cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 1153), and joined the expedition against Thebes (cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 526ff.; Eur. *Phoen.* 1104ff.). In the *Thebaid*, Parthenopaeus is excessively eager (*OLD* s.v. *protervus* 1, "bold, violent, reckless") to attain glory by fighting in the war and here Statius foreshadows the mourning over his death in battle (*plorandaque bella*). Though Parthenopaeus is introduced as a nameless Arcadian in the proem, his death stands for the grievous loss of life in war and mourning with which Statius closes the poem (12.805-807, *Arcada quo plactu genetrix Erymathia clamat, / Arcada, consumpto servantem sanguine vultus, / Arcada, quem geminae pariter flevire cohorts*, as a 'doomed youth' see Seo (2013) 122-45). The *plorandaque bella* echo the "sad wars" of Virgil and Horace (*V. Ecl.* 6.7, *tristia bella*; Hor. *Ars* 73, *tristia bella*), and so the Statius' proem closes on a note of lament and horror (cf 1.45n.), appropriate to the kind of war announced in its first line (*fraternas acies*). On Parthenopaeus in the *Thebaid*, see **Characterisation**, 73-75).

45 *atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus* foretells the horror of Capaneus climbing the Theban towers before challenging Jupiter at *Theb.* 10.827-939 (for hints of *giganto/theomach* cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 423ff.; Soph. *Ant.* 127-37; Eur. *Phoen.* 128, 1128, 1172-86). The "different" (*OLD* s.v. *alius* 7, "other than what is familiar, strange, new, different") level of horror that this episode promises to generate (*alio... horrore canendus*), is echoed at *Theb.* 10.827-36 when Statius summons the Muses for a force of greater poetic frenzy in order to recount Capaneus' exploits (10.829-30, *non mihi iam solito vatium de more canendum; / maior ab Aoniis poscenda amentia lucis*; cf. also 8.373-74, *sed iam bella vocant: alias nova suggere vires, / Calliope, maiorque chebyn mihi tendat Apollo*; see Myers (2015) 41-45 on Statius' invocations of the Muses throughout the poem). The *horror* Statius

anticipates here evokes the *horrida bella* foretold by the Sibyl at Verg. *A.* 6.86 and introduced by Virgil at 7.41 (*dicam horrida bella*), and his promise of different, or greater, horror points to his competitive *aemulatio* of Virgil. The first use of *cano* in connection with the *Thebaid* comes as the last word of the proem; in contrast to the usual verb of singing (cf. 1.2n. on *evolere*), Statius' use of the gerund suggests that his poetic venture is something forced upon him. On Capaneus in the *Thebaid*, see **Characterisation**, 75-76.

Literary models

Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1415a) outlined the function of epic proems (*τῶν ἐπῶν τὰ προοίμια*) as providing a sample of the poem (*δειγμά ἐστι τοῦ λόγου*) in order to inform the poet's audience what the poem will be about (*ἵνα προειδῶσι περὶ οὗ ἦν ὁ λόγος*) and thereby not keep them in suspense (*μὴ κρέμῃται ἡ διάνοια*). In classical literary critical works, namely those of Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian and Servius, Homer was regarded as the exemplary epic poet, his poetry providing the model structure and content that all epic poetry should follow.⁷⁶ As Roche remarks, however, there is a 'certain circularity' informing the critical logic of Homer's exemplarity, insofar as Aristotle himself was quantifying Homer's epics in order to determine what epic should contain,⁷⁷ and likewise, Aristotle's theory ultimately influenced subsequent critical approaches to epic in antiquity.⁷⁸ As for how the proem should achieve its introductory function, Servius formulates a tri-partite structure: the proposition of the poem's theme (*propositio*), an invocation of divine inspiration (*invocatio*), and a brief summary of the narrative (*narratio*),⁷⁹ a structure visible in the proems of Homer, Apollonius, Virgil and Valerius.⁸⁰ Statius appears to follow this tradition by offering his *propositio* in the opening two lines (1.1-2, *fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiis... sontesque Thebas*), but he expresses a more complicated relationship with his Muses than a traditional *invocatio*,⁸¹ and his delivery of the *narratio* (1.33-40) follows a protracted process of deliberation upon the material for his narrative. The suggestion Statius makes regarding his own uncertainty about where to begin his poem (1.3-4, *unde iubetis / ire deae?*), as Rosati terms it, 'thematizes the problem of how to begin.'⁸² In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which Statius engages with literary tradition, in particular, with his epic predecessors, but equally how his appropriation of a variety of other genres is integral for his self-representation.

The Poetics of Belatedness

For Quintilian, Homer's supremacy in the epic tradition was closely contested by Virgil,⁸³ and he was revered in Rome as Homer's heir to the epic tradition.⁸⁴ Quintilian also supposed that all the

⁷⁶ cf. e.g. Hor. *Ars* 73-74; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.51; Serv. *A.* 1.8.

⁷⁷ Roche (2012) 91-92.

⁷⁸ E.g. Russell (2006) 326 suggests that the subject of Horace's *Ars Poetica* 'is not poetry, but poetics: the body of theory formulated, largely out of earlier insights, by Aristotle and his successors, and current in Hellenistic times in a variety of handbooks and summaries.'

⁷⁹ Serv. *A.* 1.8, *sane in tres partes dividunt poetae carmen suum: proponent, invocant, narrant*; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 2.13.1 on the partition of speeches.

⁸⁰ *Propositio*: Hom. *Il.* 1.1-2; *Od.* 1.1-2; AR. 1.1-2; Verg. *A.* 1.1-3; V.Fl. 1.1; *invocatio*: Hom. *Il.* 1.1; *Od.* 1.1, 1.10; AR. 1.1; Verg. *A.* 1.8; V.Fl. 1.5, 1.20-21; *narratio*: Hom. *Il.* 1.2-7; *Od.* 1.3-9; AR. 1.2-4; Verg. *A.* 1.3-7; V.Fl. 1.2-4.

⁸¹ E.g. Ahl (1986) 2817 compares the invocation made by Statius 'obliquely and indecisively' to that by Virgil made 'succinctly and imperiously.'

⁸² Rosati (2002) 231.

⁸³ Cf. *Inst.* 10.1.85; 12.11.26. For Roman epic as an intrinsically self-conscious and palimpsestic genre, see Boyle (1993); cf. Petronius *Sat.* 118 on literary knowledge: *ceterum neque generosior spiritus vanitatem amat, neque concipere aut edere partum mens potest nisi intrenti flumine litterarum inundata*.

⁸⁴ For a recent study on Virgil's engagement with Homer, see Dekel (2012); cf. *Silv.* 4.4.54-55 for Virgil's tomb as a "temple"; cf. Oosterhuis (2007) 39 on the reverence expressed for Virgil by Martial, Silius and Statius.

“other epic poets trailed far behind” Homer and Virgil (*Inst.* 10.1.87, *ceteri omnes longe secuntur*). The supremacy attributed to the *Aeneid* in Roman epic tradition was seen to cast subsequent poets under Virgil’s shadow as his ‘epic successors.’⁸⁵ The weight of Virgil’s influence is clear in the poetry of his successors, and Statius has been considered particularly self-conscious of his status as a post-Virgilian epicist.⁸⁶ For a while, this informed many critical approaches to Statius’ *Thebaid* as a second-tier Silver Latin epic;⁸⁷ more recently, however, attention has been paid to the pride Statius demonstrates in his creative handling of literary material, inviting his readers to judge the success and originality of his poetry as a creative imitation of multiple literary models.⁸⁸ A significant focus of these critical approaches is Statius’ explicit acknowledgement of his belatedness to Virgil, principally, his indication of Virgil’s model for the night raid in Book 10 (*Theb.* 10-445-48),⁸⁹ and his address to the *Thebaid* in the envoy, urging it to “follow in the footsteps” of the *Aeneid* (12.816-17, *nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longa sequere et vestigia semper adora*).⁹⁰ Accordingly, the hyper-awareness Statius expresses about his relationship to Virgil encourages his audience to adopt a critical approach to reading his poetry as a creative reformulation of his literary tradition.

Although Statius most explicitly points to the *Aeneid* as the subtext for his *Thebaid* with the *Aeneid*, the very first words of the proem, as Roche points out, ‘look back, not to Virgil’s *Aeneid* but to Lucan’s *De Bello Civili*.’⁹¹ Statius’ “fraternal battle-lines” (*fraternas acies*) clearly evoke the “kindred battle-lines” (*BC* 1.4, *cognatas acies*) of Lucan’s proem, which prompts an assessment of Statius’ treatment of the fratricidal war between Polynices and Eteocles in connection to the Roman civil war in Lucan’s historical epic. As Hardie has argued, since any creative imitation of the *Aeneid* was an implicitly political act from its conception,⁹² the immediate and unmistakable suggestion of an imitation of Lucan points to Statius’ engagement with Lucan’s treatment of civil war, but also, to an engagement with Lucan’s epic as a response to the *Aeneid*. To quote Roche, ‘Lucan amplifies many of the reservations already contained in the *Aeneid*, partly by looking back from a point in time a century after the end foretold in that text, when the apparent necessity of centralized administration had by now definitely given way to the capricious use of inherited autocratic power.’⁹³ In short, since imperial Roman epic was inherently political and Virgil

⁸⁵ The approach of Hardie’s seminal study (1993); see also ch. 5 of Hinds’ study (1998) 123-44 on ‘Tradition and self-fashioning;’ see Micozzi (2015) for a recent discussion on Statius’ ‘secondariness’, and Leigh (2006) on the ‘rhetoric’ of imitation and emulation in the *Thebaid*. Leigh (2006) 239 n. 103 asserts the ‘inescapable reality’ of Virgil’s supremacy: ‘In one sense the reason why Statius can never outdo his rival is because the contest has already been called off.’

⁸⁶ E.g. Feeney (1991) 340: ‘one of antiquity’s most self-conscious poets;’ Nugent (1996) 70 *ad* 12.816-17 ‘perhaps the most explicit intertextual reference in Latin epic;’ cf. also Dominik (2003) 92.

⁸⁷ For a critique of these claims, see e.g. Ahl (1986) 2804-810 and Coleman (2003) 10-11.

⁸⁸ Pollmann (2004) 53-54, points to the opinions of Petronius (*Sat.* 118.3) and Seneca (*Epist.* 84.5), who advocate the use of multiple models for originality.

⁸⁹ For Statius’ reformulation of the episode, see Markus (1997) 56-62; Pollmann (2001) 16-28; Ganiban (2007) 131-36, 3 n. 14 for further bibliography.

⁹⁰ For an exclusive treatment of the envoy, see Dominik (2002); cf. Ganiban (2007) for understanding the *Thebaid* as a reinterpretation of the *Aeneid*; see Rosati (2008) for Statius’ literary succession and Leigh (2006) 224-25 *ad loc* for the idea of Statius echoing the language of literary criticism.

⁹¹ Roche (2015) 393; cf. Vessey (1986) 2967.

⁹² Hardie (1993) xi.

⁹³ Roche (2012) 2; see Hardie (1993) 2-3, for the ‘open-ended invitation’ offered by the *Aeneid* for subsequent revision and redefinition.

exalted as its model,⁹⁴ Statius' poetic emulation of Virgil not only demands a political reading of the *Thebaid* against the *Aeneid*, as Ganiban has shown,⁹⁵ but also encompasses the other Roman epicists' engagement with Virgil.

By introducing a mythological epic about the *fraternas acies* between Polynices and Eteocles, Statius points to the *De Bello Civili* as a poetic model while intimating a withdrawal from Lucan, whose bold use of the historical form in his critical portrayal of the fall of the Republic offered little room for ambiguity.⁹⁶ Far from suggesting, however, that the Greek mythological setting of Statius' poem precluded discourse about Roman history and politics, the allegorical function of myth and its dangerous potential was a fact acknowledged by the authors of antiquity themselves.⁹⁷ As McNelis suggests, 'by the Flavian period the correlation between Greek myth and Roman realities was so strong that Valerius Flaccus reversed the dynamic and compared the fight between the mythical Aetes and Perses to actual Roman civil war.'⁹⁸ The possibility that Statius' mythological epic pertaining in some way to contemporary Rome would not only have been possible, but more likely, the expectation of an audience accustomed to typological thinking⁹⁹ - as Hardie asks, 'after Virgil could any mythological epic escape such a reading?'¹⁰⁰ In the last couple of decades in particular, many political readings of the *Thebaid* have been offered,¹⁰¹ but for the purposes of this chapter, my interest lies in discussing the significance of Thebes as the choice of mythological setting for Statius' epic, and how Statius expresses this choice in the proem.

In the *recusatio* Statius creates an opposition between contemporary Rome and the Theban mythological past, purporting to omit the former in favour of the latter for his epic. However, as discussed above, Statius' suggestion that his poem about Thebes equates to an exclusion of Rome is undermined, firstly, by the inherently political nature of Roman epic and the established use of myth to communicate contemporary Roman realities. Secondly, by Statius' time there existed a tradition of using Thebes as an ideological paradigm for Roman self-exploration, particularly in the context of civil war.¹⁰² In particular, the fratricidal origins of Thebes in the story of the Spartoi offered a parallel for Rome's foundation via Romulus and Remus. Moreover, the Argive-Theban war that culminates in the mutual fratricide of Polynices and Eteocles functioned as a prototypical myth of internecine strife, a horror experienced by the Romans in the form of civil war on numerous occasions in their recent history.

⁹⁴ Boyle (1993) 3 argues Roman epic's political and historical focus was 'reinforced' by Virgil, but certainly established in the genre's inauguration, that is, with Naevius' *Bellum Punicum* and Ennius' *Annales*.

⁹⁵ Ganiban (2007) 3: 'Statius' *Thebaid* offers a critical reinterpretation of the politics and moral virtues of kingship in the *Aeneid*;' cf. McNelis (2007) 5-8 for Statius' engagement with Virgil in the context of Flavian Rome as a reestablishment of the Augustan past.

⁹⁶ See Roche (2012) 4-5 for particularly unambiguous examples of negative criticism in Lucan; see **Restraint**, 61-62 for the idea of 'boldness'.

⁹⁷ Braund (2006) 260 points to the risk expressed in Maternus' composition of a *Thyestes* in Tac. *Dial.* 3.2-3; McNelis (2007) 3 also points to Tiberius' offence at the *Atreus* of Amelius Scaurus; on the allegorical use of myth in Greek tragedy, see e.g. Ahl (1986) 2808; Braund (2006) 266 points out the durable popularity of Euripides' *Phoenissae*.

⁹⁸ Cf. V.Fl. 6.402-409.

⁹⁹ Newlands (2011a) 3; cf. **Introduction**, 7 n. 54.

¹⁰⁰ Hardie (1993) 65.

¹⁰¹ See e.g. Ahl (1986) 2812-22; Henderson (1993); for strong political readings of the *Thebaid* as a critique of the Flavian regime see Dominik (1994) esp. 130-80 and McGuire (1997); as a more ideological critique of regal power, see Braund (2006) 268 and Ganiban (2007) 231. Since Theseus' intervention in Book 12 is significant for political interpretations of the poem see the bibliography provided by Criado (2015) 291 nn. 1-3 for 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' readings of Theseus.

¹⁰² Henderson (1998) 219; McNelis (2007) 4.

Civil War, Rome and Thebes

The Roman Republic existed in a more or less constant state of civil strife until Octavian's victory over Mark Antony at the battle of Actium in 31 BCE,¹⁰³ from which the Principate was established with the re-named Augustus Caesar as its *princeps*. While Augustus presented himself as a bringer of peace restoring the Republic, the Principate was a monarchy disguised by the retention of constitutional forms of the Republic government,¹⁰⁴ and although the Principate persisted, the peace it purported to ensure did not.¹⁰⁵ Following the rebellion which resulted in Nero's suicide, the civil war and rapid changes of power in 68-69 CE underscore the fact that the Roman civil strife of the Late Republic was perfectly possible under the imperial system.

Since these civil wars entailed Romans fighting fellow Romans, they were presented as a suicidal form of war by Lucan, with Rome turning its own hand against itself (*BC* 1.3, *in sua victricis conversum viscera dextrum*; 1.23, *in te vertus manus*).¹⁰⁶ Horace, likewise, expresses the suicidal quality of civil war as a paradoxical fulfillment of the wishes of Rome's foreign enemies (*Epod.* 7.9-10, *sed ut secundum vota Parthorum sua / urbs haec periret dextera*), and as such, the self-destructive quality of civil war was also seen to be futile. Lucan, for instance, in his proem asks fellow Romans why they are determined to wage wars that could not produce triumphs (*BC* 1.12, *bella geri placuit nullos habitura triumphos?*).

For the Romans, then, to engage in civil war was to participate in a self-defeating struggle with a paradoxical outcome: victory produced no winners, and the losses, therefore, served no victorious purpose.¹⁰⁷ As such, Rome's tendency to lapse into civil strife prompted enquiry into the causes of something so entirely self-destructive that it seemed, to Horace and Lucan, to indicate madness (Hor. *Epod.* 7.13, *furorae caecos*; Luc. *BC* 1.8, *quis furor, o cives, quae tanta licentia ferri?*). The ideological explanation was seen to lie in a dark side of Roman nature, offered in the story of their origins that was tainted by Romulus' murder of his brother Remus. Lucan points to Rome's origins in fratricide (*BC* 1.93-95, *nec gentibus ullis / credite, nec longe fatorum exempla petantur: / fraterno primi maduerunt sanguine muri*),¹⁰⁸ a crime that Horace had also expressed as a curse to future Roman generations (*Epod.* 7.17-20, *acerba fata Romanos agunt / scelusque fraternae necis, / ut inmerentis fluxit in terram Remi / sacer nepotibus cruor*).¹⁰⁹ The story of Romulus' fratricide was one of two myths about Rome's origins, the other being the story of Aeneas' arrival in Italy from Troy, the subject of Virgil's *Aeneid* (cf. *A.* 1.1-3, *arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris / Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit / litora*).¹¹⁰ By virtue of Rome's dual foundation, Thebes offered an ideological space for the Romans to explore origins, with the exiled founder Cadmus resembling

¹⁰³ Flower (2010) 73 identifies 'the first real civil war at Rome as that of Sulla' insofar as 'it destroyed the Republic as traditionally defined.'

¹⁰⁴ Henderson (1998) 1, '[Julius Caesar and Augustus] provided paradigms and cautionary models from which the empire was both legitimised as a paternalist principate and reviled as a tyrannical dictatorship.' In this sense, compare Augustus' self-presentation of constitutional adherence in his *Res Gestae* 1.1-8 and Tacitus' sceptical analysis of Augustus and the Principate at *Ann.* 1: *cuncta dicordis civilibus fessa nomine principis sub imperium accepit*.

¹⁰⁵ McNelis (2007) 5.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. also Verg. *A.* 6.833 for Anchises' command: *neu patriae validas in viscera vertite viris*; V.Fl. 6.408-409, *in sua versi / funera*; see Dinter (2012) 9-49 on body imagery in Lucan's epic.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Sen. *Phoen.* 491-92, *bellum... in quo est optimus / vinci*.

¹⁰⁸ See Gibson (2010) *passim*, esp. 33-34 on Lucan's presentation of causation.

¹⁰⁹ For perceptions and representations of civil war, see the essays in Breed, Damon and Rossi (eds.) 2010.

¹¹⁰ cf. *A.* 1.292-93, for Virgil's suppression of Romulus' fratricide, *Remo cum fratre Quirinus / iura dabunt*). See Bannon's remarks (1998) 5 about models of fraternal symbolism in Augustan Rome, e.g. the divine twins Castor and Pollux, serving as models of fraternal *pietas*, in place of the emblem of fraternal discord, Romulus and Remus.

Aeneas, and the internecine conflict of Spartoi evoking the story of Romulus and Remus.

The war over the Theban throne, though fought between Argos and Thebes, was defined by the horror of the mutual fratricide of Polynices and Eteocles, and traditionally, therefore, the nature of the entire war is coloured in fratricidal, rather than suicidal, terms.¹¹¹ In Propertius and Seneca, for instance, the war between Polynices and Eteocles is associated with “fraternal arms” (Prop. 1.7.2, *arma fraternae tristia militiae*; Sen. *Phoen.* 321, *arma fraterna*). Ovid seems to have been the first to classify the mutual killing of the Spartoi in terms of both fraternal strife *and* civil war (cf. *Met.* 3.117, *civilibus bellis*; 3.123, *mutua vulnera fratres*; 3.127, *fraterna arma*).¹¹² When Lucan compares Roman civil war to the conflict of the Spartoi, he remarks upon their internecine conflict as a “dire omen” for Polynices and Eteocles (*BC* 4.550-2, *sic semine Cadmi / emicuit Dircaea cohors ceciditque suorum / volneribus dirum Thebanis fratribus omen*). What these examples collectively demonstrate is, firstly, a Roman tradition of understanding the fratricidal war between Polynices and Eteocles as being caused by their origins in fratricide as an ‘emblematic precursor’;¹¹³ secondly, that there was a tradition of exploring the ideological ‘sameness’ between Thebes and Rome.¹¹⁴

In his proem, Statius points to his awareness of the pre-existing literary tradition of Thebes, and also engages with the traditional use of Thebes as an ideological paradigm in Roman thought. His decision to pass over several elements of Theban mythology in the *praeteritio* at 1.4-14 highlights the familiarity of his theme, in a sense, acknowledging and emphasizing the fact that the Argive-Theban conflict and the house of Oedipus were already ‘well-worn themes.’¹¹⁵

Considering the vastness of literature about Theban mythology, the suggestion of Statius’ *praeteritio*, that he need no more than allude to the familiar material that will not be in his poem, invites his audience to consider the treatments with which he suggests they should be familiar. As Vessey puts it, [w]ith a greater exactitude than usual, here each reader is his own prologue.¹¹⁶ We have seen the clear influence of Ovid’s Theban book on Statius’ proem, in particular, the Ovidian chronology of events and the pattern of kin violence from the city’s foundation.¹¹⁷ In addition to Ovid, the models of Lucan and Seneca are also significant. If we consider Statius’ allusion to the Spartoi, for instance, (1.7-8, *trepidum si Martis aperti / agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis*), there are linguistic similarities with and allusions to the same episode in Lucan and Seneca (Luc. *BC* 4.554, *cognato tantos inplerunt sanguine sulcos*; Sen. *Oed.* 750, *proelia fratrum*). Statius’ mention of Cadmus’ fear in the episode (1.7, *trepidum*) can be seen to resemble Cadmus’ surprise at the unexpected emergence of the soldiers from the soil in Ovid’s account (*Met.* 3.106, *fide maius*, 3.114, *territus hoste novo*), as well as the fear felt by Cadmus *after* watching the internecine conflict in Seneca’s account (*Oed.* 743-4 *horret tantis advena montris / populique timet bella recentis*). The fear of Seneca’s Cadmus is directed towards the impiety of the fraternal conflict of the Spartoi, an element of the conflict that both Seneca and Lucan emphasize (cf. e.g. Luc. *BC* 4.449, *nefas*

¹¹¹ See especially Henderson (1998) and Braund (2006).

¹¹² Pollmann (2004) 30; Boyle (1993) 3 points to Ovid’s significant role in making it ‘more difficult in the Roman context for mythological epic to be apolitical;’ see Braund (2006) 266-67 on the renewed interest in Theban material in post-Augustan poetry, following Ovid’s extended treatment in the *Metamorphoses*.

¹¹³ Hill (1990) 101.

¹¹⁴ See Braund (2006) 268-71 and McNelis (2007) 4-5, for the ideological ‘sameness’ of Thebes for the Romans, in contrast to the ideological ‘otherness’ of Thebes for the Athenians offered in Zeitlin’s study, ‘Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama’ (1990).

¹¹⁵ Ganiban (2007) 47.

¹¹⁶ Vessey (1986) 2968.

¹¹⁷ See **Introduction**, 8-9 for Ovid’s model, and **Commentary** *ad* 1.4-9 for the Theban paradigm of kin violence.

bellorum; Sen. *Oed.* 748, *hac transierit civile nefas*). In Statius' proem, the war between Polynices and Eteocles is introduced as a fraternal conflict over the throne, fought with "profane hatred" (1.1-2 *fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiis*). Significantly, the manner in which Statius immediately looks back to the fratricidal Theban origins connects the Spartoi and the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles. The act of looking back into the past and to one's origins introduces a significant programmatic feature of the poem. Pollmann, for instance, compares how Statius' proem and the shield of Theseus in Book 12 both look back into the past, a 'pointed contrast to the *Aeneid* where both the proem and the shield of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 8 look into the future.'¹¹⁸

Notwithstanding the obvious parallels between Thebes and Rome, Lucan had made the connection explicit in his description of the omens prior to the outbreak of civil war between Caesar and Pompey, where the splitting of the Vestal flame is described as an imitation of the split flame that appeared on the funeral pyre of Polynices and Eteocles (*BC* 1.552, *Thebanos imitata rogos*).¹¹⁹ As Malamud suggests, 'power relations in Thebes and power relations in Rome are not unrelated, history and politics cannot be neatly excluded from epic, and will not be absent from the *Thebaid*.'¹²⁰ If we reconsider *fraternas acies*, the first two words of Statius' epic function programmatically as a conflation of the established tradition of the Rome-Thebes parallel. That is, since the war between Polynices and Eteocles was the fraternal war *par excellence*,¹²¹ and since the Roman civil war from which the Principate emerged was unforgettably introduced in Lucan's epic as *cognatas acies*, Statius' introduction of *fraternas acies* combines two exemplary elements from the tradition of comparing Rome to Thebes. In fact, the word order of Statius' *propositio* points to his use of Thebes to discuss the concerns of first-century Rome insofar as he introduces the themes of civil war, monarchical power and problems with dynastic succession (1.1-2, *fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiis*),¹²² before adding Thebes as a specification (1.2, *sontesque... Thebas*).¹²³ By postponing the mention of Thebes, Statius moves his examination of civil war away from the historical reality of Lucan's "Emathian plains" (*BC* 1.1, *Emathios ... campos*), to the mythological setting of Thebes. Moreover, the overall structure of the proem itself suggests a parallel between contemporary Rome and the Theban past insofar as the *recusatio* to cover Roman themes and the encomium is sandwiched between Statius' allusions to Theban material.¹²⁴ For Pollmann, the epic's 'aetiological character is intensified by its mythological dimension,' in the way it presents a 'general pattern likely to repeat itself over and over again, thereby offering an aetiological explanation for later times as well.'¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ Pollmann (2004) 22.

¹¹⁹ McNelis (2007) 4.

¹²⁰ Malamud (1995) 195; cf. Roche (2011) 60-62 on Lucan's extensive employment of apostrophe and its rhetorical force.

¹²¹ For the Argive-Theban war as a mythic archetype for all civil war, see Ahl (1986) 2869; Braund (2006) 266.

¹²² McNelis (2007) 5; Hardie (1993) 10 notes that '[b]rothers, harmonious or discordant, continue to be a theme in the history of the first-century imperial household: Tiberius and Drusus, Gaius and Lucius, Nero and Britannicus, Titus and Domitian.'

¹²³ Caviglia (1973) 88 *ad loc.*

¹²⁴ Ahl (1986) 2819 points to Virgil's linking the story of Troy's fall with contemporary Rome and Ovid recounting the universe from its generation to his own day; Dominik (1994) 168 sees the structure as 'provocatively suggest[ing] the contemporary relevance of his poem.'

¹²⁵ Pollmann (2004) 17.

The Epic of Statius

A neat description of epic is perhaps less useful than an unspecific one,¹²⁶ along the lines of ‘poetry in dactylic hexameter delivered in elevated, lofty style concerning itself with some combination of kings, heroes and battles.’¹²⁷ Such themes are prescribed by Horace (*Ars* 73, *res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella*) and, equally, circumscribed by non-epic poets as unsuitable topics for non-epic poetry.¹²⁸ The themes Statius introduces in the proem fit the bill, with the mention of “kings” (1.1, *regna*; 1.32. *tyrannis*, 1.34, *regum*), “heroes” (1.41, *heroum*), “weapons” (1.33, *arma*) and “battle” (1.1, *acies*, 1.44, *bella*). Considering also the explicit remark about his poem ‘following the footsteps’ of the *Aeneid*, the clear influences of Lucan’s civil war epic and the Theban books of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the idea that Statius’ *Thebaid* is to be understood as an ‘epic’ composition appears to be a straightforward one.¹²⁹ Moreover, the remarks he makes in his *Silvae* about the *Thebaid* characterize it as the more elevated poetry from which his *Silvae* serve as a relief.¹³⁰ As such, the hierarchy of the ‘grander’ *Thebaid* and ‘smaller’ *Silvae* draws upon Virgil’s progression from the pastoral *Eclogues* which refute, but also anticipate, the *reges et proelia* (*Ecl.* 6.3) recounted in the epic *Aeneid*.¹³¹

It seems, then, as if Statius is insistent upon presenting his poem as an epic, or, as Parkes puts it, ‘engag[ing] with the theoretical notion of epic.’¹³² Through his intricate reworking of Homer, Virgil followed a tradition of Hellenistic poetics that set the example for all Roman epicists¹³³ and McNelis has demonstrated the influence of Callimachean poetics on the *Thebaid*.¹³⁴ In the proem, for instance, Statius expresses a typically Hellenistic concern about his choice and handling of his poetic material.¹³⁵ Following Callimachus’ rejection of continuous song (*Callim. Aet.* fr. 1.3 Gelzer, *ἄεισμα διηνεκῆς*) Statius’ delimitation of his poem’s scope at 1.16 (*limes...carminis*) has been seen to point to Ovid’s proem, which paradoxically introduces a seemingly un-Callimachean “continuous song” (*Met.* 1.4, *perpetuum... carmen*) in Callimachean terms of refinement (1.4, *deducite*).¹³⁶ Within the general idea of *limes* as a “limit or boundary” (*OLD* s.v. 2d) is the sense of a “path or track” (s.v. 3a), which, in the programmatic context of Statius’ proem, invites comparison with the lines of the *Aetia*’s prologue where Apollo orders Callimachus to write original and refined poetry (cf. *Aet.* fr. 1.23-30 Gelzer), expressed as the avoidance of the “wide and well-trodden road” and the pursuit of the “untrodden and narrow

¹²⁶ See Martin (2005) on epic as genre.

¹²⁷ Martin (2005) 9 privileges a functional categorization of epic over ‘formal’ differences, arguing that “epic” ‘plays a necessary role that transcends genre (thus making fruitless the attempt to pin it down as a single genre).’

¹²⁸ I develop this at **Literary Models**, 47ff. in my discussion of Statius’ *recusatio*.

¹²⁹ For approaches to allusion, intertextuality and tradition see e.g. Conte (1988); Hinds (1998); Edmunds (2001).

¹³⁰ Bessone (2014) 216.

¹³¹ See Thomas’ discussion (2000) 101-104 on *Ecl.* 6 and *A.* 7.41-42.

¹³² Parkes (draft); considering the explicit nature of Statius’ debt to Virgil, Derrida’s question (1979) 86 (in Edmunds (2001) 149) seems pertinent: ‘how could we make a genre work without referring to it [quasi-]quotationally, indicating at some point, “See, this is a work of such-and-such a genre?” Such an indication does not belong to the genre and makes the statement of belonging an ironical exercise. It interrupts the very belonging of which it is a necessary condition.’

¹³³ Clausen (1987); Thomas (2000); for Virgil’s adaption of Homeric material through Apollonius, see Nelis (2001).

¹³⁴ E.g. McNelis (2007) 23: ‘Statius situates his poetry in the tradition of Roman Callimacheanism.’

¹³⁵ See Hutchinson (2006) 107 on Hellenistic approaches to epic.

¹³⁶ McNelis (2007) 16; *OLD* s.v. *deduco* 4b, “to compose” (literary work, “spin”, “tell the story of”; as a smaller type of poetry cf. Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.225, *tenui deducta poemata filo*; Prop. 1.16.41. See also Ganiban (2015) 74 *ad Ach.* 1.7, *deducere* for the suggestion that Statius introduces his *Achilleid* as an epic ‘that will be Alexandrian and particularly Ovidian in nature;’ cf. Myers (1994) on Ovid and Callimachus.

path”, the latter pointing to the effort and selectivity required to create poetry of refinement and originality.¹³⁷

If the articulation of the *limes*, then, incorporates the Callimachean path, we might understand Statius to be avoiding the Theban material already dealt with by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*,¹³⁸ in the similar way that Statius’ *plura vacant* purports to tell the story of Achilles not told by Homer.¹³⁹ The *limes*, which Statius inserts after his discussion of the *longa series* of Theban material has also been seen as a Callimachean rejection of the Theban epics from the Cyclic tradition, and Antimachus’ *Thebaid*,¹⁴⁰ which was criticized by Callimachus and Catullus on stylistic grounds.¹⁴¹ As critics have demonstrated, the remarks Statius makes about his *Thebaid* suggest a purposeful engagement with Callimachean ideas of poetry and their Roman reception.¹⁴² In the poem’s envoy, for instance, the mention of his *Thebaid*’s composition (12.811-12, *o mihi bisseos multum vigilata per annos / Thebat*) evokes the Hellenistic tradition of poetic labour and sleeplessness. Moreover, in his *Silvae* Statius makes regular comments upon his epic composition that assert his tireless dedication and revision of it,¹⁴³ in particular, the idea of polishing his work with the ‘file’ (*lima*).¹⁴⁴ Like Ovid’s finely spun *perpetuum carmen*, the idea Statius presents of a highly polished epic, of course, is perhaps paradoxical in Callimachean terms,¹⁴⁵ but the suggestion of engagement with Hellenistic poetics introduces a critical and literary dimension to his epic.¹⁴⁶ As Micozzi puts it, Statius ‘creates the impression of *déjà-lu*’ by drawing attention to his engagement with tradition and his reworking of it. Keith has shown, for instance, how Statius’ characters themselves express an awareness of Ovid’s Thebes,¹⁴⁷ which adds a layer of irony to Statius’ suggestion that he will pass over the story already told by Ovid. Indeed, Jupiter’s question *quis funera Cadmi / nesciat?* (1.227-28) calls to attention the self-conscious nature of Statius’ reformulation of Theban material.¹⁴⁸

In contrast with poetics of labour and painstaking revision with the file, Statius also creates the feeling in his proem that his poetry is being performed spontaneously (*calor*) with the accompaniment of a lyre (1.33, *nunc tendo chebyn*).¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Statius’ aporetic questions to the Muses and his use of priamels typify lyric and hymnic poetry,¹⁵⁰ and his invocation of Clio (1.41, *quem prius heroum, Clio, dabis?*), in particular, recalls Horace (*Carm.* 1.2.1-2, *quem virum aut heroa lyra vel acritibia sumis celebrare, Clio?*) and, in turn, Pindar (*Ol.* 2.2, *τίνα θεόν, τίν’ ἥρωα, τίνα δ’ ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν*). Once again, the *Silvae* provide some elucidation of Statius’ poetic self-fashioning.

¹³⁷ On these lines, see Harder (2012) 60-72.

¹³⁸ Feeney (1991) 344 n. 106; Galli (2013) 60-61.

¹³⁹ See Myers (2015) 37 and Micozzi (2015) 338 *ad loc* as a similar creation of poetic space in relation to Homer.

¹⁴⁰ Dewar (1991) xxix; Markus (2003) 452; Heslin (2005) 80-81; Myers (2015) 37.

¹⁴¹ For these criticisms, see Markus (2003) 452 n. 49; cf. Cat. 95.11, *tumido... Antimacho*; cf. Gibson (2010) 32.

¹⁴² In particular, McNelis (2007); also Nauta (2006) and Newlands (2002).

¹⁴³ McNelis (2007) 20-22. For sleeplessness in Statius’ *Silvae* see 3.5.1-2; 3.5.33-35; for labour, see 3.2.143; 3.5.35-36; cf. Callim. *Ep.* 6,1; 27.4; Cinna fr. 11.1-2 Beuchner; cf. also Sacerdoti (2014) on sleeplessness in Flavian poetry.

¹⁴⁴ *Silv.* 4.7.26, *Thebais multa cruciata lima*; see Williams (1992) on representations of polished poetry; cf. Cat. 1.2, *arida modo pumice expolitur*; Prop. 3.1.8, *exactus tenui pumice*; Hor. *Ars* 291, *poetarum limae labor et mora*.

¹⁴⁵ Newlands (2012) 46 argues that ‘[a]ll [Statius’] works are characterised by a generic tension between epic and Callimachean principles, between expansiveness and restraint; paradox and antithesis, moreover, are fundamental stylistic tropes for Statius’ poetics’.

¹⁴⁶ Micozzi (2015) 329.

¹⁴⁷ See Keith (2002); cf. Micozzi (2015) 325-29.

¹⁴⁸ Jupiter’s question recalls Statius’ own praeteritio at 1.15-16, *atque adeo iam nunc gemitus et prospera Cadmi / praeterisse sinam*.

¹⁴⁹ See **Commentary** ad 1.3 on *calor* and the discussion below on inspiration pp. 47-48.

¹⁵⁰ See Markus (2003) 443-44.

In *Silv.* 4.7, Statius addresses Pindar as the “ruler of the lyric band” (tr. Shackleton-Bailey (2015) 275, *Silv.* 4.7.5, *regnator lyricae cohortis*) before making the claim of “hallowing” Pindar’s Thebes “in Latian song” (4.7.7-8, *tuas cantu Latia sacravi, / Pindare, Thebas*). Of interest is the fact that Pindar was, firstly, considered one of the greatest lyric poets,¹⁵¹ and, secondly, a Theban poet. Statius’ self-alignment with Pindar as a poet of Thebes is echoed in the proem of the *Achilleid* where he remarks that Thebes reckons him alongside Amphion (*Ach.* 1.10, *cumque suo numerant Amphione Thebae*), the poetic founder of Thebes mentioned in the *Thebaid*’s proem (1.9-10).¹⁵²

The mention of Amphion’s poetic foundation of Thebes in the proem stands out insofar as it is the only positive note of Statius’ summary of Theban history, and Amphion’s own mythic biography.¹⁵³ Moreover the *chebys* which Statius purports to be holding at 1.33 was a word for the lyre attributed only to most distinguished mythic poets such as Apollo, Chiron, Orpheus and Amphion.¹⁵⁴ As such, Statius uses the symbolism of the *chebys*-lyre to depict himself as the type of dignified *vates* whose profession was both prestigious and useful in society according to Horace (*Ars* 391-407). In the envoy, Statius makes the claim of the role of Roman national *vates*, his poetry acknowledged by the emperor and Italian youth.¹⁵⁵ Considering the sense of *limes* (*OLD* s.v. 1b, “an object (stone, etc.) set up to mark a boundary”) Statius presents himself as a new Amphion, building Thebes stone by stone, word by word.¹⁵⁶ While a tension exists between poetry of the lyre and that of the file, they can also be seen to be working in combination here insofar as Statius’ Hellenistic reformulation of Theban literary material is presented as the re-construction of a city built by a mythic *vates*.

Inspiration

In both of Homer’s epics, the proem begins with a request made by the poet for divine inspiration, and subsequently, the invocation of an inspiring figure recurs as a sustained feature in the proems of Greek and Roman epic.¹⁵⁷ The impetus for Statius’ *propositio* (1.1-2) is caused by the divine inspiration of Muses in the form of “Pierian heat” (1.3, *Pierius calor*). In contrast to his epic predecessors, however, Statius does not make a request for his inspiration, rather, he announces that his mind has been “struck” by inspiration (1.3, *menti...incidit*), suggesting that his inspired state has simply happened upon him.¹⁵⁸ Critics have pointed out the way in which the lack of request suggests that the force of inspiration acting upon him is unexpected,¹⁵⁹ and therefore, that he does not present himself as a beneficiary of divine assistance, rather, that he

¹⁵¹ Cf. e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 4.2.1-4; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.61.

¹⁵² Cf. *Silv.* 3.2.39-41 for Statius’ alignment with Amphion.

¹⁵³ Bessone (2014) 230. See also **Introduction**, 8-9 for the deviation from Ovid.

¹⁵⁴ See **Commentary** ad 1.33.

¹⁵⁵ Bessone (2014) *passim*; cf. Hor. *Carm.* 4.3.13-16. See Bessone (2014) 200-201 on the tradition of claiming dual citizenship as a measure of poetic prestige.

¹⁵⁶ Heslin (2005) 102; for poetic construction cf. e.g. Pind. *Ol.* 6.1-3; Hor. *Ars* 399. See Berman (2016) 122 on the significance of Alexander’s sacking of Thebes.

¹⁵⁷ See **Commentary** ad 1.3-4 for these invocations; for Silius as a ‘model’ for Statius, I follow Pollmann’s assumption (2004) 48 n. 190, that ‘Statius knew the earlier books of Silius Italicus’ *Punica* (see Juhnke [1972] 12-13), [but] the *Thebaid* was finished clearly before the *Punica* (see McGuire [1997] 100-2);’ see e.g. Soerink (2013) and Rippoll (2015) for the interrelation of Statius and Silius as contemporary poets; invocation was of course by no means specific to epic; for inspiration in Greek and Roman literature, see the essays in Spentzou and Fowler (2002).

¹⁵⁸ Rosati (2002) 230.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. Ahl (1986) 2817; Markus (2003) 434.

assumes an unwilling, passive stance under the compulsion of an external force.¹⁶⁰ For Markus, the way Statius presents his dependence upon divine inspiration resembles the pose of a possessed *vates*, both as a divinely inspired oral poet and a prophet.¹⁶¹ For Hershkowitz, Statius' inspiration appears as a type of poetic madness that provides the impetus for his poem, which points to the significant role madness will play in both a narrative and meta-narrative sense in his 'epic about madness, pervaded by madness, dependent on madness not only for its initial impetus but also for its continued movement.'¹⁶²

The word *calor* ("heat"), which Statius uses to describe his inspiration, has been highlighted by Markus as part of a strategy Statius adopts to create the impression of spontaneity and improvisation in his proem, given the associations of *calor* with extempore poetic composition in Pliny (*Ep.* 2.19.2) and Statius in his *Silvae* (1 *praef.* 3, *subito calore*).¹⁶³ For Markus, the desired effect of 'pseudo-spontaneity' contributes to Statius' pose as a bard composing and performing poetry in front of an audience.¹⁶⁴ Orality was, of course, an integral part of Homeric epic performance,¹⁶⁵ and on the one hand, there really was a performative context for Statius' poetry in Domitianic Rome.¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, as Markus explains, Statius' self-presentation as an oral composer-poet in the proem is more of a fictional pose that he uses to point to the creative process of his poetry.¹⁶⁷ We can see this in the way Statius' *propositio* is caused by a combination of *Pierius calor* and his own poetic *mens*, expressed in juxtaposition (1.3, *Pierius menti calor incidit*). Myers has argued that this verbal juxtaposition combines two traditional views of poetic inspiration, namely, inspired poetry and the poetry of craft. Inspired poetry was understood as being generated by the power of an external force, whereas the poetry of craft was attributed to the rational and conscious mind of the poet.¹⁶⁸ Traditionally, the poetry of divinely inspired poets was regarded as the noblest form, trumping the poetry of craft,¹⁶⁹ and so the claim of being divinely inspired, or frenzied, was a form of 'poetic self-legitimization.'¹⁷⁰ However, the passive nature of such inspiration also equated to the poet's surrender of control over his poetry.¹⁷¹ By conflating the external and internal positions of poetic authority, Statius' *Pierius menti calor incit* resembles Horace (*Carm.* 3.25.1, *Bacche*; 3.25.3, *mente*), Ovid (*Met.* 1.1, *animus*; 1.2,

¹⁶⁰ Myers (2015) 33; Rosati (2002) 230.

¹⁶¹ Markus (2003) 436-43.

¹⁶² Hershkowitz (1998) 148; Statius reinvokes the Muses at 4.32-38, 7.628-31, 8.373-74, 9.315-50, 10.628-31 and 10.827-36.

¹⁶³ Cf. Ov. *Pont.* 2.5.68 for *calor* as poetic inspiration; see Roman (2014) 283 for Statius' insistence on the rapidity of his performance in the *Silvae*.

¹⁶⁴ For the illusions of improvised performance in the proem, see Markus (2003) 432-40; Myers (2015) 33; cf. Race (1992) 19 on rhapsodic self-presentation in Greek poetry.

¹⁶⁵ For orality in epic tradition see Wheeler (2002) 37; Currie (2006) 1-7; Murray (2006) 51-53; cf. Powell (2002) 4 for the strong assertion of the Homeric poems as texts.

¹⁶⁶ Markus (2003) 432; see Nauta (2002) 203 on Statius' epic recitations.

¹⁶⁷ Markus (2003) 432.

¹⁶⁸ Myers (2015) 34; cf. Fowler (2002) 144.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Pl. *Ion* 553e the poetry of *ἐνθεοί* vs. *τέχνη*; cf. Hor. *Ars* 295 *ingenium* vs. *ars*; Murray (2006) 40-41 points out that, although the ideas of poetic inspiration and poetic genius are 'similar in that they both account for the element of the poetic process which is felt to be inexplicable', she makes the distinction between the two, insofar as the former 'accounts for poetic creativity in terms of a temporary visitation from some external, or seemingly external, force; the other in terms of permanent qualities inherent in the poet.'

¹⁷⁰ Pollmann (2004) 17.

¹⁷¹ See Fowler (2002) 148-49 for inspiration as a penetrative force that places the poet in a female position, like the Sibyl in Verg. *A.* 6.77-80.

di), and Lucan (*BC* 1.63, *numen*, 1.67, *fert animus*), but, as Myers asserts, ‘the juxtaposition seems especially pointed’ in Statius’ proem.¹⁷²

Following Sharrock’s position, that ‘the language of inspiration is part of a traditional discursive nexus through which poets play out the tensions involved in the poetic process,’¹⁷³ critics have discussed Statius’ juxtaposition of *calor* and *menti* as indicative of the relationship between poet and Muse in the proem as one of conflict.¹⁷⁴ The conflicted nature of Statius’ inspiration is expressed, for instance, in the way his expressions of subordination to the Muses are followed with a contrasting assertion of his autonomy to choose the scope of his poem (1.15-17).¹⁷⁵ We can see, therefore, that the combined package of *Pierius calor* and Statius’ *mens*, which caused the delivery of the *propositio* in 1.1-2, is expanded upon in 1.3-14 as a contest between the poet and his inspiration for the poem’s direction.¹⁷⁶ If the absence of the Muses in Lucan’s proem can be understood as a replacement ‘of the divine mover with a political/historical agent of cause,’¹⁷⁷ Statius’ conflation of inspired and rational poetry is perhaps an early intimation of the *Thebaid’s* concern for ‘causation and the contradictory claims of divine and psychologically motivation.’¹⁷⁸

The questions Statius poses to the Muses, delivered in apostrophe in 1.3-4 and 1.4-6, maintain the illusion of *hic et nunc* composition and performance of his proem before an audience, creating the illusion of the Muses’ presence.¹⁷⁹ By dramatizing his interaction with the traditional goddesses of poetry at the outset of his proem, Statius draws attention to his engagement with the tradition of inspiration.¹⁸⁰ In one of his *Silvae* Statius himself points to his awareness of his frequent invocation of the Muses throughout his poetic works (1.5.2 *lassata... totiens mihi numina, Musas*). Considering Statius’ self-awareness about his presentation of inspiration in his poetry, his emphasis on the Muses as the figures of his poetic inspiration is even more conspicuous in light of the increasing tendency for poets to invoke the emperor as a source of inspiration. For Rosati, Statius’ contest with the Muses for poetic authority acts as disguise for discourse about his relationship with the emperor as the ‘symbol of the control exercised by political power over literary activity.’¹⁸¹ The tension, therefore, expressed between the poet’s *mens* and the external *Pierius calor*, that is, Statius’ rational undertaking of his poem and the influence of the Muses upon it, reflects the relationship between Statius’ poetic autonomy and the pressure exerted on his poetry by the expectations of his imperial patron.

Recusatio

Statius conveys the expectation of imperial praise in a *recusatio*, a trope that traditionally voices a refusal to comply with a request to write a certain type of poem.¹⁸² The *recusatio* was particularly

¹⁷² Myers (2015) 34; cf. Murray (2006) 40 on the critical tendency to overlook the spectrum that exists between inspired and not inspired poetry.

¹⁷³ Sharrock (2002) 207; cf. also Fowler (2002).

¹⁷⁴ Rosati (2002) 232; Myers (2015) 35.

¹⁷⁵ Rosati (2002) 231; Markus (2003) 434; Myers (2015) 35.

¹⁷⁶ See **Introduction** 10-12.

¹⁷⁷ Lebek (1993) 33-35, cited in Roche (2012) 95.

¹⁷⁸ Myers (2015) 34.

¹⁷⁹ Laird (2002) 128-32; Markus (2003) 440.

¹⁸⁰ Myers (2015) 41.

¹⁸¹ Rosati (2002) 238.

¹⁸² Nauta (2006) 21.

common among the Augustan poets as a gesture of false modesty, with the poet professing his inability to celebrate the heroic deeds of his addressee in suitably grand style.¹⁸³ The trope is thought to have derived from the prologue of Callimachus' *Aetia*,¹⁸⁴ where the poet remarks upon the complaints regarding the lack of "kings and heroes" in his poetry (fr. 1.3-5 Gelzer, βασιλ[η]... ἥρωας),¹⁸⁵ traditionally epic themes which he had rejected in favour of his more "slender" poetry (fr. 1.24, Μοῦσαν... λεπτολέην). Virgil recalls Callimachus' *recusatio* in his sixth *Eclogue*, by refusing to sing of "kings and battles" (1.3, *reges et proelia*) at Apollo's warning that these themes are inappropriate for his finely spun bucolic poetry.¹⁸⁶ These lofty martial themes, Virgil continues, would be appropriate for the poetry that praised his patron, Varus, to whom the poem is addressed, and points to a host of poets who would be able to deliver this praise adequately (*Ecl.* 6.6-7). Thus Virgil's *recusatio* carries out the function of giving praise by politely not praising,¹⁸⁷ thereby elevating Varus' deeds to the genre of poetry too lofty for Virgil's ability.

In Statius' *recusatio*, the panegyric themes which he purports to refuse allude to Domitian's role in the civil war (1.22, *bella Iovis*) and his triumphs over the Chatti and the Dacians (1.18-20).¹⁸⁸ According to the *recusatio* tradition, then, Statius' choice would classify, and thereby elevate, the refuted panegyric themes as a grander (*grande*) type of poetry, and his chosen mythological epic, therefore, as the smaller (*tenuis*) poetry.¹⁸⁹ Statius' *recusatio* deviates from the Callimachean-Augustan convention, firstly, insofar as it is included in the traditionally grander genre of epic itself,¹⁹⁰ rather than the smaller genre.¹⁹¹ A second and related difference is the fact that Statius does not refute, as such, the traditional grand and epic themes of kings, heroes and battles;¹⁹² rather he suggests a hierarchy whereby the mythological martial themes of his chosen epic are inferior to the martial themes of the refuted panegyric epic. Thirdly, Statius' *recusatio* is not quite a 'refusal' of panegyric poetry, since he suggests that he has postponed the task for now (1.17, *nondum*) and will undertake it in future (1.32-33, *tempus erit... tua... / facta canam*).¹⁹³

Statius' preference for mythological instead of panegyric epic resembles the *recusatio* in Valerius' proem where he refuses to praise Titus' siege of Jerusalem (1.12, *versam... Idumen*) in favour of an epic about the heroic past (1.11-12, *veterumque fave veneranda canenti / facta virum*). Valerius, however, defers praise of Vespasian and Titus to Domitian as a more suitable panegyric poet (V.Fl. 1.12-13, *proles tua pandet... / namque potest*), following the examples of Virgil and Horace, who offer an excuse (*excusatio*) from the panegyric task by deferring the task to other, more capable, poets (Ver. *Ecl.* 6.6-7, *namque super tibi erunt qui dicere laudes, / Vare*; Hor. *Carm.* 1.6.1, *scriberis Vario*). In his discussion of Valerius' *recusatio*, Nauta points to the significance of Valerius'

¹⁸³ Goldberg (2005) 429.

¹⁸⁴ See Nauta (2006) 21 n. 3.

¹⁸⁵ See Harder (2012) 22-23 on the uncertainty about whether these kings were contemporary or mythological.

¹⁸⁶ For Virgil's imitation of Callimachus here, see Goldberg (2005) 430; cf. Nauta (2006) 24-25 on Virgil 'bucolising' Callimachus.

¹⁸⁷ Nauta (2006) 25; see Newlands (2002) 3-4 for Augustan attitudes to praise.

¹⁸⁸ See **Commentary** ad 1.17-18 for these events and the panegyric Statius *did* compose about them.

¹⁸⁹ Rosati (2002) 251; Galli (2013) 62.

¹⁹⁰ Rosati (2002) 233; Pollmann (2004) 14; Zissos (2008) 86-87.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 6.8, *agrestem tenui ... bardudine Musam*; Prop. 3.3.18, *mollia*; Hor. *Carm.* 1.6.10, *inbellisque hyrae*; Nauta (2006) 24 emphasizes that 'the opposition between the "small" and the "grand" is not limited to a single genre'; cf. Boyle (1993) 5 for the self-positioning of poetic genres in relation to epic.

¹⁹² For "kings" cf. Callim. *Aet.* fr. 1.3, βασιλ[η]; Verg. *Ecl.* 6.3, *reges*; "heroes", cf. Callim. *Aet.* fr. 1.5, ἥρωας; Prop. 3.3.16, *carminis heroï*; "battles", Prop. 3.3.40, *arma*; Verg. *Ecl.* 6.3, *proelia*; Hor. *Carm.* 1.6.13, *Martem*; cf. Hor. *Ars* 74; see Hinds (2000) for epic's concern with these themes.

¹⁹³ Rosati (2002) 233; cf. Nauta (2006) 28 on Statius' conventional use of the future tense.

recusatio coming as part of the customary invocation of the emperor as a source of inspiration.¹⁹⁴ Nauta argues that Valerius' deferral is designed to collapse the traditional distinction between small and grand genres, that is, 'in order to celebrate the emperor – or his son –, even grand was not grand enough, so that even a writer of epic might excuse himself. Only the emperor himself - or his son - could be equal to the task.'¹⁹⁵ Valerius' *recusatio*, then, performs the tradition function of praising its addressee through the refusal of praise. Additionally, the specific deferral to Domitian to carry out praise for his brother and father conveys harmony within the family, which, in turn, suggests stability in the Flavian rule.¹⁹⁶

In contrast to Valerius, Statius' *recusatio* is not connected to invoking Domitian as the inspiring deity of his poetry, nor does he defer the expected panegyric to another poet. Instead, he promises to take up the task in the future when the Muses have provided him with the inspiration necessary for him to celebrate Domitian's deeds adequately (1.32-33). Nauta and Galli have remarked upon the fact that Statius promises future praise in the proems of both the *Thebaid* and the *Achilleid* (1.14-19), and how this presents his epics as 'preludes' to a greater, more important work about Domitian's triumphs.¹⁹⁷ Nauta, for instance, points to the suggestion Statius makes in his *Silvae* about Virgil's *Culex* as a lighter poem that would be the prelude to the *Aeneid* (*Silv.* 1. *praef.* 5-9). Accordingly, Nauta argues, 'the relation of the *Culex* to the *Aeneid* has become parallel to that of the *Achilleid* (and by implication the *Thebaid*) to a virtual panegyric epic on Domitian.'¹⁹⁸ However, if we consider the *recusatio* in conjunction with Statius' inspiration, we should note that the future panegyric is promised as future undertaking contingent upon the Muses providing him sufficient inspiration. The requirement of (and therefore dependence upon) Pierian frenzy (1.32, *Pierio... oestro*), again, can be seen as Statius distancing himself from the responsibility of his poetry.¹⁹⁹ However, as Myers has shown, by announcing his choice to pass over (1.15, *praeteriisse sinam*) the possible starting points he proposes to the Muses (1.4-14), Statius denies the Muses their traditional epic function of providing the poet the answer to his questions.²⁰⁰ The reiteration of his dependence upon the Muses (1.3, *Pierius calor*; 1.32, *Pierius oestrus*), then, is paradoxical insofar as he presents himself as simultaneously resistant to the inspiring force he is dependent upon. Not only does this highlight the fact that Domitian is not the inspiring deity of his epic, but it also suggests that the promised panegyric might never happen.²⁰¹

On one hand, then, the *recusatio* appears to be part of a strategy Statius uses to articulate his authority over his poetic output, since he denies the Muses and the emperor their customary roles of inspiration. On the other hand, since his assertions of poetic autonomy also acknowledge the external pressures exerted upon his poetry, his claims for poetic autonomy also

¹⁹⁴ Nauta (2006) 30.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Bernstein (2014) 163-64; for Valerius' panegyric gesture here, see also Feeney (1991) 335; Zissos (2008) xiv-xvi, 87; Galli (2013) 59-60; for Domitian's poetic interests, see e.g. Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.91-92, Stat. *Acb.* 1.14-16, and Coleman's 1986 study.

¹⁹⁷ Nauta (2006) 31-34; cf. Galli (2013) 64. n. 34, who sees Statius' promise of celebration as an imitation of Verg. *G.* 3.46-48, and *satis arma referre / Aonia* possibly imitating Prop. 2.10.25-26 and 3.9.45-48, which also 'expresses his intention to stay within the boundaries of the topic typical of the elegiac genre.'

¹⁹⁸ Nauta (2006) 33-34; cf. Bessone (2014) 216: 'Statius innvates the model of Virgil's poetic career, which was teleologically oriented towards the sublime.'

¹⁹⁹ Markus (2003) 434, who sees this as a 'favourable benefit' of the inspired bard persona.

²⁰⁰ Myers (2015) 36; cf. Markus (2003) 443.

²⁰¹ Galli (2013) 64-65.

point to his position of dependence upon these very external forces. The dependence he attributes to the Muses for providing the impetus for his poem likewise reflects his dependence upon imperial favour for the recognition of his poetry.

Encomium

Through his inclusion of the encomium in the proem, Statius follows the examples of Virgil (*G.* 1.24-42), Lucan (*BC* 1.33-66) and Valerius (1.15-21).²⁰² Statius, however, diverges noticeably from the tradition of these proemial epic encomia insofar as he does not combine his anticipation of the emperor's apotheosis with an invocation of the emperor as an inspiring deity for his poetry (cf. Verg. *G.* 1.41-42; Luc. *BC* 1.63-66; V.Fl. 20-21).²⁰³ Since Virgil and Valerius effectively equate, and Lucan actually replaces, the traditional deities of poetic inspiration with the emperor,²⁰⁴ the absence of Statius' invocation, by implication, withholds the now traditional suggestion of the emperor's divine stature. At the same time, Statius expresses the fact that Domitian is surely invited (1.27, *sollicitet*) to become a god, and that, if he so wished, he would be crowned by Apollo himself (1.27-29) and share a portion of Jupiter's realm (1.29-30, *magni cedat tibi Iuppiter aequa / parte poli*). These expectations about Domitian's place among the gods appear to follow the laudatory sentiments of Virgil (*G.* 1.24-39), Lucan (*BC* 1.53-59) and Valerius (1.16-20). Statius also echoes the hope Ovid and Silius express in their encomium, for the emperor to stay on earth for as long as possible (*Theb.* 1.23-24; cf. *Met.* 15.868, *tarda sit illa dies et nostro senior aevo*; *Pun.* 3.611, *nam te longa manent nostri consortia mundi*). However, as Newlands has pointed out, Statius' encomium contrasts with those of Valerius and Silius, insofar as they 'emphasise the expansion of Rome's cognitive horizons through conquest of the known world,'²⁰⁵ whereas Statius remarks upon the empire's limits. His encomium, at once, suppresses anxieties about the *princeps*, the Roman world, about empire and stability, while also revealing them.²⁰⁶

Narratio

Statius ends his encomium by advising Domitian to keep hold of the reins of mankind and reinforces the point with the distinction between the earthly realm and the heavens (1.31, *undarum terraeque potens, et sidera dones*). As such, my discussion of 1.33-45 here sets up the next chapter about the concept of restraint in the proem. The suggestion that cosmic order depends on Domitian's implementation of rulership and his eschewal of divine ambitions is followed by the anticipation of chaos caused by, and thus illustrative of, the destructive potential of sole power.

As we have seen, a large proportion of the proem is concerned with what the poem will *not* be about.²⁰⁷ However, in 1.33-45, Statius unpacks his *propositio* (1.1-3) by providing a summary

²⁰² Encomia within prophecy, see Verg. *A.* 1.286-96, 6.791ff.; Ov. *Met.* 15.832-42; Sil. *Pun.* 3.607-29.

²⁰³ Caviglia (1973) 93; Rosati (2002) 238-44; Markus (2003) 435-36; Myers (2015) 39; cf. Manil. *Arat.* 1.7-10; German. *Phaen.* 1.1-4.

²⁰⁴ See **Commentary** ad 1.3-4.

²⁰⁵ Newlands (2012) 50-51.

²⁰⁶ Rebeggiani (2013) 187.

²⁰⁷ Myers (2015) 32; cf. Markus (2003) 443, who argues that Statius' proem is structured by a series of priamels (1.4-17; 1.18-40; 1.45), each priamel 'consisting of a foil-part and a statement of theme.'

of his poem that is relatively detailed for an epic *narratio*.²⁰⁸ Statius' return to *arma ... / Aonia* (1.33-34) recalls *acies... / Thebasque* (1.1-2), and following Vessey's remark, Statius' *arma*, in contrast to Virgil's *virum*, is combined with *tyranni*.²⁰⁹ Their mutual destruction is connected to the destructive nature of power itself, insofar as the sceptre is the symbol of regal power and the Theban throne (1.36, *geminis sceptrum exitiale tyrannis*; 1.1, *regna*). The fatal outcome of the brothers' contest for the throne is also aligned with the slaughter of everyone embroiled in it (1.37, *egestas alternis mortibus urbes*; 1.1, *alternaque regna... / decertata*).²¹⁰ Thus the futility of the war is anticipated in two ways. Firstly, the hatred that fuels the brothers' conflict (1.2, *decertata odiis*) does not subside upon their death (1.35-36, *nec furiis post fata modum flammisque rebelles / seditione rogi*),²¹¹ and secondly, the way in which the split pyre of Polynices and Eteocles is immediately followed with the mention of Creon's denial of burial (1.35-36) indicates his succession of the throne and his assumption of a tyrannical character.²¹² Considering that Polynices and Eteocles refuse to share power, and Creon abuses power as soon as he attains it, these three are connected via the motif of death and burial, a significant motif of the poem.²¹³ In the proem, then, the perversion of death and burial norms is linked to the tyrannical figures and the destruction they prolong. This cycle will eventually be broken at the ending of the poem when Theseus kills Creon and thereby resolves the issue of burial of the dead.²¹⁴

In addition to death, the proem anticipates the wider disorder caused by the war. On the one hand, there is the idea of deficiency, insofar as the bodies "lack" burial (1.36, *tumulisque carentia*) and the cities are "emptied" by slaughter (1.37, *egestas... urbes*). The bloodshed and corpses spill into the Theban rivers: Dirce's water will change from blue to the red of blood (1.38, *caerula cum ruihuit Lernaeo sanguine Dirce*), and Ismenos will change from its customary dryness (1.39, *arentes adsuetum stringere ripas*) to being filled with an "enormous heap" of corpses (1.40, *ingenti venientem Ismenon acervo*).²¹⁵ The explication of immoderation (1.35, *nec... modum*; 1.41, *immodicum*), confusion (1.35-36, *rebelles / seditio*; 1.44, *turbidus*) and horror (1.40, *horruit*; 1.45, *horrore*) anticipate chaos.

Statius closes the proem by introducing the heroes Tydeus, Amphiarus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus and Capaneus. Considering the tradition of these heroes as a group known as the 'Seven', the introduction of these five heroes is perhaps a self-conscious expression made by Statius about his handling of the story's tradition. Neither Polynices nor Adrastus are actually named at any point in the proem, and even in these lines, two of Statius' five heroes are unnamed, with Amphiarus referred to as the "seer" (*vates*) and Parthenopaeus as "the Arcadian" (*Arcados*). The poetic celebration of heroism was a formulaic part of the *Iliad*, and the proems of

²⁰⁸ Ganiban (2007) 46 n. 11, who suggests the synopsis is more typical of tragedy (Eur. *Hipp.* 1-57) or comedy (e.g. Pl. *Mil. Glor.* 79-155).

²⁰⁹ Vessey (1986) 2973.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Pollmann (2004) 18.

²¹² Creon's ascension of the throne at *Theb.* 11.654-55, *scandit fatale tyrannis / flebilis Aoniae solium* echoes 1.37; the denial of burial is the first use of Creon's power (11.661, *primum*).

²¹³ Littlewood (2013) 280 n. 7 sees the denial of burial as a cycle begun by Eteocles when he refuses to give Macon burial at 3.97-98.

²¹⁴ See McNelis (2007) 156ff. on epic burial and closure; Pollmann (2004) 32-36 on burial in the *Thebaid*.

²¹⁵ Cf. **Commentary** ad 39-40.

Apollonius, Valerius and Silius embrace the role of poet and subject.²¹⁶ Statius, however, expresses little enthusiasm about his role as poet commemorating the heroes and their deeds.

²¹⁶ (AR 1.1, κλέα φωτῶν / μνήσομαι; 1.20-23; V.Fl. 1.11-12, *veterumque fave veneranda canenti / facta virum*; Pun. 1.3-4, *da Musa, decus memorare laborum / antiquae Hesperiae*).

Restraint

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which Statius engages with literary tradition and literary models in the proem. With this in mind, I now will discuss how the proem is underpinned by the concept of restraint, before making a case for its significance for informing a wider understanding of the *Thebaid* itself. We have seen how Statius presents himself striving for control over his poetry in the face of overwhelming divine inspiration, and expresses his concern for finding a suitable starting point and determining an order for his narrative. Likewise, instead of attempting to cover the entire Theban legend from the beginning, he announces a limit for his *Thebaid*'s scope, set at the house of Oedipus. When justifying his refusal to comment upon contemporary Roman themes and praise the emperor's deeds, he remarks that he "would not dare" (1.18, *nec... ausim*) take up such a task just yet, explaining that it would require him to be "stronger", or perhaps "braver" (1.32, *fortior*). These self-conscious remarks in the proem are also echoed at the close of the poem. The narrative ends with an extensive *recusatio*, with which Statius professes his inability to continue, considering himself unable to portray adequately the enormity of burial and grief in his poetry (12.797-809). Then, in the poem's envoy, he advises his *Thebaid* against attempting to rival the divine *Aeneid*, encouraging it instead to "follow in its footsteps from afar" (12.816-17, *nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora*).

At both the beginning and the end of his poem, then, Statius expresses his awareness about what he cannot cover, and would not remark upon, in his epic, and these self-conscious acknowledgements appear to promote the awareness of one's limits. It is significant that the two addressees of the poem are the *Thebaid* itself and Domitian, and moreover, that the advice offered to both addressees points to a parallel between the epic and Domitian.²¹⁷ The current entry of Statius' *Thebaid* into poetic posterity (12.813, *coeptique novam monstrare futuris*), which requires following in the footsteps of Virgil's divine *Aeneid* (12.816-17, *divinam Aeneida... / ... vestigia*) evokes Domitian's succession of his deified father (1.23, *nova maturi subeuntem exorsa parentis*). Statius, however, draws attention to the *Thebaid*'s present place in Rome (12.812-15, *iam... iam... iam*), namely for its readers, Domitian (12.814, *te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar*) and the Italian youth (12.815, *Itala iam studio discit memoratque iuventus*),²¹⁸ and likewise, in the encomium, he urges Domitian to be content with his current governance of earth (1.30-31, *maneas hominum contentus habenis, / undarum terraeque potens*). Most importantly, Statius specifically instructs his addressees to forego thoughts of their predecessors' divine heights (1.31, *sidera donec*; 12.816, *nec... tempta*), which serves as a warning about the dangerous ambition inherent in their current, and seemingly inevitable, paths to deification (1.24, *licet artior limes... licet... sollicitet*) and fame (12.812-13, *iam certe praesens tibi Fama benignum / stravit iter*). In this chapter, I will argue that the proem introduces the *Thebaid* as a poem of excess, and as such, the poem's presentation of restraint has a protreptic function, intended to instruct the *magnanimus* Domitian. Considering the alignment Statius intimates between his *Thebaid* and Domitian in the proem and envoy, part of

²¹⁷ See Leigh (2006) 224-25 on the fact that Statius makes an artificial distinction between himself and his *Thebaid*.

²¹⁸ Malamud (1995) 26-27 proposes allusions to Horace (*Epist.* 1.20.17f.) and Lucretius (3.1-6, 5.55-58) for Statius' presentation of the *Thebaid*'s didactic function in the envoy; Bessone (2014) 223 suggests that Statius 'fashions himself before the emperor and to the Italian audience as the new Virgil and Roman national poet;' as statement of self-promotion, Dominik (2003) 92 points to Ennius *Ann.* 1 fr. 11 Skutsch, *latos <per> populous res atque poemata nostra / ... <clara> cluebunt*.

my assessment will be to look at the ways in which Statius applies the poetics of restraint to his own poetry and at what this might communicate about the place of his poetry in society. Before looking at this framework in Statius' poetry, it is worth briefly covering some pre-existing approaches to restraint in antiquity.

Background

The ancient Greek maxim “nothing in excess” embodies an ideology of restraint that was central in classical thought.²¹⁹ Considering the first word in Greek literature was *μῆνις*, the “wrath” of Achilles,²²⁰ it is perhaps unsurprising that the restraint of anger remained a central concern for discourse on restraint and excess.²²¹ Homer's introduction of Achilles' wrath at the outset of his poem anticipates the central role it will play, namely, the widespread destruction it will cause (*Il.* 1.2-4, *οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε, / πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν / ἡρώων*). In light of this, Homer follows the introduction of this destructive wrath with an inquiry into its causes, asking which god brought about the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon (*Il.* 1.8),²²² since the conflict leads to Agamemnon claiming Achilles' hard-fought prize for himself, a grave offence to Achilles' *raison d'être* and honour as a hero. Homer's interest in identifying the causes of pain and death brought about by Achilles' anger, in turn, points to an interest in determining the factors that drive human action.²²³ For Homer, it was the dishonour shown by Agamemnon towards Chryses that angered Apollo, and the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles arises in response to the pestilence sent by Apollo as punishment. In short, Achilles' wrath is presented as an emotional response to a combination of external factors, namely Agamemnon's dishonorable behaviour, firstly towards Chryses and then towards Achilles himself, as well as Apollo's anger. However, the enormous suffering Achilles then causes by choosing to act upon his anger, however justifiable, raises further questions of fundamental importance, namely, whether emotions were irresistible forces beyond an individual's control or if they could be restrained, and therefore, if an individual *is* autonomous in his ability to curb emotion, whether it is possible to determine one's actions as exercising an appropriate, rather than excessive, degree of emotion.²²⁴

Following Homer's interest in the causes and consequences of Achilles' anger, and the questions it raises accordingly about the excess and restraint of anger, the consideration of emotions developed as a central concern in Greek and Roman literature. In Greek tragedy, for instance, we see an increased focus on emotions such as envy, hatred, sexual passion, grief and humiliation.²²⁵ Any modern analysis of ancient approaches to emotion is an inherently problematic task since ancient classifications and definitions do not transpose neatly onto

²¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Theogn. 335, *μηδὲν ἄγαν σπεύδειν*; Eur. *Hipp.* 265; Harris (2001) 81, citing Parke and Wormell (1956) 387-92, notes prominent display of the maxim on the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1389b) perhaps points to Chilon of Sparta as its originator; for *μηδὲν ἄγαν* in sixth-century context see North (1966) 10-14.

²²⁰ Braund and Most (2003) 3.

²²¹ See Harris' Appendix (2001) 127, which lists treatises on emotions and anger.

²²² Gibson (2010) 30.

²²³ Marincola (2001) 10; Gibson (2010) 30 notes that anger 'has a role to play in examples of historiographical causation.'

²²⁴ Harris (2001) 5.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* 83.

modern ones.²²⁶ ‘Anger’ for instance, does not adequately distinguish the divine or heroic *μῆνις* of Achilles and the *χόλος* harboured by Agamemnon towards Achilles,²²⁷ and likewise, the term ‘emotion’ in particular cannot be applied to an analysis without disclaimers.²²⁸ Before Aristotle, virtues such as *σωφροσύνη*, to show self-control, but also general good-sense, and *αἰδώς*, to show shame or respect to others, were perhaps the closest concepts that resemble the idea of tempering ‘emotions.’²²⁹ Aristotle then applied pre-existing conceptions of self-control and moderation to his notion of *πάθη* (“passions”), which resembles our idea of emotions as irrational impulses.²³⁰ In particular, he addressed the tension that existed between the belief in emotions as irresistible external forces and the belief that it was possible for an individual to restrain them.²³¹ A defining position espoused by Aristotle in his ethical formulation of moderation was to situate *ἀρετή* (“excellence”) at an intermediate point between the two extremes of deficiency and excess.²³² When applied to emotion, for instance, this entailed understanding and exercising a moderate degree of the emotions themselves (*μετριοπάθεια*), as well as the type of actions that were ethically appropriate to the situation.²³³

The influence of the Aristotelian approach to emotion was evident in subsequent approaches that emerged in Hellenistic philosophy, Epicureanism and Stoicism. In contrast to Aristotle’s preference for the moderation of passions, rather than a state of freedom from emotion altogether (*ἀπάθεια*),²³⁴ a cornerstone of Epicurean thought was the striving for *ἀταραξία*, the absence of emotional disturbance.²³⁵ For their part, the Stoics regarded all emotions to be undesirable insofar as the assent to an emotional impulse entails an assent to false beliefs about what is good or bad and about how it is right to react.²³⁶ Epicurean and Stoic philosophy were particularly influential for Roman thought,²³⁷ and ideals of moderation and restraint were therefore not just a central concern of philosophical works, but featured in all

²²⁶ Cairns (2003) 11 states, ‘[t]o study emotional language of another culture is to enter into the most significant questions raised by the study of emotion, since it raises the fundamental issues of the universality or cultural specificity of the emotions and of the contribution made by linguistic labels and categories to the constitution of emotions as well as cultural phenomena.’

²²⁷ *LSJ* s.v. *μῆνις* I, “wrath, anger”; *LSJ* s.v. *χόλος* I, “gall, bile”; cf. s.v. II, “bitter anger, wrath”; cf. Redfield (2001) esp. 458-60 on *μῆνις* in the proem of the *Iliad*.

²²⁸ Harris (2001) 81, for instance points out that the Greeks of the Homeric and archaic periods ‘had no such categories as “emotions” and “appetites,” although [they] knew that emotions and appetites had, most of the time, to be kept within limits;’ see Cairns and Fulkerson (2015) 1-22 for a good overview on fundamental problems of definition and categorization in studies of emotion.

²²⁹ cf. *LSJ* s.v. *σωφροσύνη* I, “soundness of mind, prudence, discretion;” II “moderation in sensual desires, self-control, temperance;” *LSJ* s.v. *αἰδώς* I, “reverence, awe, respect; shame, self-respect, sense of honour;” see Cairns (2014) 1330-32 on the interrelation of these two concepts.

²³⁰ The term *πάθη* is notoriously difficult to translate into English; cf. Braund and Gill (1997) 1 n. 1: ‘[“passion”] is mostly used in English to denote an overpowering emotion to which one is, or feels oneself to be, subject or ‘passive’, and which to this degree is problematic;’ Cairns and Fulkerson (2015) 9

²³¹ Harris (2001) 5.

²³² See Gibson (2007) 12-13 for Aristotle’s application of ‘intuitive conceptions’ to his ‘doctrine of intermediacy;’ cf. Gill (1997) 5-16, for distinctions within the ‘Aristotelian approach’ to emotions.

²³³ Aristotle adds (*NE* 4.5.1) that mildness to the mean ‘inclines towards the side of deficiency (*πρὸς τὴν ἔλλειψιν ἀποκλίνουσαν*).

²³⁴ cf. *NE* 2.3.1104b *ἀπαθείας τινὰς*.

²³⁵ A fragment attributed to Epicurus (fr. 221, Usener) articulates Epicurean philosophy’s aim to expel emotion. The Epicurean approach to anger is difficult to define due to scarcity of sources. See Fowler (1997) on the complexities and contradictions in Epicurean approaches to anger.

²³⁶ Gill (1997) 5.

²³⁷ Criado (2013) 208.

genres of literature. For instance, in the historiographical works of Sallust the fall of an idealized past is related to the erosion of virtues associated with restraint, and their replacement by those associated with excess.²³⁸

When evaluating a text, an interpretive difficulty lies in the convergence of these philosophical influences with literary and ideological ones.²³⁹ In heroic epic, for instance, philosophical approaches to anger converge with the concept of ‘heroic anger’, or the Greek ideology of ‘helping friends and harming enemies.’²⁴⁰ It is conflicting approaches like these that problematize the interpretation of Aeneas’ killing of Turnus in a state of anger (12.946-47, *furiis accensus et ira / terribilis*) at the end of the *Aeneid*. As Wright argues in her study on this scene, Virgil characterizes Aeneas’ anger both as an un-praiseworthy act of passionate, and therefore irrational aggression,²⁴¹ and in terms of a ‘heroic temper’ where anger can be seen as a ‘righteous’ or ‘justified’ response to offence.²⁴²

Turning now to Statius, there are many readings of the *Thebaid* that focus upon the poem’s excesses. For instance, regarding the poem’s theme and style, Henderson proposes that the ‘horrors of partisan conflict, where all valour is atrocity, family are the foe, and winning is losing, stir portrayal in a massive over-kill of effect, as doomed to self-incriminating absurdity as it is to rending plagency.’²⁴³ The premise for Hershkowitz’s evaluation of the *Thebaid* is that the poem is dependent on ‘madness.’²⁴⁴ Fantham, whose study looks at Statius’ representation of passions in the *Thebaid*, argues that ‘there can be no doubt about the importance of human hatred as a driving force in the *Thebaid*.’²⁴⁵ In Ganiban’s assessment of the *Thebaid* as a poem of the post-Virgilian tradition, he explores and identifies the centrality of *nefas* in Statius’ poem as a consequence of the ‘indulgence of excessive and destructive passions.’²⁴⁶ Less attention has been paid to the function of restraint, boundaries, and limits in Statius’ *Thebaid*.²⁴⁷ Now I have established the importance of restraint and moderation in Roman thought and literature, and its noticeable presence in the proem and envoy, I shall begin by discussing how Statius’ introduction of excess in the proem is related to his concern for the value of restraint.

The Limits of Anger

Let us begin by looking at how Statius introduces his poem as one of excess in comparison to the introductions made by his epic predecessors. Earlier I discussed Homer’s interest in the causes of Achilles’ destructive wrath. Similarly, *ira* is presented in Virgil’s proem as an integral

²³⁸ Sall. *Cat.* 2.5, *ubi pro labore desidia, pro continentia et aequitate libido atque superbia invasere, fortuna simul cum moribus immutatur*; 3.3, *pro pudore, pro abstinentia, pro virtute audacia, largitio, avaritia vigeant*; see Kaster (2005) 3-4 for his discussion of the Roman ‘psychology of paradise.’

²³⁹ Gill (1997) 214; cf. Zissos (2014) 269 on Roman epic’s selective interaction with philosophical doctrine.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Blundell (1989).

²⁴¹ Wright (1997) 179-84.

²⁴² Wright observes (1997) 182-83, for example, the description of angry Aeneas as *fervidus* (*A.* 12.951), following the example of Hercules (8.230, *fervidus ira*), who required the force of anger in order to overcome Cacus; for the wealth of studies on the *Aeneid*’s final scene, see the bibliography provided in the notes of Nelis (2015) 149-50.

²⁴³ Henderson (1998) 212-13.

²⁴⁴ Hershowitz (1998) 248.

²⁴⁵ Fantham (1997) 201; cf. Ahl (1986) 2899 for a similar reading of passions.

²⁴⁶ Ganiban (2007) 37; for the *Thebaid* as a poem of ‘Silver Latin’ excess, see e.g. Williams (1986); Henderson (1991) 42; Hershkowitz (1998) 249.

²⁴⁷ Ahl (1986) 2817-22; Dominik (1994) 167-76. Newlands (2012) 45-86 looks at ‘boundaries’ across Statius’ entire poetic corpus.

force affecting the poem's progression. The suffering endured by Aeneas in his journey towards foundation is attributed to the obstructive force of Juno's anger (*A.* 1.4, *saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*), and, following Homer, Virgil asks the Muses to relate the causes of Juno's anger (*A.* 1.8-11).²⁴⁸ Lucan introduces his epic about Roman civil war by asking his fellow citizens to join him in addressing the extent of *furor* (*BC* 1.8, *quis furor, o cives*) that could cause the undertaking of such a self-destructive and futile conflict. In his proem, Statius anticipates the significant role anger will play, namely, the *furor* between Polynices and Eteocles that will continue even after death (1.35, *nec furiis post fata modum*), and the immoderate anger of Tydeus (1.41-42, *immodicum irae / Tydeus*). Additionally, in his allusions to events in the Theban past, Statius refers to the history of divine anger against the Thebans (1.11, *graves irae* of Bacchus; 1.12, *saevae Iunonis opus*). However, in contrast to Homer, Virgil and Lucan,²⁴⁹ Statius opens his proem by announcing a conflict fuelled by the "hatred" between Polynices and Eteocles for the Theban throne (*alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiis*). Although anger might seem to be a prerequisite for hatred, Fantham has shown that Greek and Roman definitions of hatred in relation to anger vary,²⁵⁰ and so it is not immediately clear how the introduction of *odium* compares to the traditional introduction of "anger" in epic proems. However, if we turn to Tisiphone's effect on Polynices and Eteocles (1.123-30), we see that Statius classifies their mutual hatred as a product (*parens odii*) of an emotional mixture of anger (*furor*), envy (*invidia*) and fear (*metus*). Statius reveals the cause of their hatred as soon as the narrative begins, with Oedipus' prayer to Tisiphone (1.56-87). As punishment for their insult towards him (1.78, *insultant*), but also perhaps resentful about his loss of regal power (1.74, *regnisque carentem*),²⁵¹ Oedipus transmits the "family fury" (1.126, *gentilisque... furor*) onto his sons. When Tisiphone strikes the brothers with an "impulse" (1.125, *motus*), Polynices becomes "sick with envy" towards Eteocles' good fortune in holding the throne first (1.126-27, *aegraque laetis / invidia*). Eteocles, on the other hand, feels "fear" (1.127, *metus*) towards his exiled brother. So, only with the addition of Polynices' envy and Eteocles' fear does the brothers' mutual *furor* swell into *odium*.

If we analyze the role of hatred in the brothers' fight for the throne, we see that their mutual hatred aligns with the nature of their shared kingship. Since Polynices and Eteocles are both sons of Oedipus, the terms of alternated rule honour them as equal claimants of the Theban throne.²⁵² Equally, their inheritance of Oedipus' curse is described in terms that resemble a reaction to emotional impulse (1.125, *protinus attoniti fratrum sub pectore motus*). As such, since the terms stipulate that Eteocles and Polynices are allotted two different portions of the same agreement, their shared assumption of *furor* (implied in the singular *pectore*) manifests in two different ways according to their respective positions in the agreement. The hatred between the brothers is, firstly, the combination of Polynices' envy as an exile towards Eteocles as king, and Eteocles' fear towards Polynices. Secondly, as Statius mentions,²⁵³ by virtue of the agreed

²⁴⁸ See Schiesaro (2015) 163-68 for Virgil's *ira* as a 'memory' of Homer's $\mu\eta\nu\iota\varsigma$; Gibson (2010) 31 sees Verg. *A.* 1.8 'play[ing] on Callimachean *aitia* (origins) and historiographical *aitiai* (causes).'

²⁴⁹ Silius announces his intention in the proem to reveal the causes of *odium* between the Romans and Carthaginians (*Pun.* 1.17-19).

²⁵⁰ Fantham (1997) 186-202; cf. Vessey (1986) 2969.

²⁵¹ Marinis (2015) 360; cf. Ahl (1986) 2825 notes the irony in Oedipus' expectation of his sons' respect.

²⁵² Cf. 1.138-39, *alterni placuit sub legibus anni / exsilio mutare ducent*; Marinis (2015) 354 n. 63 notes that in Statius' version, Eteocles rules first, not due to primogeniture (cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 69-74; *Supp.* 150), but following the casting of lots (cf. Stesichorus *PGMF* 222b 218-24).

²⁵³ 1.139-41, *sic iure maligno / Fortunam transire iubent, ut sceptrum tenentem / foedere praecipiti semper novus angeret heres*.

alternation, Polynices, as the next king, feels himself hated as a threat by fearful Eteocles. Likewise, while Eteocles holds the throne, he feels himself hated by envious exile Polynices. The rule they had been given to share in agreement becomes hatred shared in disagreement, as Statius himself makes clear (1.130, *sociisque comes discordia regnis*).²⁵⁴

It becomes apparent, then, that the hatred introduced in Statius' opening lines is more than *furor* between Polynices and Eteocles, but a mixture of anger, fear and envy that aligns with the terms of shared rule. Moreover, the brothers' hatred is not only a product of these passions, but it also acts as a cause for more passionate impulses directed towards holding the throne, namely Eteocles' "love of rule" (1.127-28, *regendi / saevus amor*) and Polynices' "intolerant ambition" (1.129-30, *ambitus impatiens, et summo dulcius unum / stare loco*). In a similar manner *fraternas acies* suggests that the hatred fuelling the brothers' personal conflict spreads like a sickness to the forces of Argos and Thebes fighting on their behalf,²⁵⁵ and the hateful war between Argos and Thebes, therefore, serves as a magnified version of the personal hatred between Polynices and Eteocles. Since the *furor* between the brothers is one defined by its lack of moderation (1.35, *nec furiis... modum*), the war itself is anticipated as one of excess.

On an intertextual level Statius' poem promises excess through his emulation of Lucan, who introduces the wars of his epic as "more than civil" (*BC* 1.1, *bella plus quam civilia*), referring to the fact that Caesar and Pompey were not only fellow Romans, but also related through Pompey's marriage to Caesar's daughter Julia. Considering the way in which Lucan explicitly characterizes his civil war as excessive (*plus quam civilia*),²⁵⁶ Statius' *fraternas acies* might be seen as an attempt to outdo Lucan's *cognatas acies*,²⁵⁷ insofar as the war of Statius' poem is waged between two brothers who are actually related by blood.²⁵⁸ In the *Thebaid*, Tisiphone draws attention to this fact, emphasizing to her sister Megaera that their war is no ordinary war, but one between brothers (11.97-99, *non solitas acies nec Martia bella paramus, / sed fratrum... / fratrum stringendi comminus ense*).²⁵⁹ Moreover, whereas one of the causes of civil war between Caesar and Pompey was 'the destructive power of wealth' in Lucan's Rome (*BC* 1.158-82),²⁶⁰ Statius emphasizes the lack of wealth of the Theban throne (1.151, *pugna est de paupere regno*).²⁶¹ The relative worthlessness of the object that divides Polynices and Eteocles amplifies the role of personal hatred between the two brothers, whose desire for sole power (1.150-51, *nuda potestas / armavit fratres*) is

²⁵⁴ Rebggiani (2013) 202 compares the discordant succession of power between the two brothers and the model of *concordia* demonstrated by Thiodamas' succession of Amphiarus in Book 8: 'Amphiarus is not envious of [Thiodamas] (*tantaque haud invidus artis, Theb.* 8.281), and, in fact, he is happy that Thiodamas is considered his equal and close second (*gaudebat dici simile iuxtaque secundum, 282*);' Rebggiani, *op. cit.* 203 suggests that Statius may be providing a model of succession for Domitian, who lacked a male heir, though the *Thebaid* 'does not aim to express a clear political doctrine.'

²⁵⁵ See Ahl (1986) 2887 for the widespread involvement in the war, including neutral bystanders, such as Hypsipyle and Lycurgus.

²⁵⁶ Conte (2010) 51-52; Dinter (2005) 295 reads *plus quam* as a leitmotif for Lucan's epic, which strives to 'exceed many of the expectations traditionally aroused by the epic genre and its narrative economy.'

²⁵⁷ See Vessey (1986) 2969; Braund (2006) 262; Ganiban (2007) 45; cf. Roche (2015) 394 n. 5, for the 'greater specificity' of the adjective *fraternus*; Henderson (1998) 219 suggests Statius falls short of Lucan in his 'ambition to represent the ultimate epic amplification.'

²⁵⁸ Bernstein (2015) 141: 'Statius literalizes what remains metaphorical in Lucan.'

²⁵⁹ For fraternal war surpassing civil war cf. also Sen. *Phoen.* 354-55, *non satis est adhuc / civile bellum: frater in fratrem ruat*; Jocasta at Sen. *Phoen.* 549-50 argues that it would be a remarkable crime even for Thebes.

²⁶⁰ Gibson (2015) 125; for a similar sentiment about wealth and Roman civil war, cf. Lucr. 3.70-73.

²⁶¹ See Hulls (2014) 200-201 *ad loc* for the possible allusion to the Cyclic *Thebaid*; Statius' portrayal of the Theban throne differs from Seneca's at *Phoen.* 54, *opulenta... regna*.

subordinate to their hatred of each other.²⁶² Statius' question to the brothers about the extent to which they will extend their *ira* in this conflict (1.155-56, *quo tenditis iras, / a, miseri?*),²⁶³ could be understood to echo Roma's address to Caesar as he approaches the Rubicon (Luc. 1.190, *quo tenditis ultra?*).²⁶⁴ The aporetic feeling of Statius' address also resembles Turnus' supplication of Aeneas at the end of the *Aeneid* (12.938, *ulterius ne tende odiis*), insofar as it evokes Turnus' hope that death will bring an end to hatred.²⁶⁵ Statius, however, has already answered this question in the proem: the brothers' enmity will continue even after death (1.35, *nec furiis post fata modum*).

We have seen that both the proem and the poem set in motion a hateful contest for power between two brothers, and also that this hatred is requested by their father, Oedipus. We should also observe that their hatred is described as *profanis* and Thebes itself is described as "guilty" (*sontesque*), which evokes the criminality and collective sacrilege associated with civil war in Lucan's proem (*BC* 1.2, *iusque datum sceleris*; 1.6, *in commune nefas*).²⁶⁶ Moreover, the blood-brothers of Statius' war come from a particularly guilty and self-destructive family, as Senecan emphasizes in his *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*.²⁶⁷ If Lucan's civil war is criminal, the sustained hatred between two blood brothers in Statius' proem not only merits the same categorization but surpasses it.

I have discussed how Statius presents the *fraternas acies* of Polynices and Eteocles as a repetition of their 'origins-in-fratricide',²⁶⁸ and as such, how the war and the brothers' mutual fratricide are presented as a propagation of their *nefas*-in-origins. Statius' use of *condere* in the allusion to Cadmus' foundation of fratricidal war points to his poem as a type of 'anti-*Aeneid*',²⁶⁹ destined for hate-filled war and widespread destruction instead of the goal of foundation and stability in the *Aeneid*.²⁷⁰ The progress of Statius' poem is fulfilled accordingly by forces of *nefas*, the opposite of the force of *pietas* central to Aeneas' progress towards foundation, which is apparent in the first scene of the poem, in which Oedipus specifically requests Tisiphone to grant him the *nefas* he wishes to see (1.85-86, *da... / quod cupiam vidisse nefas*). Oedipus' "perverse" desire to incite hostility between his sons (*Theb.* 1.59, *perversaue vota secunda*) is not only indicative of the perverse nature of the house of Oedipus (1.17, *Oedipodae confusa domus*), but it also marks the transfer of hereditary guilt, from Laius and ultimately all the way back to Cadmus.²⁷¹ The

²⁶² Penwill (2013) 39; Gibson (2015) 125-26 observes the similarity between the poverty of the Theban throne in Statius' *Thebaid* and Lucan's mention of Romulus and Remus competing for power in a time of poverty (*BC* 1.95-97); cf. Ahl (1986) 2826-27 and Newlands (2012) 47 *ad loc* on the struggle for power in Thebes and Rome; see also Bessone (2013) 104 on the frugality of archaic Rome.

²⁶³ Fantham (1997) 189: '[Statius] subordinates the legitimate loathing felt towards a tyrant to the unnatural horror of enmity between close kin;' cf. Sen. *Phoen.* 655-56 for the intrinsic connection of hatred and kingship.

²⁶⁴ Gibson (2010) 43.

²⁶⁵ Pollmann (2004) 32.

²⁶⁶ Penwill (2013) 39; Dinter (2012) 103: 'Civil war makes it considerably harder to hold any one party responsible.'

²⁶⁷ E.g. Sen. *Oed.* 1044, *plusque quam timui nocens*; *Phoen.* 80, *nefanda ... domo*; for guilt and *nefas* in Seneca, see e.g. Fantham (2011) 484-500.

²⁶⁸ The term is from Braund (2006) 267.

²⁶⁹ For this reading see e.g. Pollmann (2004) 30; cf. Hardie (1990) 224; Markus (2003) 455; Braund (2006) 268: 'Rome's other foundation legend.'

²⁷⁰ Hardie (1993) 61; Ganiban (2007) 64-65 argues that Statius can be seen to be 'intertextually "rewriting"' the war between Aeneas and Turnus as a '(proto-civil) war', offering an 'important way for the reader to gain a higher level of understanding of the inevitable course and character of the war, while also anticipating the *Thebaid's* central theme: the overthrow of Virgilian *pietas* by Statian *nefas*;' cf. also McNelis (2007) 12 who reads Statius' Nemean episode in relation to *Aeneid* Book 4, as a delay that hinders progress towards 'a war that may be construed as civil;' cf. Verg. *A.* 10.360, *Troianae acies aciesque Latinae*.

²⁷¹ Ahl (1986) 2824 compares Oedipus' 'butchery' (*Theb.* 1.65, *implicui*) of Laius to Pyrrhus' 'butchery' (*A.* 2.552, *implicuitque*) of Priam, the former more terrible as patricide; see Marinis (2015) 358-59 on the 'nexus of causality.'

hatred between Polynices and Eteocles is bound in a nexus of causes, their inescapable origins, the perverted wishes of their father and the divine framework. The destructive passion which they share propels the poem to its *telos*.

A Limit to the Poem

As discussed earlier, the changing position of Statius' subordination and autonomy in the poem communicates the process of his poem's organization. Statius expresses his intent to impose order upon the poem instigated by the Muses (1.3-4, *unde iubetis / ire, deae? 1.41, quem prius*), and likewise, he remarks upon the potential enormity of the story he will not address (1.7-9, *longa retrahat series, si... penitusque sequar*) and establishes his chosen *limes* of the story (1.16-17, *limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipode confusa domus*),²⁷² though it is one he would not have chosen to tell.²⁷³ Having identified the excesses of the poem, in particular the *nefas* of the fraternal war, we can see that the prospect of unfolding the narrative is something Statius is reluctant to fulfill.²⁷⁴ On the one hand, then, the poem is anticipated as a venture that he will struggle to control and contain, but on the other hand, he will actually require poetic madness in order to advance the story towards its horrific *telos*. As such, I will now discuss the significance of the *limes* Statius applies to his poem, and more importantly, how successfully he manages to adhere to it.

Following the *praeteritio*, Statius' declaration of his poem's *limes* purports to signify his controlled state of autonomy and rationality.²⁷⁵ His successful adherence to his own poetic schema, therefore, would confirm his command over his poetry. If we take *limes* to mean "limit or bound" (*OLD* s.v. 2d), this would imply that the poem will begin with the house of Oedipus and also that the end of his poem is coterminous with the end of Oedipus' line.²⁷⁶ If *limes* is understood as "path or way" (*OLD* s.v. 3a), the suggestion could be that Statius' account of the house of Oedipus, in particular the conflict between his sons for the Theban throne, forms the bounds within which he will proceed from the beginning to the end of the poem. At various points in the poem, Statius reiterates his intention to adhere to his poem's *limes*, and in the process, reiterates his implementation of poetic self-restraint.²⁷⁷ Before the description of Harmonia's necklace, for example, Statius remarks upon the length and sequential nature of the story behind the necklace (2.267, *longa est series*). He introduces the description of the "dire necklace" (2.266, *dirumque monile*) as a relevant explanation of the "dire omens" (2.263-64, *omina... / dira*) just witnessed in the marriage procession (2.249-65), before abruptly cutting off the description in the interests of the poem's progression (2.296, *post longior ordo*).²⁷⁸ At times, the

²⁷² See **Introduction**, 8-9 on the changing positions of autonomy; **Literary Models** on inspiration; see Myers (2015) 37 and Micozzi (2015) 338 on Stat. *Ach.* 1.4, *plura vacant* as a similar creation of poetic space in relation to Homer.

²⁷³ See Myers (2015) 39-40 nn. 40-41 as to whether the Muses assist in this choice *ex silentio*, or if the poet himself imposes the limit.

²⁷⁴ As Ganiban (2007) 50 points out, the words *nefas* and *infandus* denote 'that which should not be said;' as a feature of Lucan's narrative voice cf. e.g. *BC* 7.552-56.

²⁷⁵ Goldhill (1990) 290 suggests that *praeteritio* 'self-consciously marks such abrupt changes of narrative direction as part of the narrator's role in (the aesthetics of) his epic.'

²⁷⁶ In this sense, Hershkowitz (1998) 271 argues that the madness which fuels the *Thebaid* ends upon Theseus' killing of Creon, since this marks the end of the house of Oedipus.

²⁷⁷ Newlands (2012) 47 remarks that 'the word *limes*... emerges as a key word that runs through Book 1 like a scarlet thread.'

²⁷⁸ McNelis (2007) 57-75 provides an excellent discussion on the ecphrasis' synecdochical relationship to the larger narrative.

characters themselves enact Statius' poetic agenda through the self-conscious omission of unnecessary detail,²⁷⁹ which suggests a conviction to observe the *limes* established in the proem at a narrative and meta-narrative level.

As I have touched upon, there is a paradox in the concern Statius expresses for adhering to his poem's *limes* and his reluctance towards pursuing the story at all. As Gervais has observed, on two occasions Statius 'imagines how much better it would have been had [Polynices] died before reaching Thebes (1.428-30, 6.513-17).'²⁸⁰ His reluctance is evident in the delay of the Argive forces' progress to Thebes.²⁸¹ The poem about *fraternas acies* is immediately set in motion in the first line of the proem, then in the first scene of the poem via Oedipus and Tisiphone, and likewise, in the first appearance of the Olympian gods, Jupiter makes an express wish for the destruction of Thebes and Argos (1.243-47).²⁸² It is not until mid-way through Book 7, however, that the conflict of *fraternas acies* gets underway. If we consider the very establishment of the *limes* in the proem itself, there is, as Ahl has pointed out, something paradoxical about Statius' purpose to impose order and boundaries on a royal house that he introduces as being defined by disorder (*confusa domus*).²⁸³ These paradoxes are manifestations of a poem about internal-conflict at multiple levels.²⁸⁴ The poem itself is, of course, about a conflict between brothers instigated by their father, and the process of the poem's composition is contested between the rational poet and his inspiration.²⁸⁵ As far as the narrative is concerned, on the one hand, there are agents who align with the poem's determination to advance towards destruction in their desire to incite war and bring the fratricide to fulfillment. On the other hand, there are agents who align with Statius' intention to delay or prevent the destruction promised by the war.²⁸⁶ In short, the proem anticipates the challenges attached to Statius' poetic venture, namely, his intention to constrain the *nefas* and *odium* of his civil war theme,²⁸⁷ and also to adhere to his narrowly prescribed *limes*.²⁸⁸

The Restrained Poet

In the *recusatio* Statius restrains himself from writing poetry about Domitian's exploits, which he frames in terms of not daring (1.18, *nec... ausim*) and needing be *fortior* (1.32, "stronger", "braver"). If, however, we compare this self-suppressing attitude towards his own poetry and Domitian with the admiration he expresses towards Maeon, who commits suicide after

²⁷⁹ Cf. Tiresias at 4.537; Hypsipyle at 5.36, *quid longa malis exordia necto?*; Pluto at 8.65, *sed quid ego haec?*; see Ganiban (2006) 66 and Marinis (2015) 326 on Statius' self-conscious declarations of literary debts; see Gibson (2008) on Statius' compression of battle narratives.

²⁸⁰ Gervais (2015a) 235, referring to 1.428-30 and 6.513-17.

²⁸¹ For delay in the *Thebaid*, see e.g. McNelis (2007) esp. 76-96; Parkes (2012) xvii-xix; cf. Fantham (2006) 162: 'with Statius delay is not an expression of personal aversion from his war narrative.'

²⁸² Feeney (1991) 180 notes that 'the first 300 lines deploy each of the three realms in turn (Oedipus 1.46ff., Tisiphone 88ff., Jupiter 197ff).'

²⁸³ Ahl (1986) 2817, (2015) 254; Henderson (1998) 224.

²⁸⁴ On conflicting stances in Statius' poetics, see e.g. Markus (2003) 437; Ganiban (2007) 49; Myers (2015) 32.

²⁸⁵ For the suggestion that 12.810 (*durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes*) points to Statius himself as a poetic 'father' of civil war, see Newlands (2009) 398-400; Bernstein (2015) 142-43; Gervais (2015a) 231-37.

²⁸⁶ Most obviously, Adrastus and Amphiarus try to delay the expedition, whereas, Tydeus and Capaneus are intent upon inciting war.

²⁸⁷ Newlands (2012) 47-48.

²⁸⁸ As Newlands (2012) 48 puts it, 'Thebes is the sum of its terrible past, and the poet's theme of the 'Oedipean house' is shaped by memories that cannot be erased and indeed spill over from earlier events; the very geography of Thebes, to which Statius frequently alludes, is a perpetual reminder of past horrors.'

denouncing Eteocles, the two cases present inconsistent attitudes. Statius lauds the courage Maeon shows for “daring speak in open contempt of kings” (3.100-101), and “establishing a path for *libertas*” (3.101-102) which appears to be a sort poetic commemoration of heroism, and one that Statius considers important to make. As Markus notes, Statius praise of Maeon’s daring appears as a more generalized comment about ‘kings’ rather than Eteocles specifically.²⁸⁹ The *libertas* Statius praises is a politically loaded term, and in Lucan’s mind, was something fundamentally antithetical to the Principate (cf. Luc. *BC* 7.695-96, *par quod semper habemus, / libertas et Caesar erit*).²⁹⁰ Statius’ admiration for political courage emerges in his *Silvae* when he praises Lucan for “more boldly” composing an epic (*Silv.* 2.7.52-53) that establishes a connection between Caesarism and tyranny.²⁹¹ As Ahl has suggested, Lucan’s *De Bello Civile* was ‘a political act as well as a political poem,’²⁹² and as such, Statius might be considered to follow Virgil in his sensible acceptance of historical inevitability,²⁹³ by distancing himself from being politically “bold” with his poetry.²⁹⁴ At the same time, the admiration Statius expresses for Lucan perhaps suggests a nagging aspiration to write the type of epic Lucan had (*Silv.* 2.7.3, *docto...oestro*; cf. 1.32-33, *tempus erit, cum Pierio ... fortior oestro / ... canam*).²⁹⁵ As a compromise, it seems that Statius’ praise of Maeon expresses an obligation for not letting *libertas* fall into oblivion altogether,²⁹⁶ while admitting that he does not personally regard himself able to do so (3.102-103, *quo carmine dignam, / quo satis ore tuis famam virtutibus*).²⁹⁷

Encomium

By overcoming his own urge to follow Lucan, however, Statius sets the tone for his encomium, in which he advises Domitian to resist the temptation of divine ambitions.²⁹⁸ Firstly, whereas Virgil and Lucan declare that the emperor can choose whichever place in the sky he desires (e.g. Verg. *G.* 1.32, *anne nouum tardis sidus te mensibus addas*; Luc. *BC* 1.50-52, *tibi numine ab omni / cedetur, iurisque tui natura relinquet, / quis deus esse velis, ubi regnum ponere mundi*), in Statius’ encomium, it appears that Domitian does not have the same power of choice.²⁹⁹ Statius suggests that there is a finite amount of space in heaven (1.24-25, *artior... / limes*), and so, in comparison to Virgil and Lucan, the way Statius expresses his anticipation of Domitian’s apotheosis implies that the gods would have to make space for Domitian should he choose to ascend into the already crowded heavens.³⁰⁰ Rather than being welcomed by the gods into heaven, it seems that Domitian’s

²⁸⁹ Markus (2003) 463.

²⁹⁰ Gowing (2005) 95; Roche (2012) 5; for Maeon as a Stoic political suicide, see McGuire (1990) 56-62; cf. Wirszubski (1961) for *audacia* as a political term in Republican language.

²⁹¹ Dominik (2003) 107.

²⁹² Ahl (1993) 125; Rutledge (2009) 58 makes the important point that ‘it was not Lucan’s poetry but rather his involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy that brought about his demise.’

²⁹³ Ahl (1993) 132.

²⁹⁴ See Leigh (2006) esp. 236-38 on the language of literary sublimity.

²⁹⁵ Dominik (1994) 170; cf. Newlands (2012) 46 on the centrality of dualism in Statius’ poetry.

²⁹⁶ Gowing (2005) 95.

²⁹⁷ Markus (2003) 467 comments upon Statius ‘adding’ (3.103, *addam*) to Maeon’s fame, rather than creating it.

²⁹⁸ Ahl (1986) 2819; Feeney (1991) 358; Rosati (2002) 237; Myers (2015) 39.

²⁹⁹ Newlands (2012) 49 remarks that Statius’ ‘refusal to write contemporary historical epic conveys a characteristic tension between limits and limitlessness and differentiates [his] epic poetics from mainstream imperial ideology.’

³⁰⁰ Newlands (2012) 49; Penwill (2013) 39 rightly observes that Statius ‘maintain[s] the Lucanic conceit that the time of the emperor’s departure from earth will be chosen by him, not, as in Ovid, by the gods (*Met.* 15.861-870);’ Criado

apotheosis might be seen, as Feeney argues, ‘as a competition with Jupiter for divine prerogatives: the emperor should remain content with his regulation of the human realm, since elevation to heaven would require yielding on the part of Jupiter.’³⁰¹

The second aspect of Statius’ reservation towards Domitian’s apotheosis is expressed in his clear allusion to Phaethon, the son of Apollo who brought the entire world to the brink of destruction after losing control of the horses driving Apollo’s chariot.³⁰² Lucan had alluded to the same myth in his encomium, but showed the caution to avoid the negative implication of associating Nero with Phaethon’s disastrous consequences, by expressing confidence in Nero’s ability to drive Apollo’s chariot without losing control (*BC* 1.48-50).³⁰³ Statius’ allusion to Phaethon expresses no such confidence; instead, Statius urges Domitian to “remain content with holding the reins of mankind” (1.30, *maneat hominum contentus habenis*), pointing out that the emperor already holds power over the land and seas (1.31, *undarum terraeque potens*). In a sense, Lucan’s allusion to Nero as a ‘successful Phaethon’³⁰⁴ serves to confirm Nero’s divinity insofar as the ability to keep control of Apollo’s horses is one that requires the power of a god. Statius, in contrast, draws attention to Domitian’s prerogative as the ruler of the human realm,³⁰⁵ reinforced by the remark that the emperor should forego his invitation to the divine sphere (1.31, *sidera dones*). To quote Penwill, ‘Domitian’s role is that of reader... he is presented with Lucan’s heavenly outcomes not as future events but as temptations, and urged to keep his feet firmly on the ground.’³⁰⁶

It is worth considering the motivation behind Phaethon’s wish to take control of Apollo’s chariot. In particular, it is worth acknowledging the variation between different treatments of the myth. For Lucretius, the disaster that ensues from Phaethon’s assumption of his father’s horses exhibits a sort of high-minded ambition (5.400, *magnanimum*; cf. *Ov. Met.* 2.111, *magnanimus Phaethon*). This ambition is also implied in Hyginus’ account where Phaethon actually seizes the reins in secret (*Fab.* 152.1, *clam patris currum conscendisset*), and, importantly, without his father’s authority (*Fab.* 152.1, *iniussu patris*). Considering these implications of Phaethon as an example of rebellion against established authority, Rosati persuasively interprets Statius’ expectation that Apollo himself would crown Domitian (1.27-29, *licet ignipedum frenator equorum / ipse tuis alte radiantem crinibus arcum / imprimat*), as a celebration of Domitian’s legitimate appointment to power, designed ‘to dispel any insinuations about the way in which he rose to power.’³⁰⁷ Elsewhere in Latin poetry, the story of Phaethon is used as a way of advising

(2013) 214, ‘the power of the emperor must be restricted, because even the power of his divine counterpart is limited.’

³⁰¹ Feeney (1991) 358.

³⁰² See **Commentary** ad 1.24-31 for the Phaethon myth in antiquity.

³⁰³ As for the sincerity of Lucan’s expression of confidence, Rosati (2008) 186 remarks that ‘the cautionary reassurance that earth will not have to fear from his leadership seems to reveal the poet’s consciousness of running a risk;’ see also Grimal (2010) “Is the Eulogy of Nero at the Beginning of the *Pharsalia* Ironic?” and Gibson (2013) 69; for the poem as highly critical of the Principate, see Roche (2012) 4-5.

³⁰⁴ Rosati (2008) 187; Rebggiani (2013) 188 suggests that ‘the hint at Phaethon implies the possibility of a disastrous outcome and is there to warn the reader that there are certain risks inherent in dynastic succession.’

³⁰⁵ Ahl’s suggestion (1986) 2820 that *hominum contentus habenis* might also be translated as ‘restrained by the reins that control mankind.’ The possible ambiguity of these words reinforces Domitian’s place on earth; see Ahl (1986) 2820 for other ambiguities in the encomium.

³⁰⁶ Penwill (2013) 41-42.

³⁰⁷ Rosati (2008) 192-93; Suetonius alleges (*Dom.* 2.3), for example, that Vespasian’s will had been tampered with after his death.

moderation.³⁰⁸ For Horace, Phaethon serves as a warning against “greedy hope” (*Carm.* 4.11.25-26, *terret ambustus Phaethon avaras / spes*); for Ovid, in his *Tristia*, Phaethon is used as an example of someone who failed to recognize (and fear accordingly) what was too high (*Tr.* 3.4.25, *tu quoque formida nimium sublimia semper, / propositique, precor, contrabe vela tui*); and in Seneca’s tragedies, Phaethon exemplifies the dangers of “veering from the middle course” (*Her. O.* 675-76, *quisquis medium defugit iter / stabili numquam tramite curret*) and of “daring” (*Med.* 599, *ausus aeternos agitare currus*).

If we compare Statius’ encomium to Ovid’s extensive treatment of the Phaethon myth in the *Metamorphoses*, we can see that Ovid was undoubtedly a model for Statius. In Ovid’s account, Phaethon’s anxiety to prove his divine parentage causes him to ask his father Apollo for the control of his chariot for a day (*Met.* 2.47, *currus rogat ille paternos*). In a similar way, Statius remarks upon Domitian following the undertakings of his father, Vespasian (1.23, *nova maturi subeuntum exorsa parentis*). Apollo emphasizes Phaethon’s mortality (*Met.* 2.56, *sors tua mortalis, non est mortale, quod optas*), and remarks that Phaethon asks for what the gods cannot share (*Met.* 2.57-58, *plus etiam, quam quod superis contingere possit / nescius adfectas*). Furthermore, Apollo points out the riches available to Phaethon on earth (*Met.* 2.95, *denique quidquid habet dives, circumspice, mundus*), adding that he could have anything from land, sea and sky (*Met.* 2.96-97, *eque tot ac tantis caeli, terraeque marisque / posce bonis aliquid*). Statius echoes these remarks when he points out that Domitian should *remain* content with control over mankind (1.30, *maneas hominum contentus habenis*), and that he is *already* powerful over sea and land (1.31, *undarum terraeque potens*). Statius finishes his encomium by urging Domitian to “forego the stars” (1.31, *sidera dones*), leaving implicit Phaethon’s rejection of Apollo’s warnings, which causes him to lose control of the horses and unleash destruction on the world, before being killed by Jupiter’s thunderbolt. Considering the fact that Nero *had* plunged the world back into civil war,³⁰⁹ Statius’ use allusion to Lucan’s encomium is all the more poignant since Nero really had turned out to be somewhat of a Phaethon.

³⁰⁸ Rosati (2008) 189. Rebggiani (2013) 189 notes that Tiberius had been said (*Sen. Dial.* 11.17.3; *Suet. Cal.* 11.1) to have called his adoptive son, Caligula, a new Phaethon, a remark that reflects upon ‘the problems of paternity and succession, as well as the disastrous consequences of a son’s inability.’

³⁰⁹ Rebggiani (2013) 194 points to the allusion Statius makes at *Silh.* 2.7.60-61 (*vagantes / ... ignes*; cf. *Luc. BC* 1.50, *igne vago*) as suggesting that ‘Lucan’s prophecy of Nero as a new Phaethon has materialized through involvement in the fire’ of 64 CE.

Characterisation

The purpose of this chapter is to look at how Statius introduces the heroes in the proem and how it informs a reading of their exploits in the poem.

Tydeus

The first hero mentioned is Tydeus, whom Statius introduces as “immoderate in his anger”, postponing his name to the next line in enjambment (1.41-2, *immodicum irae / Tydea*).³¹⁰ This initial mention anticipates that Tydeus’ anger will overstep the bounds of moderation and, therefore, implicitly asks the reader to assess *how* a moderate degree of anger has been transgressed. As the first of the “heroes”, we might assess Tydeus’ anger against the heroic anger of epic’s quintessential hero, the *μῆνις* of Achilles, with which Homer begins the *Iliad*. As I have discussed,³¹¹ Achilles’ anger stems from the offence to his honour as a hero as far as the notion of the ‘heroic code’ is concerned.³¹² The extent to which Achilles refuses to relent his anger, Most argues, serves ‘as a foil in order to increase our anxiety for Priam and as a contrasting measure of the change in Achilles’ character.’³¹³ Most suggests, that the *Iliad* is framed by the change Achilles demonstrates in his ability to control his anger. In Book 1, for instance, Athena just manages to restrain Achilles from killing Agamemnon out of impulsive anger. By end of the poem, however, Achilles shows compassion to Priam, the father of Hector, his Trojan opponent.

When Tydeus enters the narrative, Statius remarks that the force of *virtus* that spreads through all his limbs is made greater by the small size of his frame (1.416-17, *totosque infusa per artus / maior in exiguo regnabat corpore virtus*).³¹⁴ In combination with Statius’ initial association of Tydeus with anger, the attention drawn to the relatively greater force of *virtus* that rules over his body suggests that he is emotionally and physically susceptible to external forces, and by implication, that he is not inclined towards restraining his anger. Tydeus’ characteristic anger and martial prowess are presented to be both useful and justifiable in certain contexts. For instance, when he fights off the ambush, he is returning from a just cause - a diplomatic trip to Thebes on behalf of Polynices, who has been denied his right to the throne by Eteocles. Furthermore, not only had Eteocles refused to observe the agreement, but his order to ambush Tydeus also transgressed the inviolable status of an envoy.³¹⁵ Since Tydeus is ambushed he is acting in self-defence against fifty men who pose a threat to his survival.³¹⁶ In short, Tydeus’ anger is psychophysically, legally and ethically justifiable.³¹⁷ In his anger, he kills all but one of the fifty men sent to kill him, at which point Pallas intervenes and urges him to put an end to his killing

³¹⁰ Newlands (2012) 51 *ad loc* suggests that his immoderate character will ‘lead him to be the one finally unleash war (7.611-15).’ It has been noted, e.g. by Ahl (1986) 2864, that Statius’ Tydeus diverges from his characterisation as a *contemptor deorum* in previous versions, thus playing up the role of his anger.

³¹¹ See **Restraint**, 54-55.

³¹² For Homeric heroism, see e.g. Clarke (2004) and Scodel (2008).

³¹³ Most (2003) 72.

³¹⁴ For *virtus* in the Thebaid, see Masterton (2005) and Ganiban (2007) *passim*; for the purpose of this chapter Ahl’s definition (1986) 2900 of *virtus* in the *Thebaid* as something ‘measured by one’s ability to destroy’ is satisfactory.

³¹⁵ At *Theb.* 2.373-74, Statius points out the assurance for an envoy’s safe return; at 3.653-55, Capaneus comments upon the revenge owed to Tydeus for the offence.

³¹⁶ Wright (1997) 179.

³¹⁷ See Ganiban (2007) 51 for the ambush providing moral justification for the fraternal war; cf. Bessone (2013) 103 for the justification of war for the purpose of peace; Theseus’ anger is *iusta... ira* at *Theb.* 12.589.

(2.687, *iam pone modum*), remarking that he has enjoyed enough good fortune (2.689, *Fortuna satis usus*). The sense of Pallas' advice for Tydeus to show self-restraint – *iam pone modum* – could equally be translated as “now show moderation.” However, while Tydeus refrains from killing Maeon, it is clear that he is following instructions rather than showing any sense of moderation.³¹⁸ Firstly, just as Statius remarks at 1.428-34 that Tydeus would have killed Polynices without the intervention of Adrastus, here the poet attributes Tydeus' self-restraint to Pallas' intervention with reason (2.686, *consilio*). Secondly, the mercy Tydeus shows when sparing Maeon is verbalized in the contradictory manner of a “merciless” charge (2.696, *Tydeus immitia mandat*). In short, Tydeus withholds from killing and spares Maeon, but his restraint is not performed with a willingness and understanding of why he should show restraint.³¹⁹

Despite Tydeus' friendship with Polynices, a benefit which emerged from restraint and Adrastus' attempt to reinforce the idea of restraint as a virtue, when Tydeus spares Maeon, he exhibits a disparity between his performance of restraint and the unwillingness underlying his actions. The way Tydeus behaves, and the words he employs, in his interactions with Polynices and Maeon, point to an unchangeable nature of his disposition for immoderation, a point that is reiterated until his death in Book 8. He possesses the qualities of “daring”, or “recklessness” (*audax*, 2.174; 2.370; 2.467) and irascibility (cf. 2.391-92, *pronusque calori / semper erat*; 2.449, *iratus germane veni*). As such, Tydeus is, in Kaster's words a ‘dispositionally *iracundus* person [who] lives with the foretaste of anger.’³²⁰ That is, if we consider Tydeus' immediate rise to anger when he crossed paths with Polynices, the justifiable grounds for his angry response to being ambushed is not necessarily ‘prompted by a single judgment of one specific set of actual circumstances,’³²¹ but an illustration of his habitual tendency to see justification in responding angrily to any situation.

In assessing the ‘immoderation’ of Tydeus' anger, we might consider the Aristotelian notion of ‘anger in the right manner and at the right things’ (*NE* 4.5, 1125b35-1126a1). In this sense, we have seen the ethically appropriate display of Tydeus' anger insofar as it was rooted in a sense of duty to fight on behalf of Polynices' offence, as Statius suggests when Tydeus volunteers to go to Thebes as an ambassador (1.364-65, *Tydea iam socium coeptis, iam pectore fido / aequanem curas*). However, when Eteocles refuses to give up the throne, the dutiful cause for Tydeus' anger mutates into the misguided feeling that “he himself had been denied the throne” (2.476, *ipsi ceu regna negentur*).³²² Tydeus' disposition, illustrated in his misdirection of anger, is accompanied by suggestions of his animal-like qualities. If we take Cicero's notion, that a sense of moderation and propriety was what separated mankind from animals,³²³ the suggestions of Tydeus' animalism further emphasize his capacity for immoderation. His underlying animalism is suggested immediately in his fight with Polynices, expressing anger typical of animals (1.408, *rabies*). Moreover, the *Calydonius heros* (2.476) visually resembles the Calydonian boar on his shoulders (1.488-90),³²⁴ and Pluto foretells his cannibalism in the manner of wild beasts (8.71-72,

³¹⁸ N.B. the hypocrisy of his recent advice to Eteocles (2.406, *pone modum laetis*); compare Tydeus, here, with Theseus' ‘exemplary modesty of a hero’ and sparing the defeated as a Roman political ideal, Bessone (2013) 103; see Gervais (2015b) on the intertextual depth of the ambush episode.

³¹⁹ The ambivalence of Tydeus' heroism in the *Thebaid* resembles Homer's account (*Il.* 4.382-400).

³²⁰ Kaster (2005) 16.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² After Tydeus' death, Polynices also comments upon the way Tydeus went willingly to Thebes “as though to win the sceptre for yourself and honours of your own” (9.67, *ceu tibi met sceptrum et proprios laturus honores*).

³²³ Cic. *Off.* 1.14, *quod unum hoc animal sentit, quid sit ordo, quid sit quod deceat, in factis dictisque qui modus*; cf. 1.96, *moderatio*.

³²⁴ Ahl (1986) 2876 suggests that the number of warriors sent to ambush him makes the ‘enterprise a Calydonian hunt in scale.’

sit qui rabidarum more ferarum / mandat atrox hostile caput). Yet, while his characterization makes excess seem inevitable, his behaviour does not seem to breach the character and attitude of a traditional epic hero. Moreover, as Braund and Gilbert have demonstrated, the suggestion of animalism is often a positive connotation in similes that express the anger essential to ‘the intrinsic backbone of the warrior mentality.’³²⁵

In his dying moments, however, Tydeus reveals his disposition for immoderation suggested in the proem, in the form of animalism that falls outside the bounds of definitions of heroic anger. We should note Tydeus’ language, and how it suggests a state of insanity typical of “immoderate anger.”³²⁶ He asks the Argives to show him a perverted version of pity (8.735, *miserescite*) by demanding the head of Melanippus in order to prove his *virtus* (8.741, *nec me virtus suprema fefellit*). He exhibits a frenzied combination of self-hatred towards his own body (8.738, *odi artus fragilemque hunc corporis usum*) and demented joy and anger (8.751-52, *amens / laetitiaque iraque*). He applies his self-professed disregard for his own body and burial rites to his enemy. In contrast, for example, to the reciprocal gazing in the scene of pity between Achilles and Priam at the end of the *Iliad* (e.g. 24.633, *τάρπησαν ἐς ἀλλήλους ὀρόωντες*), the sense of content momentarily felt by Tydeus (8.757, *infelix contentus erat*) as he “recognizes himself” while looking at the face of Melanippus (8.753, *seseque agnovit in illo*), is quickly dispelled and he eats Melanippus’ brain.³²⁷ Braund and Gilbert point out the distinction between Achilles’ famous threat to eat Hector raw (*Il.* 22.345-54) and Tydeus’ actual performance of it: ‘Achilles manages to restrain his anger from transforming into cannibalism, surely the closest form of close combat. Tydeus does not. When he is driven by Tisiphone in his death throes to eat raw and living flesh he has gone beyond what is appropriate for even the fiercest and angriest warrior.’³²⁸ In his act of cannibalism, Tydeus reveals that Statius’ suggestions of his animalism have not been descriptive similes, but suggestions of a true animalistic nature.³²⁹

The reaction to Tydeus’ act is universal disapproval, and informs the reader’s interpretation of Tydeus’ anger as *immodicum*. Both Mars and Pallas turn their eyes away from the scene and Pallas seeks purification (8.762-66), which points to a sacrilegious element to Tydeus’ cannibalism.³³⁰ The reactions of the Thebans (9.1, *rabies*), Eteocles (9.20, *feritas*; 9.99, *feram*), and Polynices (9.57, *fero...fratri*) confirm the realization of Tydeus’ animalistic nature. For the Argives, Tydeus has breached the boundaries of hatred (9.3-4, *rupisse queruntur / fas odi*). Both Mars and Polynices find offence in Tydeus’ act of perverted *virtus* (9.6, *offensum virtute*; 9.37-38, *nimum nam cognita virtus / Oednidae credi letum suadet vetatque*).³³¹ The role Tisiphone plays in Tydeus’ cannibalism, of course, must be mentioned insofar as she is, at least partly, if not fully,

³²⁵ Braund and Gilbert (2003) 263.

³²⁶ cf. e.g. Sen. *Epist.* 18.14.3, *inmodica ira gignit insaniam*; Apul. fr. 19.1c, *immoderata ira genetrix est insaniae*.

³²⁷ Augoustakis (2016) xxxvii-xxxviii compares Tydeus’ cannibalism with that of Thyestes in Seneca’s *Thyestes*, suggesting that Statius ‘takes [Seneca’s] story to the next level’ insofar as Tydeus’ cannibalism is ‘a conscious choice of sacrilege’, in contrast to Thyestes’ unknowing act of cannibalism.

³²⁸ Braund and Gilbert (2003) 278-80; similarly, Ganiban (2007) 123 points out Achilles’ threat to decapitate Hector at *Il.* 18.333-35.

³²⁹ As Marinis (2015) 345 put it, ‘his final horrendous act ... respectively colours all his previous behavior;’ cf. Gervais (2015b) 74: ‘Tydeus does not merely wear a boarskin – he *is* a boar.’

³³⁰ Thyestes himself terms his own cannibalism as *nefas* (*Thy.* 1006, *agnosco fratrem. sustines tantum nefas gestare, Tellus?*); Henderson (1998) 236-37.

³³¹ Ganiban (2007) 125 sees the offence Mars takes at Tydeus’ *virtus* demonstrating that ‘not only are the gods weakened, but the very ideas they represent are also called into question.’

responsible for Tydeus' decision (8.757-58, *plus exigit ultrix / Tisiphone*).³³² However, we have seen that Tydeus is incapable of restraint, requiring interventions from Adrastus and Pallas in the examples discussed above. Tisiphone takes advantage of the absence of Pallas, as she arranges the glory of immortality (8.759, *decus immortale*) for her hero.³³³ The role Tisiphone plays in the cannibalism reinforces the idea that without the capacity to restrain oneself, excess will inevitably prevail, and as such, Statius proves the first named hero worthy of his designation as *immodicum irae* in the proem.

Amphiaraus

Amphiaraus is introduced in the proem in his capacity as a seer of Apollo (1.42, *laurigeri...vatis*). He then appears at a critical point in the narrative when Adrastus is uncertain whether to declare war, which his people are already eager for (3.333-34, *incertusque animi, daret armis iura novosque / gentibus incuteret stimulos*), or to restrain their anger by opting for peace (3.445-46, *an frena teneret / irarum*). Adrastus turns to Amphiaraus in order to inform his decision with omens from the gods, which make clear that certain destruction would follow the choice for war. However, Amphiaraus also knows that the war and its destruction is not a choice, but an inescapable fate. Since Amphiaraus foresees the destructive war between Thebes and Argos, as well as the deaths of Capaneus, Parthenopaeus, Polynices, Adrastus, Hippomedon, Tydeus, as well as his own,³³⁴ the enunciation of his omens reiterates Statius' proem. Similarly, Amphiaraus' simultaneous feelings of resistance and acceptance of the war aligns with Statius' poetic reluctance to narrate the war he knows to be inevitable.³³⁵

Amphiaraus attempts to delay the expedition at first, by refusing to divulge the bad omens (3.570-75), but his refusal is met with verbal abuse by Capaneus,³³⁶ who is defined by his longstanding contempt towards both peace and the gods (3.599, *longam pridem indignantia pacem*; 3.602, *dium tuto superum contemptor*).³³⁷ The opposition between the delay of peace and the progression of war is embodied in the figures of the prophet Amphiaraus, whose pious regard for the gods and their omens causes him to attempt delay of the war, and the impious Capaneus, who regards *virtus* and warfare as his deity (3.615-16, *virtus mihi numen et ensis / quem teneo*). The Argives' approval for Capaneus' *furor* (3.618-19, *laetum fremit assensuque furentem / implet Achaea manus*) and his disrespect towards Apollo's seer contrasts with the familiar scene at the beginning of the *Iliad*, where the Achaeans voice their approval to show reverence to the priest Chryses and

³³² See Marinis (2015) 358 n. 84 for contrasting critical stances of divine and innate / psychological causation in the *Thebaid*.

³³³ Gervais (2015b) 75 sees this as 'the final failure of heroism in the universe of civil war between the sons of Oedipus'; Newlands (2012) 52 has argued that 'gods, who are included in Horace's opening question [*Carm.* 1.12.1-2], are absent from the structured plan of Statius' epic. In referring only to the heroes, Statius omits the possibility of divine transcendence for his warriors.'

³³⁴ See Seo (2013) 146-84 for Amphiaraus as a 'Predestined Prophet' trope.

³³⁵ Cf. 3.636-37, *quae fati exordia cunctis, quae mihi*; 3.646-47, *quid vana cano, quid fixos arceo casus? ibimus.* 'hic presso gemuit semel ore sacerdos'; Fantham (2006) 160 points to Amphiaraus' protest to the war (3.629-30, *quo, miseri, fatis superisque obstantibus arma, / quo rapitis?*) evoking Virgil's 'true priest and prophet Laocoon' (*A.* 2.42, *o miseri, quae tanta insania cives?*) and the poet Lucan (*BC* 1.8, *quis furor, o cives, quae tanta licentia ferri?*).

³³⁶ Ahl (1986) 2863 and Marinis (2015) 345 point out that in Statius' account, Capaneus is Amphiaraus's abusive opponent (3.648-69), instead of Tydeus, as was the case in Aeschylus (*Sept.* 382-83).

³³⁷ Cf. Leigh (2006) 226-27 for Virgil's Mezentius as a *contemptor divum* being a precursor for Capaneus as *contemptor superum*.

accept his request (*Il.* 1.22-23, ἔνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες ἐπευφήμησαν Ἀχαιοὶ / αἰδεῖσθαι θ' ἱερῆα καὶ ἀγλαὰ δέχθαι ἄποινα). The Achaeans' approval of reverence (*αἰδεῖσθαι*) for Chryses stands for a wider regard for piety in the poetic world of the *Iliad*. The approval expressed towards Capaneus' impiety, therefore, points to a wider futility of *pietas* in the *Thebaid*.

Despite his resistance, Amphiaraus is tricked by his wife into joining the war,³³⁸ and Statius' description of his *aristeia* is introduced with the foreshadowing of his imminent downfall (7.690-91, *iam formidantibus arva / ... equis*). The failure of his opposition to Capaneus and the Argives' desire for war is illustrated, first of all, in his participation in the war. Secondly, the manner of his participation perpetrates the very things he had previously opposed. As Amphiaraus fights, Statius describes the way he “burns with a savage love of war” (7.703, *ardet inexploto saevi Mavortis amore*), which closely resembles Statius' description of Capaneus when he enters the narrative (3.597-98, *hic ingenti Capaneus Mavortis amore / excitus*). Similarly, although both Apollo and Mars assist him in his *aristeia*, he is distracted from an even more superior knowledge of heaven, by the personification of *Virtus* (7.701-702, *numquam tanta experientia caeli. / si vacet: avertit morti contermina Virtus*), the deity that Capaneus had associated with himself to deride Amphiaraus' piety. Statius draws attention to this change from pious seer to prolific killer (7.706-707, *quantum subito diversus ab illo / qui tripodas laurusque sequit*), and describes how the warrior version of Amphiaraus severs bodies on the ground with the “impious axle” (7.763, *impius axis*) of his chariot, and plucks spears left in the corpses in a state of fury (7.768, *ipse furens*).³³⁹ In the proem, Amphiaraus is introduced as the “laurel-bearing seer” (1.42, *laurigeri... vatis*), since the laurels were the traditional symbol of Apollo as the god of prophecy.³⁴⁰ The loss of his former identity is confirmed when he gives the laurels back to Apollo in order to avoid the sacrilege of taking them to the underworld (7.784-85, *accipe laurus, / quas Erebo deferre nefas*). His transformation to warrior is confirmed in the way he holds onto his weapons and the reins of his horses (7.819, *non arma manu, non frena remisit*) when the ground opens up and swallows him. The line referring to Amphiaraus in the proem (1.42, *laurigeri subitos an vatis hiatus*), therefore, points to both his loss of life as well as the loss of his identity as a seer.

Amphiaraus' death, which marks his transformation from the seer who resisted the war to the warrior participating in it, also represents the forces of excess overcoming the forces of restraint at a poetic level. It is significant that Amphiaraus features as the first warrior of the poem's battle narrative, since it also marks both the beginning of the battle narrative as well as the end of Statius' delay of the poem. When Amphiaraus becomes a participant in the war he previously resisted, Statius, by narrating Amphiaraus' exploits on the battlefield, participates equally in narrating the war he has been delaying. Amphiaraus' arrival into the underworld alive causes horror among the shades and the fates (8.4, *horror habet cunctos*), since he has violated the cosmological boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The way Pluto regards Amphiaraus' arrival as a dissolution of boundaries (8.37, *pereant aegedum discrimina rerum*) and a disrespectful invasion of his realm (8.38-40, *magno me tertia victum / deiecit fortuna polo, mundumque nocentem / servo; nec iste meus*), resembles Statius' suggestion in his encomium that Domitian should remain on earth, since his arrival in the heavens might be seen as a challenge to

³³⁸ Fantham (2006) 148 notes that Statius follows Aeschylus in playing down Eriphyle's treachery in order to emphasize his tragic foreknowledge; cf. McNelis (2007) 83 for the importance of the necklace.

³³⁹ Though there is no sense, in contrast to Tydeus, that Amphiaraus is in some way seized by madness or insanity – to some degree he is appropriately *furens* in the heat of battle.

³⁴⁰ Cf. **Commentary** ad 1.42.

Jupiter's authority. If we consider the way Statius describes Pluto as the "lord of Erebus" (8.22, *dux Erebi*), "pitiless towards humankind and angry towards the shades" (8.23, *nil hominum miserans iratusque omnibus umbris*), it is interesting that Pluto not only decides against punishing Amphiarus, but actually accepts the prophet's prayers and feels indignation towards himself for the anger he had impulsively directed towards the him (8.123, *accept ille preces indignatur moveri*). In order to explain why Pluto - whom Statius characterizes as a powerful and merciless ruler - would react in a manner contrary to expectation, it would seem that Amphiarus' defence provides some clues. For, when Pluto demands that Amphiarus explain his "unlawful path" into the underworld (8.84, *qui limite praeceptis non licito per inane ruis?*), the language clearly recalls Statius' own *limes* at 1.16 and the explanation Amphiarus provides (8.96 *nec... illicitam... ausi*; 8.116, *nil ausurus*), might be seen as a demonstration or a self-reflexive endorsement on Statius' part about his decision not to follow Lucan's daring model (1.18, *nec ausim*).

I have discussed how Statius and Amphiarus align insofar as Amphiarus' departure from battle, and Statius' narration of it, allows them to remember and reassert their former desire to resist. In a similar way, the phrasing that Statius applies to Amphiarus' descent into the underworld in the first line of Book 8 (8.1, *ut subitus vates*) unmistakably echoes, and therefore points to, Statius' foretelling of Amphiarus' descent in the proem (1.42, *subitos an vatis hiatus*).³⁴¹ As Lovatt and Augoustakis have argued, the linguistic parallel between Amphiarus' arrival in the underworld and divine inspiration striking Statius in the proem points to a structural parallel between the beginning of Book 8 and Statius' proem,³⁴² with the former functioning as reiteration of the latter. Since Amphiarus enters the underworld alive, his arrival is unexpected (8.1, *subitus... incidit*) and he is said to be still "hot with the sweat of war" (8.7, *sudore calens*). In the same way, Statius' poetic inspiration comes as an unexpected strike of heat from the Muses (1.3, *Pierius menti calor incidit*). For his part, Pluto's reaction to the sudden arrival of Amphiarus appears to align with Statius' reaction to the Muses in his proem. Pluto immediately sets his own *fraternas acies* in motion (8.70-71, *fratres alterna in vulnera laeto / Marte ruant*; cf. 1.1, *fraternas acies*),³⁴³ as well as the beastly savagery of Tydeus' cannibalism (8.71, *rabidarum more ferarum*; cf. 1.41-42, *immodicum irae / Tydea*), Creon's denial of burial for the dead (8.72-74; cf. 1.36-37, *tumulisque carentia regum / funera*) and a challenge to Jupiter's kingdom in the form of Capaneus (8.75-77; cf. 1.45). In addition to duplicating Statius' proem, the sequence of events at the beginning of Book 8 repeats Oedipus' prayer to Tisiphone, and likewise, Pluto unleashes Tisiphone in order to fulfill his wish for hateful fraternal strife in his own family (8.69-70, *atque adeo fratres nostrique haec omina sunt / prima odii, fratres alterna in vulnera*; cf. 1.84-5, *votisque instincta paternis / i media in fratres*), with the specific request for *nefas* (8.68, *ede nefas, quod mirer ego*; cf. 1.85-86, *da... / quod cupiam vidisse nefas*).³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ See Ganiban (2007) 47-48 on prevalence of foregrounding in the poem.

³⁴² Lovatt (2015) 424; Augoustakis (2016) 61.

³⁴³ As Bernstein (2015) 149 argues '[h]ostility between divine siblings both reflects and inspires the violence that transpires between the human brothers.'

³⁴⁴ Like Jupiter and Oedipus, Pluto promotes fraternal war on the basis of personal rather than moral reasons; cf. Ganiban (2007) 51; cf. also Criado (2013) 198 for Statius' rationalist perspective towards the gods, of interest to Euripides.

Hippomedon

The next hero Statius mentions in his proem is Hippomedon, who is “close upon” or “pressing” (1.43, *urget*) the poet, “as he pushes the enemy river with corpses” (1.43, *hostilem propellens caedibus annem*), in anticipation of the hero’s battle with the river Ismenos. Hippomedon, however, is not so much introduced, rather, he urges Statius to introduce him, which distorts the traditional dynamic between hero, poet and poem in several ways. Firstly, the immediacy with which Statius feels the hero of his poem pressing him, suggests a lack of ‘epic distance’³⁴⁵ between the narrator and his poem. The lack of distance also suggests a lack of control, which is expressed in the inverted relationship between poet and subject — it is the hero who presses the poet, thereby undermining Statius’ poetic authority in his ability to choose the subject of his poetry. Hippomedon also disrupts the structure and order of Statius’ poem by pre-emptively performing his battle with Ismenos in the inappropriate poetic space of the proem. Hippomedon demands the poet’s recognition of the episode before allowing the poet to provide the narrative that leads up to it. The way Hippomedon’s introduction straddles over lines 1.39-45 evokes the Callimachean symbol of the swollen river, standing for as grandiose poetry,³⁴⁶ with the suggestion that Hippomedon might overflow the boundaries of epic.

The suggestion of threat that Hippomedon poses in the proem, both to Statius and established poetic conventions, manifests itself in the poem, firstly, in recurrent remarks about Hippomedon’s desire to dismantle the Theban city itself. It would seem that Statius’ allusion to Amphion’s poetic construction of the Theban walls in the proem (1.9-10, *quo carmine muris / iusserit Amphion Tyriis accedere montes*) is significant here. As we have seen, Statius presents himself as another Amphion, as a *vates* composing poetry with the distinguished *chebys*, his Theban epic, therefore, standing for Amphion’s poetic construction of the city. As such, Hippomedon’s intention to destroy the city walls themselves can be understood in some way as a threat to Statius’ poetic artifice. We can see this in two cases where Hippomedon articulates the war against Thebes as an assault on the city’s walls and towers. Firstly, in the funeral games, Hippomedon remarks upon the large stone he offers to the other discus-throwers, in anticipation of their destruction of the walls and towers of Thebes (6.656-7, *hunc potius, iuvenes, qui moenia saxis / frangere, qui Tyrias deiectum vaditis arces*). The second case occurs in Book 7, where Hippomedon vows to the Argives that he will be the “first to lead them to the walls and break through closed Thebes” (7.433-34, *ite viri, clamat, sic vos in moenia primus / ducere, sic clausas voveo perfringere Thebas*). Here, Hippomedon repeats his intention to dismantle the walls themselves, and, if we take the adjective *clausas* to mean “composed”,³⁴⁷ the suggestion of Thebes’ construction by poetry is further reinforced. The ominous anticipation of Hippomedon’s ability to destroy the walls is suggested in Statius’ description of the strength he displays in his efforts to retrieve Tydeus’ corpse. Statius speculates that the Thebans would be unable to stop Hippomedon even if they had the force of catapults, which would cause fear in towers (9.146-7, *formidatique superbis / turribus impulsus temptato umbone redissent*). In addition to Hippomedon’s self-

³⁴⁵ Cf. Roche (2012) 95-97 on Lucan’s eschewal of epic distance.

³⁴⁶ See Leigh (2006) 237-38; Chaudhuri (2014) 213.

³⁴⁷ OLD s.v. *clando* 10b; cf. Cic. *Or.* 68.229 *claudunt numeris sententias*; Hor. *S.* 2.1.28, *me pedibus delectat claudere verba*; Hor. *S.* 1.10.59, *pedibus... claudere senis*.

professed preoccupation with destroying the Theban walls and towers is Statius' suggestion that Hippomedon may be physically stronger than the towers.

The 'threat' that Hippomedon poses to Statius' epic is demonstrated in his battle with the Ismenus, an episode modelled upon Achilles' fight with Scamander in *Iliad* 21, which invites comparison between Hippomedon and Achilles.³⁴⁸ Chaudhuri remarks that 'the river battle topoi distinguishes between the deeds of heroes performed with the help of gods and those without, thereby provid[ing] an especially revealing perspective on the true capacity of mortals to contend with the divine.'³⁴⁹ In the *Iliad*, Achilles is simultaneously superior to mortals, but also subject to the same fate. Homer attributes Achilles' superiority over other mortals to his divine descent (e.g. *Il.* 21.16 *διογενής*), which makes him appear like a god (21.17, *δαίμονι ἴσος*; 21.67, *δῖος Ἀχιλλεὺς*; 21.227, *δαίμονι ἴσος*). Similarly, Achilles articulates his own superiority over other mortals as a demigod (21.109, *πατρὸς δ' εἴμ' ἀγαθοῖο, θεὰ δέ με γείνατο μήτηρ*), but he also demonstrates an awareness of his mortal fate (21.110, *ἀλλ' ἔπι τοι καὶ ἐμοὶ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή*). Achilles' descent from Zeus in Homer provides a context that draws attention to Hippomedon's mortality.³⁵⁰ As such, Hippomedon's slaughter of Crenaeus, the grandson of Ismenos,³⁵¹ and his resistance to a river god himself in an "unequal fight" (9.469, *stat pugna impar*) between a god and a mortal would point to Statius' Hippomedon surpassing Achilles' efforts against Scamander.

Where the Homeric episode asserts the supremacy of gods over mortals (e.g. *Il.* 21.264, *θεοὶ δέ τε φέρτεροι ἀνδρῶν*), Statius' river battle amplifies Hippomedon's heroism to such an extent that the distinction between mortal and god is called into question.³⁵² A significant point should be mentioned with regards to the way Hippomedon's death is foretold in Amphiarus' omens. The bird symbolizing Hippomedon "dies caught up in a storm cloud" (3.544, *hic nimbo glomeratus obit*), which anticipates his death shortly after his battle with Ismenos. In the proem, Hippomedon is characterized as *turbidus* (1.44), a disposition traditionally associated, particularly in Virgil, with fighting angrily in war.³⁵³ However, considering the more conventional sense of *turbidus*, which is applied to winds, storms and rivers, we might reconsider the word *glomeratus* (3.544), used to foretell Hippomedon's death, as suggesting that he is not merely "caught up" in a river, but that he blurs the distinction that exists between himself and Ismenos, and therefore between mortals and gods.³⁵⁴ This confusion between Hippomedon and Ismenos is expressed linguistically, for instance, if we compare the description of Hippomedon "swelling with pride in the flood" (9.393, *iactatque tuo se in gurgite maior*), and Ismenos' response in much the same fashion (9.413, *tantus tumido de gurgite surgit*).³⁵⁵ Hippomedon's disregard for the epic hierarchy of gods and mortals is suggested in Ismenis' complaint about the apparent worthlessness of her son's

³⁴⁸ Also Publius Scipio's battle with Trebia in Silius *Pun.* 4; see Chaudhuri (2014) 205-10 for Silius' emulation of the Homeric episode.

³⁴⁹ Chaudhuri (2014) 196-97.

³⁵⁰ Chaudhuri (2014) 212.

³⁵¹ Hippomedon's killing of Crenaeus in a sacred river (9.342, *sacrum amnem*) is considered impious (9.347, *borruit unda nefas*); Marinis (2015) 346-50 discusses the *nefas* depicted on Hippomedon's shield at *Theb.* 4.132; Chaudhuri (2014) 211 notes that Asteropaeus, whom Achilles kills, was a river-born youth but not a descendant of Scamander.

³⁵² Chaudhuri (2014) 214.

³⁵³ Cf. **Commentary** ad 1.43-44.

³⁵⁴ Newlands (2012) 52 has pointed out how '[w]aters form natural boundaries and thus often take on metapoetical meaning as textual or narrative devices... in the *Thebaid* water appears as a prime site of violation of sacred or protected space.'

³⁵⁵ Shackleton-Bailey (2003b) 95 notes the tacit changes of subject between Hippomedon and Ismenos in this fight.

divine ancestry implied by his death at the hands of a mortal (9.376-77, *hoc tibi semidei munus tribuere parentes / nec mortalis avus?*). In the same way, Ismenos complains to Jupiter about the lack of reward of his divine status (9.421, *huncne mihi, superum regnator, honorem*).

After Ismenos expresses his concerns about his divinity to Jupiter, he remarks upon Hippomedon's pride (9.442-43, *at tu, qui tumidus spoliis et sanguine gaudes / insontis pueri*), before threatening him in a manner that points to a metapoetical anxiety in re-establishing the epic rules outlined in the model episode between Achilles and Scamander. Ismenos declares that Hippomedon will not, or should not, return victorious from the river, unless it is the case that he is mortal and Hippomedon's blood comes from heaven (9.445, *ni mortalis ego et tibi ductus ab aethere sanguis*). It is important to notice how Achilles reacts when confronted by Scamander. Firstly, when Scamander asks Achilles to take his battles out of the river, Achilles observes a degree of respect to the river god (*Il.* 21.223, *ἔσται ταῦτα Σκάμανδρε διοτρεφές, ὡς σὺ κελεύεις*). By contrast, when Ismenos attacks Hippomedon, the hero is neither afraid nor does he retreat, but actually advances towards the river in attack (9.470-2, *nec ullis / frangitur ille minis, venientesque obvius undas / intrat*). In the context of the two parallel episodes, Hippomedon is, in epic terms of mortality, less powerful than Achilles, yet he fights Ismenos, paradoxically, with less fear and more success than Achilles had with Scamander.

In Homer, Scamander is subdued by Hephaestus, and his acknowledgement of Hephaestus' superiority reinforces the hierarchy that exists among all the players in the episode. In Statius' version, Ismenos' defeat of Hippomedon appears an anxious victory over the hero's ability to overcome his mortality and, therefore, a fundamental boundary of epic itself. Since Ismenos feels that his own divinity is insufficient to defeat Hippomedon, not only does he summon extra strength from the other Theban rivers, Cithaeron and Asopus (9.446-51), but he also expresses the need to gain every other available supply of water from the surrounding landscape (9.451-54). Not content with the full force of water (9.466-67, *nec mole liquenti / contentus*), Ismenos also adds trees and rocks in order to ensure victory (9.467-69). Only when Ismenos possesses the full force of the Theban landscape does he manage to strike Hippomedon with sufficient force of anger and divinity (9.484, *quantum ira deusque valebat*) to bring about the mortal's defeat. In distinct contrast to Zeus' distanced and indifferent reaction to Achilles' battle with Scamander, and the gods' involvement in it,³⁵⁶ in the *Thebaid*, Jupiter gives Ismenos the command to release Hippomedon, curiously, after casting a brief glance at the Theban walls (9.520-21, *leviterque oculos ad moenia Cadmi*), suggesting that the poetic threat posed by Hippomedon has been safely overcome insofar as the distinction between man and god remains intact, regardless of how god-like the mortal appears.³⁵⁷

Parthenopaeus

Next, Statius introduces Parthenopaeus, as the "overbold Arcadian". The use of the metonym *Arcados* (1.45) suggests that Parthenopaeus is indistinct from the other Arcadians. When he enters the narrative in the catalogue of troops, he appears as the exemplary doomed young man fighting

³⁵⁶ Cf. Hom. *Il.* 21.388-90.

³⁵⁷ Criado (2013); Marinis (2015) 349; cf. *Theb.* 11.538-39.

in order to attain personal glory in battle (4.247, *a rudis amorum, tanta nova gloria suadet*),³⁵⁸ since he is ashamed of his lack of experience in war (4.253-55, *titulumque nocentem / saguinis humani pudor est nescire*). Rather than fighting with a sense of duty on behalf of Polynices' offence, his desire to participate in battle is framed in social and emotional terms. With the word *bella* (1.44), there is the implication that the inexperienced Parthenopaeus regards the *pugnae* ("battles") he fights as *bella* ("wars"), which expresses his inflated perception of his courage and ability. This aspect of his approach to war is foreseen in Amphiaraus' augury, where a young bird is described "attempting the tracks of greater birds" (3.540-41, *illum vestigia adortum / maiorum volucrum tenerae deponitis alae*). Parthenopaeus is overshadowed by the military prowess of his mother, Atalanta, who attempts to dissuade her son from joining the expedition, questioning his mad desire for war (3.318, *unde haec furibunda cupido*), and his sense of *virtus* (3.319, *teneroque unde improba pectore virtus?*). Parthenopaeus' anxiety to prove himself in light of his mother's fame is comparable to the line of Statius' encomium that refers to Domitian undertaking his father's enterprises (1.23, *nova maturi subeuntum exorsa parentis*). The fate Parthenopaeus meets with in the *Thebaid*, however, points to the backdrop of Phaethon in the encomium, fatefully anxious to establish himself with regards to lineage and succession. Similarly, when measured against the military success of Vespasian and Atalanta, the nature of the *bella* fought by Domitian and Parthenopaeus seems to point to a sense of inflated self-importance.

Atalanta advises her son to wait until he is older, but, like Phaethon, Parthenopaeus is unaware of his limits and rejects the advice of self-restraint, embarking upon a ruinous venture. In the proem, Parthenopaeus is characterized as overbold (1.44 *protervi*), and his boldness is restated later in the poem (4.260, *prosilit audaci Martis percussus amore*; 9.651 *nimum fortes ausum petis Arcada pugnas*). In addition to boldness, Parthenopaeus shows himself to be proud (9.683, *illum acies inter coepta iam caede superbum*), and it is the combination of boldness and pride, as well as his motivations for personal glory, that leads to his downfall.³⁵⁹ A Theban enemy, Amphion, not only criticizes both Parthenopaeus' pride and audacity (9.781, *quin etiam menti tumor atque audacia gliscit*), but also mocks his lack of military prowess, remarking that no one deems him worthy to fight (9.782, *pugnoremque minorem*), and that Amphion himself will give him the man's death he so desires (9.787, *dabimus leto moriari virorum*). These insults strike a nerve with Parthenopaeus' preoccupation with proving himself in battle, and he is further inflamed (9.788, *contra stimulis gravioribus ardet*). Parthenopaeus is deluded by the success of his *aristeia*, enabled by Diana's assistance, and so when she urges him to be content, he fearlessly (9.814, *nec territus*) rejects the opportunity to check his pride. Diana's advice, that Parthenopaeus has enjoyed "enough" success (9.812-13, *hactenus...satis / ... satis*), echoes Pallas' advice to Tydeus (2.689, *Fortuna satis usas*), but also Statius' advice to Domitian (1.30, *maneas... contentus*).

In addition to personal moderation, both Pallas and Diana express a point in cosmological terms, that a mortal should be sparing of the amount of divine favour they enjoy (2.687-88, *nimumque secundis / parce deis*; 9.814, *parce deis*), a message which is left implicit in Statius' encomium. Venus disapproves of Diana's prolonged assistance of Parthenopaeus, remarking that Diana herself is being "reckless" (*protervam*) and "daring" (*audax*) by encroaching upon Mars' remit as god of war (9.825, *nonne hanc, Gravide, protervam*; 9.827-28, *utque acies audax et Martia signa / temperet*). Mars upbraids Diana accordingly, and she departs from the battle.

³⁵⁸ See Seo (2013) 123-45 on Parthenopaeus playing the role of 'the Doomed Ephebe;' Marinis (2015) 353 'Stadius' sympathetic *Heldenknabe*.'

³⁵⁹ Dewar (1991) xxv.

Without Diana's aid Parthenopaeus loses his former fearlessness (9.814, *nec territus*) and his lack of prowess is exposed – his heroic anger is replaced with fear (9.862, *iam non ira subit, sed leti nuntius horror*). As he dies he asks Dorceus to comfort his mother by relaying his own contemplation about his death. Parthenopaeus' self-evaluation is effectively an epitaph about his rejection of restraint.³⁶⁰ He acknowledges that he deserves his death (9.891, *merui*), that he rejected Atalanta's attempts to restrain him (9.892, *nec te retinente*) and so, that she is right to be angry at his high spiritedness (9.894, *igitur potiusque animis irascere nostris*). As Dewar argues, the death of Parthenopaeus is less easy to distinguish as punishment for what he terms 'sin', like Tydeus' cannibalism, Capaneus' blasphemy, or Polynices' fratricide.³⁶¹ And it is this lack of criminal element that makes his death tragic and deserving of lament (1.44, *ploranda*) rather than horror. Equally, however, if Parthenopaeus' recklessness serves as a paradigm for mortality, when mapped onto Domitian the consequences are Phaethon-like in potential.

Capaneus

Just before Tydeus eats Melanippus' brain, he urges the other heroes to keep the war going despite his imminent death (8.742-44, *i, precor... / Hippomedon, vadem, o primis puer inclute bellis / Arcas*) and names Capaneus as the greatest of the Argives (10.744, *Argolicae Capaneu iam maxime turmae*). Similarly, after Parthenopaeus' death, Eteocles remarks that Tydeus, Amphiarus, Hippomedon have died, and that Parthenopaeus was no threat in any case (10.25-28). He asks if Adrastus, Polynices and Capaneus are something to fear (10.32, *metuendus*). Yet, Statius makes clear that the force of these heroes has not died with their bodies. Now, Capaneus furiously (*furit*) and indiscriminately kills on the battlefield 10.751-52, *non ullius aetas, / non cultus, non forma movet; pugnantibus idem / supplicibusque*, too fierce a match for anyone to attempt (10.753-54, *non quisquam obsistere contra, / non belli temptare vices*). Carrying the force of his dead comrades (10.750-51, *quin socium coisse animas et corpore in uno stare, ita cuncta replet*), Capaneus now inspires horror on the battlefield (10.754-55, *procul arma furentis / terribilisque iubas et frontem cassidis horrent*). Considering his introduction in the final line of the proem (1.45, *Capaneus horrore canendus*), the horror inspired by Capaneus in all his fury is a poetic cue for Statius, that the horror he foretells in his proem is now upon him.

Statius acknowledges the futility of his attempt to restrain his poem, by echoing in Book 10 the sense of compulsion to sing of Capaneus in the proem (10.827, *Capaneus tollendus*; cf. 1.45, *Capaneus canendus*). In terms of poetics, Statius submits to the force of his poem embodied in the figure of Capaneus. Just as Amphiarus abandons his role as prophetic *vates* and participates as a soldier in the war alongside Capaneus, Statius is forced to abandon his own role as poetic *vates* (10.829, *non mihi iam solito vatum de more canendum*) in order to match the *furor* of Capaneus.³⁶² Statius 'conflates his poetic inspiration with Capaneus' impious final stand against heaven,³⁶³ asks for the poetics of insanity greater than before (10.830, *maior ab Aoniis poscenda amentia lucis*)³⁶⁴ and betrays his former self-described disposition for poetic moderation (1.18, *nec... ausim*) in order to pursue this poetic venture (10.831, *mecum omnes audete deae*).

³⁶⁰ Cf. Dewar (1991) xxiv: '[c]ertainly he fails to recognize the limits of his power.'

³⁶¹ Dewar (1991) xxiii.

³⁶² Markus (2003) 460.

³⁶³ Myers (2015) 34-35.

³⁶⁴ See Leigh (2006) 235.

When Capaneus ascends the walls, he derides their construction by Amphion's "unwarlike song" (10.874, *carmenque imbelle*) as "a lying story about Thebes" (10.875, *mentita diu Thebarum*),³⁶⁵ which, like Hippomedon above, points to the mention of Amphion in the proem. The destruction of these walls, with specific reference to their construction via poetry, represents an undermining of Statius' poetry, and Capaneus' scornful remark that they are "constructed by a soft lyre" (10.876-77, *moenia molli / structa lyra*), seems to cast doubts over the power of poetry, and the effectiveness of a poet in society as Statius would like to imagine. Capaneus is struck down by Jupiter which recalls Phaethon's death in the lurking in the encomium and, significantly, the reflection upon Capaneus' fall from the Theban towers points to the excess of a *magnanimus* mortal (11.1-3, *postquam magnanimus furias virtutis iniquae / consumpsit Capaneus expiravitque receptum / fulmen*) as Domitian is described in the envoy (12.814, *iam te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar*). The ambiguity of *magnanimus* underlines the tension between the ambitions of the *princeps* and the objectives of the Principate: the poem asks Domitian if he will fall victim to the fate of Phaethon and Capaneus and ensure a return to chaos or if he will look to impose order on the world by keeping a grip on the reins. This faint hope offered by Statius through his *Thebaid* is expressed against a pessimistic backdrop of history repeating itself, with the additional tendency, as Statius suggests, of the present learning nothing from the examples of the past (11.556-57, *numquamne priorum / haerbunt documenta novis?*).

Considering that Statius asks this question following Creon's assumption of the throne and his immediate act of tyranny, the fact that the *Thebaid* is read by *magnanimus Caesar*, rather than Domitian specifically, is significant.³⁶⁶ The suggestion is that Domitian is simply another Caesar,³⁶⁷ and as such, the poem speculates whether Domitian might break from the mould of Caesarism, a form of monarchy, which is portrayed in the poem as something systematically inclined to committing the same mistakes of the past. In turn, Domitian's response to reading the *Thebaid* will reveal how impactful Statius' poetry has been, though the underlying feeling is that, as is the case with his poem, he has tried to impose himself on something inherently unchangeable. The futile task Statius embarks upon, of imposing order and a *limes* on the cycle of Theban guilt and inescapable origins, resembles the hope (or doubt) of his poetry's ability to advise a Caesar to rule responsibly and prevent Rome lapsing back into chaos. Unlike Domitian, however, the *Thebaid* will outlive the constraints of mortality, and only time will reveal if the poet has been effective has or if indeed his *Thebaid* has accurately captured and illustrated the fundamental nature of sole power - thus retelling a story already told many times before.

³⁶⁵ Cf. Hes. *Tb.* 1.27-28, with Murray (2006) 45.

³⁶⁶ In addition 'Creon' literally means "ruler, lord, master" (*LSJ* s.v. *κρείων*).

³⁶⁷ In this sense Domitian might be compared to Capaneus carrying the spirits of his fallen predecessors (11.746-51).

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