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Introduction

Night has fallen on the battlefield of Thebes. In the moonlight a woman wanders among the corpses, searching for Polynices, the exile son of Oedipus who raised an army against his own home. The light falls on his clothes, that she herself had woven, now drenched in his blood.¹ She falls on the corpse and cries out ... "Husband!" Meet Argia, Polynices' widow, the woman who put Antigone to shame by arriving there first. But what exactly is the relationship between the two heroines in the last book of Statius' *Thebaid*? To find out, let us start at the beginning.

In most extant versions dealing with the death of Polynices (A. *Th.* 1032ff.; S. *Ant.*; E. *Ph.* 1745–1746; Apollod. 3.78) it is always his sister Antigone who undertakes to bury him disregarding the ban imposed by Creon.² Argia is merely mentioned as the distant—anonymous—wife of Polynices (τῆς Πολυνείκεος / ... νόμφας, E. *Ph.* 135–136),³ and their marriage is possibly tinted with a hint of apprehension when Antigone exclaims ἰὼ δυσπότμων κασίγνητε γάμων κυρήσας ("alas, brother, you obtained an ill-stared marriage", S. *Ant.* 870). Statius, on the other hand, follows a version where both women attempt to bury Polynices, found elsewhere only in

¹ All translations are by the author. On weaving and the female voice in this scene, see Dietrich (1999) 47.

² Euripides' *Antigone* differed from the Sophoclean homonymous drama according to Aristophanes Byzantinus (κεῖται δὲ ἡ μυθοποιία καὶ παρ' Εὐριπίδῃ ἐν Ἀντιγόῃ: πλὴν ἐκεῖ φωραθεῖσα μετὰ τοῦτο Αἴμονι διδοται πρὸς γάμου κοινωνίαν καὶ τίκτει τὸν Μαίονα, "the myth is also found in Euripides' *Antigone*, only in that play, when she was discovered after that, she was given to Haemon in marriage, and gave birth to Maeon", Ar. Byz. 1) and a scholium in S. *Ant.* 1351 (ὅτι διαφέρει τῆς Εὐριπίδου Ἀντιγόνης αὕτη ὅτι φωραθεῖσα ἐκείνη διὰ τὸν Αἴμονος ἔρωτα ἐξεδόθη πρὸς γάμον, ἐνταῦθα δὲ τοῦναντίον, "this Antigone differs from Euripides' in that when she was discovered, thanks to Haemon's love for her, she was given to him in marriage, while here it is the opposite"). The surviving fragments, however, do not make any reference to Argia, and in that play, according to Webster's reconstruction (1967) 182, Antigone would have been helped by Haemon in burying her brother. See also Pollmann (2004) 44.

³ This appears in Antigone's question to her tutor about the identity of Tydeus.

Hyginus' summaries (*Fab.* 72) and on a [p. 122] late 2nd century ad Roman sarcophagus which depicts Antigone and Argia as they try to lift the corpse.⁴

The presence of sisters-in-law at the funeral of a hero killed in battle in front of his city is in fact a rare occurrence, but Statius does have an extant precedent to draw from: the lament for Hector in *Iliad* 24, conducted by his mother Hecuba, wife Andromache and sister-in-law Helen. At first sight, Argia corresponds to Andromache as the hero's widow, while Antigone matches Helen as the sister-in-law of the widow, who in Statius also happens to be the sister of the dead hero. There are, of course, important differences too, such as the fact that Homer's heroines are the wives of two brothers, whereas Antigone has no husband of her own. Polynices is the common object of affection for the two Statian heroines, a situation which is comparable to, and yet different from,⁵ Helen's privileged bond to Andromache's husband Hector which I examine below.⁶

As this essay will show, the Flavian poet intentionally evokes the Homeric sisters-in-law in his descriptions of Antigone and Argia, both in the final scene in Book 12 and in anticipatory glimpses of the two protagonists throughout the poem. He also benefits from the Homeric treatment of the bond in general. His aim is to prepare the reader for their encounter in Book 12 which transforms them, even momentarily, into actual sisters.⁷ Already their common interest in Polynices and their role as his mourners make them sisters, a notion which their comparison to the Heliades further encourages.⁸ In addition to that, Statius offers a portrayal of

⁴ *Antigona soror et Argia coniunx clam noctu Polynicis corpus sublatum in eadem pyra, qua Eteocles sepultus est, imposuerunt. quae cum a custodibus deprehensae essent, Argia profugit, Antigona ad regem est perducta* ("His sister Antigone and his wife Argia lifted Polynices' body secretly during the night, and placed it on the same pyre on which Eteocles had been cremated. When they were apprehended by the guards, Argia fled and Antigone was taken to the king", Hyg. *Fab.* 72); *LIMC* I 1 s.v. *Antigone*, No. 5 and 11.

⁵ I thank the anonymous reviewer for this point.

⁶ Importantly, Antigone's blood relationship to Argia's husband Polynices has no counterpart in the Homeric poem.

⁷ Which goes beyond "sisterhood", on which see e.g. Henderson (1993) 186–187.

⁸ *sic Hyperionium trepido Phaethonta sorores / fumantem lauere Pado; uixdum ille sepulcro / conditus, et flentes stabant ad flumina siluae* ("In such a way did his sisters wash still smoking

Argia and Antigone which abounds in references to specific sisters and their actions, as well as to the more general characteristic [p. 123] trait of sisterly similarity that we encounter in Latin epic, and the *Thebaid* in particular.

Sisters-in-law at Troy

As Argia parts ways with the rest of the Argive women in Book 12, she tells them that she expects to be allowed into Thebes on account of the presence there of her parents-in-law and sisters-in-law (*sunt illic soceri mihi suntque sorores / coniugis*, *Theb.* 12.201–202).⁹ Even though this argument serves her purpose of proceeding with her plan to bury Polynices unobstructed, it still presents a plausible expectation of what she might encounter by going to Thebes. To understand Argia’s certainty that she will find help from an audience of parents- and, more to the point, sisters-in-law, let us briefly consider attitudes ascribed to these kinship groups in earlier literature.

Homeric sisters-in-law, for which there are distinct terms in Homeric Greek (εἰνάτηρ “wife of one’s brother”, or “wife of one’s husband’s brother”, and γάλωσ “sister of one’s husband”),¹⁰ seem to spend time with each other and have access to each other’s chambers. In Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Iris takes the form of Laodice, Hector and Paris’ sister, and consequently Helen’s γάλωσ, in order to bring Helen to the walls of Troy. Laodice’s natural entrance to Helen’s room (Ἑλένη λευκωλένω ἄγγελος ἦλθεν ... τὴν δ’ εὖρ’ ἐν μεγάρῳ: ... ἀγχοῦ δ’ ἰσταμένη προσέφη, “she came as a messenger to Helen of the white arms ... she found her in her house ... standing next to her, she

Phaethon, son of Hyperion, in the warm Padus; barely had he been buried and they were standing as a forest next to the river”, *Stat. Theb.* 12.413–415). See Corti (1987) 5–9 on Polynices as Phaethon in the *Thebaid*; and Bernstein (2008) 100 who argues that this comparison “equates marriage with a blood relationship”.

⁹ See Bernstein (2008) 97 on Argia’s faith in her in-laws’ goodwill due to her expectations from a virilocal marriage.

¹⁰ Liddell-Scott ad loc. suggest that both terms are used to describe the bond of sisters-in-law regardless of the details of the marriage that produced it.

addressed her”, 3.121, 125, 129) and her affectionate address (νόμφο φίλη, 130)¹¹ indicate that the two women are on good terms with one another. Another passage that illuminates the attitudes of such Homeric women is found in Book 6. Here Hector asks the maids whether his wife, currently absent from their house, might have gone to see any of her sisters-in-law (ἠέ πη ἐς γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρων ἐϋπέπλων / ... ἐξοίκεται, 6.378–379).¹² And it is precisely these nameless female relatives who stand around and [p. 124] support Andromache when she faints after finding out about Hector’s death (ἀμφὶ δέ μιν γαλόω τε καὶ εἰνατέρες ἄλις ἔσταν, / αἶέ μετὰ σφίσιον εἶχον, 22.473–474).¹³

A nuance at negative feelings, however, can be traced in Helen’s lament for Hector, when she complains that some of his relatives spoke ill of her:¹⁴

ἀλλ’ εἴ τις με καὶ ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἐνίπποι
 δαέρων ἢ γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρων εὐπέπλων,
 ἢ ἐκυρή— ...

Hom. *Il.* 24.768–770

But if anyone else were to reprove me in the palace, one of my husband’s brothers or one of his sisters or one of his brothers’ wives with their beautiful robes, or my mother-in-law ...

The relatives are mentioned in a very general way, but the fact that the reference to “sisters-in-law” occupies most of line 769 may suggest an allusion to Andromache; if this is true, then Helen accuses Hector’s wife, who is present at the scene, of animosity against her. Such a complaint may be all the more significant since it is

¹¹ “my sister-in-law”, lit. “dear young bride”, which may be an appropriate form of address for a sister-in-law (as it is in Modern Greek) as Kirk (1985) *ad Il.* 3.130 notes.

¹² One of these is Cassandra who does not interact with Andromache, or indeed any other of her female relations. She is granted a very small part in *Iliad* 24 when she is the one to spot Priam return with Hector’s body (699–707); see below, n. 22.

¹³ Bettini (2013) 212 also notes this interaction, to then argue, somewhat less convincingly, that sisters-in-law would also assist at childbirth (p. 213). The harmony of “husband’s sisters” and “husband’s brother’s wives” who sit around the same table is an indication of a household’s prosperity, according to Callimachus (ταὶ δὲ θυωρὸν / εἰνάτερες γαλόω τε μίαν περὶ δίφρα τίθενται, *Cer.* 134–135) (Bettini *ibid.*).

¹⁴ See Tsagalis (2004) 99–102 on Helen’s weaving of the blame of others (instead of her usual self-blame) within her lament to Hector, her “dearest brother-in-law” (p. 101).

precisely Hector whom Helen thanks in the subsequent lines for his display of kindness (771–772). Needless to say that tragedy is more explicit in feelings between these two sisters-in-law. In Euripides' *Andromache* the title heroine calls Helen the destruction (ἄταν, 103) of Paris, Hector, Troy and herself,¹⁵ and in the *Trojan Women* she attributes Helen's paternity to a number of evils and curses her to die.¹⁶ Statius, however, seems to draw from Homer [p. 125] here rather than Euripides, at least as far as the attitude of the sisters-in-law is concerned.

Homeric Models in Common

The reworking of the Homeric funeral scene in *Thebaid* 12, and consequently the encounter of the Statian sisters-in-law, does not come unprepared. The Roman poet plants a number of hints in the course of the poem associating in turn Antigone and Argia with Andromache, or Helen, or both. The first such clue is found in the second book where the daughters of Adrastus are first named as rumour spreads of their impending double marriage to Polynices and Tydeus (*egregiam Argian ... / Deipylen ... iugari, Theb. 2.203–204*). *Argia* and its Greek counterpart Ἀργεία, after her native city, echoes Helen's frequent epithet in the *Iliad*, incidentally first used when she is first named also in that epic's second book (Ἀργεῖην Ἑλένην, *Il. 2.161*).¹⁷

¹⁵ Ἴλιῳ αἰπεινᾶ Πάρις οὐ γάμον ἀλλά τιν' ἄταν / ἀγάγει' εὐναίαν εἰς θαλάμους Ἑλέναν. / ὣς ἔνεκ', ὃ Τροία, δορὶ καὶ πυρὶ δηιάλωτον / εἶλέ σ' ὁ χιλιόναυς Ἑλλάδος ὄξυς Ἄρης / καὶ τὸν ἐμὸν μελέας πόσιν Ἔκτορα, τὸν περὶ τείχη / εἶλκυσε διφρεῦων παῖς Ἀλίας Θέτιδος ("Paris did not bring a wife in lofty Troy, but ruin as a consort in his bedroom, Helen. Because of her, the harsh warriors of Greece with their thousand ships seized hold of you, Troy, with spear and fire of capture, and killed my Hector, husband to miserable me; the son of sea-goddess Thetis dragged him around the city walls as he rode his chariot", E. *Andr.* 103–107).

¹⁶ ὦ Τυνδάρειον ἔρνος, οὐ ποτ' εἶ Διός, / πολλῶν δὲ πατέρων φημί σ' ἐκπεφυκέναι, / Ἀλάστορος μὲν πρῶτον, εἶτα δὲ Φθόνου, / Φόνου τε Θανάτου θ' ὅσα τε γῆ τρέφει κακά. / οὐ γάρ ποτ' αὐκῶ Ζῆνά γ' ἐκφῦσαι σ' ἐγώ, / πολλοῖσι κῆρα βαρβάροις Ἕλλησι τε. / ὄλοιο: καλλίστων γὰρ ὀμμάτων ἄπο / αἰσχροῦς τὰ κλεινὰ πεδί' ἀπώλεσας Φρυγῶν ("Oh offspring of Tyndareos, there is no way you are Zeus' child, I say you were born of many fathers, first of the Avenging Demon, then Envy and Murder and Death and all evils the earth nourishes. I confidently declare that Zeus was never your father, doom as you have been for many barbarians as well as Greeks. Die! For with your beautiful eyes you have shamefully destroyed the famous plains of the Phrygians", E. *Tr.* 766–773).

¹⁷ Interestingly, *egregiam Argian* mirrors in reverse Ἀργεῖην Ἑλένην, with both phrases occupying the space from the beginning of the line to the strong caesura.

Like Argia, Helen comes from Argos, and from the perspective of the city under siege she is the foreign bride. While Argia's name points towards Helen, however, her attitude in her native city recalls Andromache. Like her Trojan model, Argia tries to talk her husband out of the war (*Theb.* 2.339–343),¹⁸ and in her expression of anxiety about Polynices' safety (*tua me ... / angit ... salus*, 342–343) she repeats Andromache's argument that his very might is going to be her husband's doom (φθίσει σε τὸ σὸν μένος, *Il.* 6.407). On the other hand, Argia explicitly rejects Andromache's

further efforts to persuade Hector by means of references to her widowhood at the beginning and end of her speech:¹⁹ *nil foedere rupto / conubiisue super moueor uiduaque* [p. 126] *iuuenta* (“nor am I moved by the broken pact of our marriage and my widowed youth”, *Theb.* 2.339–340).

Andromache is also evoked in Book 4, when Polynices sees Argia standing on a tower and looking at his departing army: *de turre suprema / attonitam totoque extantem corpore longe / respicit Argian* (“he looked back to Argia, frantic on the highest tower, stretching out with her whole body”, 4.89–91). Here Statius is reworking a specific Homeric scene describing Andromache as she goes “on the great tower of Troy” (ἐπὶ πύργον ... μέγαν Ἰλίου, *Il.* 6.386). In her haste to reach the walls, Hector's wife is compared to a “frenzied woman” (πρὸς τεῖχος ἐπειγομένη ἀφικάνει / μαινομένη ἔϊκυῖα, 388–389), which explains the designation of Statius' Argia as *attonita* (*Theb.* 4.90), a term often used to denote Bacchic frenzy.²⁰

However, as she mourns Polynices in Book 12, Argia twice insists on taking the blame for the war, which is not something Andromache ever did. The first such

¹⁸ Ross (2004) xxxiii.

¹⁹ οὐδ' ἐλαίρεις / παῖδά τε νηπίαχον καὶ ἔμ' ἄμμορον, ἢ τάχα χήρη / σεῦ ἔσομαι (“you feel pity neither for your infant son nor for ill-fated me, who will quickly become your widow”, *Il.* 6.407–409); θήης χήρην τε γυναῖκα (“you will leave your wife a widow”, 432).

²⁰ Thus, for instance, are the mothers of Latium described in *A.* 7.580, as they celebrate Bacchic rites with Amata; the same term forms part of a simile comparing Jocasta to a Theban Bacchant in *Sen. Oed.* 1005–1007.

instance forms part of a cunning speech where she is trying to part from the rest of the Argive women without their objecting to her plan: *tantae quae sola ruinae / causa fui* (“I who have been the only cause of such great misfortune”, 12.198–199). If that was pure rhetoric, the second time that she admits her responsibility for the war cannot be discredited, since it is made to Polynices himself: *quid queror? ipsa dedi bellum maestumque rogavi / ipsa patrem ut talem nunc te complexa tenerem* (“why do I complain? I myself gave you this war and asked my sad father so that I might now hold you like this in my embrace”, 336–337). Argia’s awareness of being the cause of war recalls Helen’s speech to Hector when she assumes, together with Paris, the blame for the war (εἴνεκ’ ἐμεῖο κυνὸς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ’ ἄτης, “on my account, bitch as I am, and due to Alexander’s blindness”, *Il.* 6.356).²¹

In the same way that Statius’ Argia finds correspondences both in Helen and Andromache, his Antigone can also be seen as a reworking of both Homeric heroines. Half-way through the poem, Antigone finds herself on “a solitary tower” (*turre ... sola, Theb.* 7.243) to perform a *teichoscopia* similar to that of Helen,²² who goes “up to the tower” (ἐπὶ πύργον, *Il.* 3.154) as a result of Iris’ visit [p. 127] discussed above. Yet, Antigone’s role is not to explain who the warriors are, as in the Homeric model, but to listen to her old companion pointing them out to her,²³ as the tragic tradition

²¹ Helen, however, allows for the role of the gods to come explicitly into the picture (οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόνον, “as Zeus brought an evil doom upon us both”, *Hom. Il.* 6.357). Dominik (1994a) 131 points out that, instead of blaming the gods, Argia thanks them for helping her find Polynices’ body, yet another proof of her piety.

²² Smolenaars (1994) 120; Ganiban (2007) 166–167. *Teichoscopia* is very common in the *Iliad*; Priam and Hecuba go on the walls in Book 22 in an attempt to convince Hector not to fight Achilles, only to witness their son’s death with their own eyes. Andromache hears Hecuba’s shrill cry “from the tower” (κωκυτοῦ δ’ ἤκουσε καὶ οἰμωγῆς ἀπὸ πύργου, 22.447) and rushes there herself to look out from the wall (αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πύργον τε καὶ ἀνδρῶν ἴξεν ὄμιλον, / ἔστη παπτήνασ’ ἐπὶ τείχεϊ, 462–463), only to confirm her fears seeing Hector’s body being dragged by Achilles’ chariot (464). Cassandra, on the other hand, is the first to raise the alarm after looking out from Pergamum, the Trojan citadel, and seeing Priam come back with Hector’s ransomed body (Πέργαμον εἰσαναβᾶσα φίλον πατέρ’ εἰσενόησεν / ἔσταότ’ ἐν δίφρῳ, κήρυκά τε ἀστυβοώτην / τὸν δ’ ἄρ’ ἐφ’ ἡμιόνων ἶδε κείμενον ἐν λεχέεσσι, 24.700–702).

²³ Phorbas in *Thebaid* 7 explains who the Theban warriors are, unlike both Helen’s *teichoscopia* and the tragic precedent of Euripides’ *Phoenissae*, which are concerned with the hostile army (Greeks and Argives respectively). In this respect Statius’ Antigone resembles

prescribed.²⁴ She “protects her tender cheeks with a veil” (*Theb.* 7.244–245), just as Helen “veiled herself with linen” (*Il.* 3.141), only in her case the veil is gleaming white (ἀργεννήσι ... ὀθόνησιν) whereas Antigone wears an ominous black (*atra / ueste*).

In Book 11 Antigone returns to the walls (*fastigia muri ... summas ... ad arces*, *Theb.* 11.356–358) to try to convince Polynices not to fight his brother in a duel. Here, however, she recalls Andromache in whose description we also note two references to the walls: ἐπὶ πύργον ... μέγαν Ἰλίου (*Il.* 6.386); πρὸς τεῖχος (388). She gets there in haste (ἐπειγομένη, 388), which in Antigone’s case is expressed as non-delay (*nec casta retardat / uirginitas*, “her chaste maidenhood does not delay her”, *Theb.* 11.354–355).²⁵ Finally, the Theban princess is characterised as *furens* (357) which reproduces the Iliadic phrase applied to Andromache (μυαινομένη εἰκυῖα, Hom. *Il.* 6.389).²⁶ [p. 128]

Antigone / Argia

The use of these Homeric models, who are also sisters-in-law, evokes the Homeric lament for Hector in the final book of the *Iliad*, and foreshadows the encounter of Antigone and Argia in order to mourn Polynices in the final book of the *Thebaid*. The two women’s similar portrayal in their respective *teichoscopia* scenes, which this section examines, also anticipates that encounter.

Medea in Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica* 6, who also listens to someone else (in that case, Juno disguised as her sister) describing the heroes on the battlefield.

²⁴ E. *Ph.* 88–201, where the old paedagogus describes the Argive army to Antigone, as Smolenaars (1994) 120 points out.

²⁵ Hershkowitz (1993) 142–143 compares Antigone’s two *teichoscopia* scenes, noting that her madness in Book 11 accounts for her figurative loss of virginity.

²⁶ Antigone’s portrayal as a raging woman whose frenzy helps her go fast (*uolat*) recalls Jocasta’s earlier description which compared her to the Bacchant Agave (*Theb.* 11.318–320). Then neither the attendants nor Antigone and Ismene could keep up with the queen (*Theb.* 11.321–322); here Antigone’s tutor, Actor, tries to walk as fast as his mistress but ultimately fails (*non duraturus*, *Theb.* 11.358), as Ganiban (2007) 166 points out. He adds that Antigone’s appeal to Polynices has no precedent in the tragic tradition, and this is proof of the Statian Antigone’s appropriation of roles originally belonging to Jocasta alone.

As Antigone stands on the walls of Thebes to address Polynices (*Theb.* 11.354–358), she recalls Argia who earlier stood on the walls of Argos to watch him depart (4.89–91). In both cases Polynices in the midst of his army sees and is seen by his wife and his sister who stand at the top of towers: Antigone goes *summas ... ad arces* (11.358), Argia is seen *de turre suprema* (4.89). In fact, the word *turris* used to denote Argia's position in Book 4 is repeated in Antigone's own description of her position (*paulumque hanc respice turrem, / frater*, "look to this tower for a moment, brother", 11.363–364).²⁷ Even more importantly, Antigone uses the same verb (*respice*, 363) that earlier described Polynices looking back to see Argia on the tower of Argos (*respicit*, 4.91).²⁸ In other words, Antigone asks her brother to repeat his earlier action but this time to look not at his wife but at his sister.

Antigone's speech has a similar temporary effect on Polynices as the sight of Argia. The latter "draws her husband's mind and eyes, and turns sweet Thebes away from his heart" (*haec mentem oculosque reducit / coniugis et dulces auertit pectore Thebas*, 4.91–92).²⁹ Comparably, his sister's words calm his anger and generate feelings of regret and shame (*his paulum furor elanguescere dictis / coeperat, obstreperet quamquam atque obstaret Erinys*, "with these words [Polynices'] frenzy started to grow faint, even though the Fury was roaring and standing in his way", 11.382–383). In both cases the intervention of a third party is required to break the spell that those two women cast on Polynices. In Book 4 it is the shift of focus to bellicose Tydeus, while in Book 11 it is the sudden breaking of the gates by the Fury

²⁷ Vessey (1973) 205 and n. 2 compares Argia's position *de turre suprema* with Antigone's *teichoscopia* which happens *turre ... sola* (*Theb.* 7.243).

²⁸ On "looking back" in the *Thebaid* see Pagán (2000) 439–448.

²⁹ See Hershkowitz (1993) 129–130 on an interpretation of Polynices' desire for his natal family as sexual.

who forces the two brothers to face each other and engage in their fateful duel.³⁰ [p. 129]

As the two heroines arrive at the scene of the fratricide in the following book, further similarities emerge. Antigone is introduced as ‘another Argia’ when she appears on the battlefield in a pitiful state, wailing, and carrying a torch (*ecce alios gemitus aliamque ad busta ferebat / Antigone miseranda facem*, 12.349–350).³¹ Only a few lines earlier, Argia was described as wailing (240) and carrying a torch (267–279), while when she recognised Polynices’ clothes that she herself had woven she was “pitiful” too (*coniugis ipsa suos noscit miseranda labores*, 313). The description of Antigone’s exit from Thebes also echoes Argia’s earlier portrayal. Antigone’s frenzy (*amens*, 354) as she “breaks out of the walls” (*erumpit muris*, 356) is compared to a lioness’ (*uirginis ira leae*, 357), appropriately described “without her mother” (*sine matre*, 358), since Jocasta committed suicide in the previous book.³² Similarly characterised by frenzy in her search for her husband’s corpse, Argia is compared first to the crazy leader of the followers of Cybele (*dux uesana chori*, 226);³³ then to Ceres looking for her daughter Proserpina and wailing madly (270–275; note esp.

³⁰ Vessey (1973) 273 compares Antigone’s speech here to Jocasta’s embassy to Polynices in Book 7 which also has a temporary effect (*Theb.* 7.536–538), but once again the intervention of a third party, there Tydeus, makes Polynices change his mind (*Theb.* 7.538–563).

³¹ Pollmann (2004) ad 349–351. A closer inspection of the text, however, complicates matters. In order to point out that Antigone looks and behaves the same way as Argia, the poet opts for the term *alius-a-um* which is often used to stress the difference between two items. That was, for instance, the case in the Aeneid where the term accompanies the name of Achilles in order to designate Turnus who is similar but also very different from the Greek hero (*alius Latio iam partus Achilles*, A. 6.89). Thus, although the appearance of Antigone as she arrives at the scene resembles that of Argia a hundred lines earlier, the poet makes sure that there is a clear distinction between the two, at least for the time being.

³² Pollmann (2004) ad 356–358.

³³ Pollmann (2004) ad 224–227 stresses the fanatic aspect of Cybele’s followers and glosses over the idea of insanity carried by *uesana*.

insanis ululatus, 274);³⁴ and finally to a frenzied woman possessed by a god (*attonitam*,³⁵ 278).³⁶

So far we have seen that Argia and Antigone are modelled on the same Homeric precedents (who are indeed also sisters-in-law); and that both earlier in the poem and in Book 12 they are presented as sharing a number of [p. 130] traits: actions, appearance and equipment, wretchedness, frenzy. Their earlier similarities help to anticipate their encounter but, more importantly for the purpose of this paper, they bring them closer than any precedent of sisters-in-law could. Similarity is a characteristic of sisters in Latin epic, and I will spend the rest of this paper demonstrating how Argia and Antigone become just that within the lament scene.³⁷

Sisters

Like Virgilian sisters Dido and Anna, and Ovidian heroines such as Procne and Philomela, ³⁸ Statius' sister pairs exemplify a degree of unanimity and interchangeability that we do not see much in their Greek literary counterparts.³⁹ For example Argia and Deipyle, the daughters of Argive king Adrastus, and wives to Polynices and Tydeus respectively, are portrayed throughout the poem in terms highlighting their similarities, whether in appearance, age, modesty, beauty, or

³⁴ Pollmann (2004) ad 270–277 brings parallels for the use of *insanus* to describe the effect of great grief to people.

³⁵ This is the second occurrence of the term applied to Argia (the first one was at *Theb.* 4.90, discussed above), and it can be seen as continuing the simile that compares her to Ceres and thus reworking *mutatis mutandis* the mother's desperate search for her daughter.

³⁶ Pollmann (2004) ad 278 describes Argia's actions as "verg[ing] on the subconscious or rather paranoid". I cannot understand then why she does not see the similarity with Antigone at 12.354ff. and insists instead on stressing the contrast between Antigone's frenzy and Argia's *pietas* [Pollmann (2004) ad 354].

³⁷ Their adherence to this sister image is such that Argia and Antigone are sometimes described as "the sisters": Dominik (1994b) 42 n. 61; Ganiban (2007) 211.

³⁸ Verg. *A.* 4 *passim* (Dido and Anna); Ov. *Met.* 6.424–674 (Procne and Philomela).

³⁹ See Maniotti (2012) 27–45, 45–54, and Maniotti (forthcoming). On unanimity among siblings in Flavian epic see Keith (sisters) and Littlewood (brothers) in this volume.

simply pace.⁴⁰ Therefore, by presenting Argia and Antigone as similar, the poet indicates that we should see them as more than just sisters-in-law.

In fact, a clearer pointer to their sisterly nature is found in their comparison within Book 12 in terms of knowledge and ignorance of the battlefield. Naturally for a Theban, Antigone knows the topography of the plain as well as the exact position of Polynices' body (*trucem campum et positus quo puluere frater / nouerat*, 359–360), perhaps because she watched the duel from the walls [p. 131] where we left her in Book 11,⁴¹ just as Helen did when Menelaus and Paris fought to settle their dispute in *Iliad* 3. Knowledge ensures a swift arrival (*nec longa morata*, *Theb.* 12.358). On the contrary, Argia wanders around the battlefield for hours in vain (*per campos errore fatiscere uano*, 295), as she is *rudis atque ignara locorum* (“inexperienced and ignorant of the place”, 206). While *ignara* contrasts with Antigone's *nouerat* (360), the first term used to describe Argia's ignorance, *rudis*, was applied earlier in the poem to Antigone (*sic rudis Antigone, senior cui talia Phorbas*, 7.253) who at the time, and in comparison to her tutor Phorbas, was as inexperienced in war as Argia is. *rudis* was also used to describe Ismene, who during the embassy to Polynices in Book 7 was not as aware of the sorrowful situation as her sister (*rudis Ismenes ... flebiliora precantis / Antigones*, 535–536). Now Ismene is no longer, because she has committed suicide after Jocasta in Book 11,⁴² but we have another woman in Book 12 who juxtaposes her ignorance to Antigone's knowledge: *rudis Argia*.

⁴⁰ *pariter pallorque ruborque / purpureas hausere genas, oculique uerentes / ad sanctum rediere patrem*, “in equal measure pallor and redness suffused their purple cheeks, and their eyes turned respectfully towards their holy father”, *Theb.* 1.337–339; *geminae mihi namque, nepotum / laeta fides, aequo pubescunt sidere natae, / quantus honos quantusque pudor*, “for my twin daughters, a happy promise of grandsons, are growing to adulthood under an equal star, how great their honour, how great their modesty”, 2.158–160; *egregiam Argian nec formae laude secundam / Deipylen*, “lovely Argia and Deipyle, equal in praise of her beauty”, 2.203–204; *proxima Lernaio Calydonidas agmine mixtas / Tydeos exsequiis trahit haud cessura sorori / Deipyle*, “right next to [Argia], not intending to give precedence to her sister, Deipyle drags to Tydeus' funeral Calydonian women mixed with the Lernaean group”, 12.117–119. For an extensive discussion see Maniotti (2012) 55–67.

⁴¹ Pollmann (2004) ad 360 takes this to be a certainty.

⁴² Implied by her comparison to Erigone (*Theb.* 11.644–647): see Hershkowitz (1993) 140, 143; Augoustakis (2010) 75; Scioli (2010) 209 n. 15.

Argia's role as filling in the gap left by Ismene's death is confirmed by two scenes in the lament episode which rework earlier ones in the *Thebaid* featuring Antigone and Ismene, but are ingeniously reversed. While Antigone and Ismene acted as mediators in Book 7, and told each other stories of the war in Book 8, in Book 12 Antigone and her new 'sister' Argia first become storytellers and then try to intervene between the still-warring brothers.

After the initial moments of apprehension and mistrust which follow their encounter on the Theban battlefield (on which see below), Argia and Antigone resume their lament for the dead Polynices:⁴³

... hic pariter lapsae iunctoque per ipsum
amplexu miscent auidae lacrimasque comasque
partitaeque artus redeunt alterna gementes
ad uultum et cara uicibus ceruice fruuntur.
dumque modo haec fratrem memorat nunc illa maritum
mutuaque exorsae Thebas Argosque renarrant

Stat. *Theb.* 12.385–390 [p. 132]

... here, collapsing together and joined in the same embrace around him, they greedily mix their tears and their hair, and dividing his limbs between them they return to his face alternating their wailing, and delight in his dear neck in turn. And while now one recalls her brother, now the other her husband, and they begin to tell again to each other the stories of Thebes and Argos ...

The concentration of terms denoting equity (*pariter*, *partitae*), togetherness (*iuncto* ... *amplexu*) and alternation (*alterna*, *uicibus*) points to Argia and Antigone's rejection of one's priority over the other and the acceptance of their bond through Polynices.⁴⁴

⁴³ The two laments for Polynices (by Argia alone earlier in Book 12, and by Argia and Antigone here) offer "a rival version of the epic Statius has just told, seen through women's eyes and in women's terms" [Fantham (1999) 231]. On the feminine end of the *Thebaid* see also Dietrich (1999).

⁴⁴ As Lovatt (1999) 138 puts it, "mutual grief makes the women allies, and their mourning is characterised by words of sharing (*pariter*, *iuncto*, *miscent*, *partitae*, *alterna*, *uicibus*, *Theb.* 12.385–388)". These terms, according to Ganiban (2007) 211, "contribute to the

Their equal share further extends to their words, which they resume immediately in order to remember Polynices and retell the story of their countries and the war (389–390). Their mutual exchange of narratives (*mutua ... renarrant*) is further stressed by the symmetrical structure in the first line with the singular verb (*memorat*) applying to both as it is framed by a sequence of temporal adverb, pronoun subject and noun object.

More importantly, this description recalls the scene in Book 8 where Antigone and Ismene talk about the woes of their family and the war of their brothers:⁴⁵

interea thalami secreta in parte sorores,
par aliud morum miserique innoxia proles
Oedipodae, uarias miscent sermone querellas.
nec mala quae iuxta sed longa ab origine fati,
haec matris taedas oculos ast illa paternos,
altera regnantem profugum gemit altera fratrem,
bella ambae. ...

Stat. *Theb.* 8.607–613

Meanwhile in a secret part of the room the sisters, a different pair in attitude, the innocent offspring of wretched Oedipus, mix various complaints in their speech. Nor do they talk of recent evils but those from the early [p. 133] beginnings of their doom, this one of their mother's bridal torches, that one of their father's eyes, one wails for their reigning brother, the other for their exiled one, and both of them for the war ...

Their descriptions (*sorores, par, proles*) are densely packed in one and a half lines, creating the impression of a very intimate relationship, also highlighted by the kinship terms (*mater, pater, frater*) which are valid for both. They complement each

inseparability of the sisters (sic) in their frenzied actions". On the "sexually charged picture of grief", see Hershkowitz (1998) 294 with further bibliography.

⁴⁵ On this episode see also Augoustakis, Keith and Newlands in this volume.

other in their narrative of the family's past misfortunes,⁴⁶ as the syntax points out (*haec ... illa ... / altera ... altera ... / ... ambae*, 611–613), with the last designation, *ambae*, bringing them together as one. This arrangement paired with a balanced distribution of half a line to each one (611–612) confirms the sisters' indivisibility and identical behaviour, a trait shared with the other pair of the poem, Argia and Deipyle.⁴⁷

The combination of the words *exorsae* and *renarrant* to describe the narrative process in Book 12 (390) echoes the sequence *exordia ... adnarrant* ("they tell of the beginning", 8.618–619) applied to the Theban sisters through their comparison to nightingales. The invocation of the previous scene through these structural and verbal parallels encourages us to read this meeting as a repetition of the earlier one, but now Argia has substituted Ismene not only in the role of a narrative voice but also in the more crucial one of a sister.⁴⁸

Later in Book 12, Argia and Antigone place Polynices' body on a still burning pyre, only to realise that it is that of Eteocles. The two brothers' duel continues after death as the flames split and seem to fight each other.⁴⁹ At that moment, Antigone tries to placate the brothers' posthumous ire, specifically addressing Polynices:⁵⁰ *cede—hoc nupta precatur / hoc soror—aut saeuos mediae uenimus in ignes* ("yield—your wife begs for this, your sister too— [p. 134] otherwise we will come in the middle of the savage fire", 445–446).⁵¹ As Antigone points out, both his wife and his sister

⁴⁶ This scene "draws attention to the undeserved nature of their suffering", but also showcases the "virtuous qualities of womankind" as innocent victims of the war (Dominik (1994b) 126–127).

⁴⁷ See above, n. 40.

⁴⁸ As Steiner (1984) 146 notes, in the reception of Statius' *Thebaid* one cannot fail to notice the replacement of Ismene's character by that of Argia, and it is only in the modern period when Statius' work was eclipsed that the Theban princess reclaims her Sophoclean position.

⁴⁹ On the split flame see e.g. McNelis (2007) 157–159.

⁵⁰ Pollmann (2004) *ad* 444 explains this shift from both brothers to Polynices alone as a matter of affability of the latter. It is more reasonable, however, to expect Antigone to address him and not Eteocles not only because of their closer bond, but also because Argia, his wife, is present whose prayers would have no effect on Eteocles.

⁵¹ Gärtner (2007) sees in Antigone's threat *aut saeuos mediae uenimus in ignes* a reworking of Julia's threat to Pompey in Lucan: *ueniam te bella gerente / in medias acies* (Luc. 3.30–31).

are begging Polynices to withdraw from this meaningless hatred, and once again they are given equal space in the line. But it is her threat that they fall in the flames that carries the most powerful implications in Antigone's brief speech. While the adjective *mediae* primarily indicates the movement of the two women "to the middle" of the flames, there is certainly an echo from a previous occasion when the same word was applied to Antigone and her sister Ismene. This was during Jocasta's embassy to Polynices in Book 7, where her daughters accompanied her, though they were not granted direct speech. Tydeus then pointed out that even if Eteocles were to come to the Argive camp, Jocasta, Antigone and Ismene would assume the same roles that they were playing then, namely those of mediators (*et hic genetrix eadem mediaeque sorores*, 557). Now Antigone, viewing Argia as Ismene's replacement, intends to act once again, this time *in extremis*, as a mediator in order to stop the brothers' quarrel which continues even after their mutual killing.

Rivalry

This combination of sisters-in-law and actual sisters in the presentation of Argia and Antigone may go some way towards explaining their perceived rivalry in Book 12.⁵² Throughout the lament scene tension builds up and then subsides, whether it is Argia wondering where the famous Antigone is (*ubi incluta fama / Antigone?* 331–332), or their alternating claims over Polynices just before they start their mutual lament (362–385). Especially poignant in that altercation are Antigone's designation of the night as hers (*nocte mea*, 367), Argia's embrace of Polynices (*corpusque tamen complexa*, 373), and Antigone's identification of his body with her own (*mea membra tenes, mea funera plangis*, 383).⁵³ We have seen them act complementarily or as one, but at the end of that scene of war storytelling *longius Argia miseros reminiscitur*

⁵² On a different interpretation of their rivalry see Newlands in this volume.

⁵³ Bernstein (2008) 100–101 points out the brief duration of this competition, and the fact that Antigone embraces Argia's cooperative attitude.

actus (“Argia recalls his sorrowful actions for longer”, 391). A direct speech follows but when Antigone’s turn comes for her reply, in fact as “she had begun to tell of the reasons and the sad [p. 135] fate” (*causas ac tristia reddere fata / coeperat*, 404–405), she is briskly cut off by Argia’s “loyal companion” (*fidus comes*, 405) who urges them to get on with the burial.⁵⁴

Alongside this narrative imbalance we should also note the possibility of jealousy behind Argia’s speech. By highlighting how much Antigone was loved by Polynices,⁵⁵ and allowing only a couple of mentions to herself, she brings out their contrast even more clearly:

‘... te cupiit unam noctesque diesque locutus
Antigonen; ego cura minor facilisque relinqui. ...
nos procul. extremas sed quis deus egit in iras?
nil uestrae ualuere preces? tibine iste negauit
oranti?’...stat.

Stat. *Theb.* 12.396–397, 402–404

“... You alone he desired, and day and night he spoke of Antigone; I was a lesser care, easily left behind ... I was far away. But which god drove him to the edge of anger? Did your prayers count for nothing? Did your brother refuse you when you begged him?”

Argia was “easy to leave behind” and “far away”.⁵⁶ She almost accuses his sister for not being able to stop Polynices with her pleading, just as she had done before Antigone arrived at the scene (*nullasne tuorum / mouisti lacrimas? ubi mater, ubi*

⁵⁴ Argia’s own lament for Polynices (before Antigone arrived) was given in direct speech at *Theb.* 12.322–348; for a stylistic analysis see Dominik (1994a) 267–268. Dietrich (1999) 47 compares Argia with Euryalus’ mother, and Dietrich (2004) 10–12 discusses her modelling on Dido.

⁵⁵ Foley (2005) 117 sees an example of Statius’ sensitivity “to the power and importance of a female voice and perspective” in Argia’s presentation of Polynices’ love for Antigone as his motive behind his return to Thebes; cf. Lovatt (1999) 139 who reads this rhetorical choice as Argia’s manipulation of “the story to enact the reconciliation with her new family which her husband failed to achieve through war”.

⁵⁶ Lovatt (1999) 139 reads Argia’s speech as manipulating the truth in order to earn an ally, which is what Pollmann (2004) ad 396–397 also suggests, agreeing with Frings and Hoffmann who point out that these words do not correspond to an earlier passage and purely serve her need for Antigone’s loyalty and assistance.

incluta fama / Antigone? “Did you not move any of your kinswomen to tears? Where is your mother, where the famous Antigone?” 330–332).

The tension briefly subsides in the following scene where the two join forces in order to find a pyre and offer Polynices funeral rites, and even in their [p. 136] efforts to prevent the brothers from continuing to fight after death as discussed above. When they are arrested, however, this tension reaches a climax which is interpreted as reflecting the brothers’ rivalry:⁵⁷

... haec fratris rapuisse haec coniugis artus
contendunt uicibusque probant: ‘ego corpus’ ‘ego ignes’
‘me pietas’ ‘me duxit amor.’ ...
nusquam illa alternis modo quae reuerentia uerbis,
iram odiumque putes, tantus discordat utrimque
clamor,...

Stat. *Theb.* 12.457–459, 461–463

... they contend that she snatched her brother’s limbs, the other her husbands, and they offer proof in turn: “I <found> the body” “I the fire” “Piety led me” “Me love.” ... Nowhere was that reverence which their alternating words showed a moment ago; you would think it was anger and hatred, so great was the shouting that clashed from either side ...

How are we to understand this jealousy and passionate competition between the two heroines?⁵⁸ One possibility is that they convey some of the rivalry between Homeric sisters-in-law that we have seen latent in Helen’s lament for Hector. The earliest version of the nightingale’s myth, also found in Homer, similarly implies a rivalry between mythical sisters-in-law:⁵⁹ in the *Odyssey* Penelope compares herself to

⁵⁷ E.g. Hardie (1993) 46; Lovatt (1999) 144; Ganiban (2007) 210–212; Keith (2013) 293.

⁵⁸ Hershkowitz (1998) 294–296 argues that this *furor*, ultimately caused by a combination of piety and madness, is directed by each heroine against herself, rather than against her sister-in-law, as their disregard for their impending death at the hands of Creon indicates (*Theb.* 12.456–460, 679–681).

⁵⁹ As Huebner (2013) 150 points out in her discussion of sisters-in-law in Roman Egypt (largely based on comparative data as papyrological evidence is lacking).

Aedon who grieves constantly, after mistakenly killing her and Zethus' son Itylus (Hom. *Od.* 19.518–523). The scholiast, drawing on Pherecydes' account, supplies the details of the story: Aedon was jealous of Niobe, who was married to Zethus' twin brother Amphion and had six children compared to her two; Aedon meant to kill one of Niobe's sons but ended up killing her own (*ad Od.* 19.518).⁶⁰ Alongside these mythical precedents, however, we may also consider the attitudes of Argia and Antigone's Roman counterparts. [p. 137]

We know very little about Roman sisters-in-law, who might on occasion have had to live in the same household,⁶¹ creating opportunities for conflict.⁶² Rumours of such rivalry are found in literature concerning the imperial family, the first formation of which comprised precisely of a leader, his sister and his wife. Octavia is said to have resented Livia, because Augustus' love for his nephew Marcellus shifted on the young man's death to Livia's son Tiberius (*oderat omnes matres et in Liuiam maxime furebat, quia uidebatur ad illius filium transisse sibi promissa felicitas*, "she hated all mothers, and was exceedingly furious with Livia, because the good fortune promised her seemed to have passed over to that woman's son", Sen. *Dial.* 6.2.4). Tacitus opposes the unanimity of the 'brothers' Germanicus and Drusus to all the things that the Imperial court perceived as setting them apart (*fratres egregie concordēs et proximorum certaminibus inconcussi*, "the brothers were in excellent agreement, unperturbed by the rivalry of those closest to them", *Ann.* 2.43), including a comparison of their wives Agrippina and Livilla, from which the former emerged

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the jealousy motif in the Roman version of this myth, see Maniotti (forthcoming).

⁶¹ The extended family model (including grandparents and / or adult brothers and sisters) was not the norm, as Saller and Shaw (1984) 137 argue; see also Treggiari (1991) 410; Dixon (1992) 142, and 232 n. 42 for a couple of known exceptions in the 2nd and 1st century BC.

⁶² Dixon (1992) 142. In the tenth book of his 2nd century AD *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius describes a woman who, motivated by "cruel rivalry" (*saeva rivalitas*, 10.24), killed her husband's sister who was living under his protection ahead of her marriage to one of his best friends, because she suspected her of being a "rival and sharer of her bed" (*aemulam tori succubamque*, *ibid.*). See Bradley (2012) 86–88 for a brief discussion of the episode. For conflict as a regular feature of Roman family life, see Dixon (1997).

victorious thanks to her fertility and reputation (*coniunx Germanici Agrippina fecunditate ac fama Liuiam uxorem Drusi praecelebat*, *ibid.*); whether the two women were actively engaged in this competition, however, it is impossible to say.

Among elite families, Cicero's wife Terentia seems to have got on well (at least initially) with her sister-in-law Pomponia, wife of Cicero's brother Quintus and sister of Atticus;⁶³ or at least Cicero is keen for Atticus to think so (*et te et sororem tuam et matrem maxime diligit*, "she loves you and your sister and your mother very much", *Att.* I.5 = 1.8). In another letter, Terentia invites Pomponia to celebrate the Compitalia festival, and Cicero magnanimously adds her mother to the list of guests (*et Pomponiam Terentia rogat; matrem adiungemus*, "and Terentia invites Pomponia; we shall add your mother too", II.3 = 23.4). Alongside her husband, Terentia would have made her own contribution to [p. 138] saving Quintus' marriage in her day-to-day interaction with Pomponia,⁶⁴ who became neighbours when Quintus bought a house on the Palatine next door to one of Cicero's residencies in 59BC (II.4 = 24.7); Pomponia and her son seem to have lived in Cicero's house during the autumn of 54BC (*Q. fr.* III.7 = 27.9). Yet, there is also evidence in the orator's correspondence of discord between the sisters-in-law; in another letter to his brother he mentions "the disagreements of our women" that he and Quintus, his nephew, discussed on a recent visit in 56BC (*multumque is mecum sermonem habuit et perhumanum de discordiis mulierum nostrarum. quid quaeris? nihil festiuus*, "he had a long conversation with me, full of sympathy with regard to the disagreements of our women. What do you want to know? Nothing was more entertaining", II.6 = 10.2).⁶⁵

⁶³ Treggiari (1991) 422.

⁶⁴ Treggiari (2007) 41.

⁶⁵ Treggiari (2007) 82 imagines that, because of this fall-out, Terentia would have not sided with Pomponia when she threw a tantrum during one of Cicero's family's visits to Quintus' house (*Att.* V.1 = 94.3). On the conflicts between Quintus and his wife, his brother-in-law, his brother, and his son of the same name, see e.g. Dixon (1997) 154–161.

At the same time, it is important to recall that actual epic sisters also display jealousy and are depicted in contexts of competition. Dido's words to Anna that Aeneas respected "her alone" and shared his secrets with her (*solam nam perfidus ille / te colere, arcanos etiam tibi credere sensus; / sola uiri mollis aditus et tempora noras*, A. 4.421–423), could be read as revealing jealousy for her sister's privileged position as Aeneas' confidante—or worse.⁶⁶ In Ovid, Aglauros' envy for her sister Herse (*Met.* 2.805–811) is a lot more explicit, though divinely inspired at the same time.⁶⁷ Further examples can be found in the *Thebaid* itself. At the double wedding of Argia and Deipyle in Book 2, the former's donning of the necklace of Harmonia outshines her sister's bridal splendour (*tunc donis Argia nitet uilisque sororis / ornatus sacro praeculta superuenit auro*, "then Argia shines with the gifts and highly ornamented with the sacred gold she surpasses her sister's cheap attire", Stat. *Theb.* 2.297–298). Later in the same [p. 139] book, Deipyle's wish for Tydeus to stay at Argos is explicitly side-lined by Argia's desire for him to go as an envoy to Thebes: *iustaeque preces uicere sororis* ("the just prayers of her sister won", 374).⁶⁸

So even in the *Thebaid* the relationship between actual sisters is not without tensions, perhaps as a result of the general mood of the poem. A similar situation is seen in tragedy which also supplies important models for the heroines' characterisation. Argia's fervent desire to partake in the burial of Polynices, which is not part of the tragic tradition as we know it, can be seen as echoing Ismene's similar wish to share if not the act, at least the consequences, whatever they may be (δέδρακα

⁶⁶ Barrett (1970) 24 reads *perfidus* here as implying that Dido suspects Anna of having an affair with Aeneas. Ovid's and Silius' versions of the aftermath (*Fast.* 3.543–656; *Sil.* 8.50–201), which presents Lavinia as jealous of Anna who is now a guest in their palace in Latium, may be inspired by these lines. There is an older version of the story, which Servius attributes to Varro, according to which Anna was Aeneas' lover (*Serv. A.* 4.682, 5.4); Casali (2014) 89 suggests that A. 4.421–423 may allude precisely to that version. See Dietrich (2004) 2–7, 12–13, and 16 on a discussion of Silius' episode and its models.

⁶⁷ See Keith (1992) 117–134; Maniotti (2012) 156–170; Maniotti (forthcoming) on how this is not the case with Ovid's Procne and Philomela.

⁶⁸ The tension between the sisters is visualised by the position of *Deipyle* at the start of line 373 and *sororis* (= Argia) at the end of line 374.

τοῦργον, εἶπερ ἤδ' ὁμορροθεῖ / καὶ συμμετίσχω καὶ φέρω τῆς αἰτίας, “I did this deed, if she also agrees, and take part with her in it, and bear responsibility”, S. *Ant.* 536–537). We can then read *contendunt* at *Theb.* 12.458 as summing up the tension between Argia and Antigone in the course of the lament scene, and in this way the transferral of the rivalry from the dead brothers onto them becomes more natural if they stand in for actual sisters.

But *contendere* is also used for *amoeban* singing as Virgil’s shepherds do: *alternis igitur contendere uersibus ambo / coepere* (“therefore they both began to contend with alternating lines”, *Ecl.* 7.18–19). Thus, it is appropriate for Antigone and Argia’s *amoeban*, contest-like, storytelling and lament which we are presented with in *Thebaid* 12.⁶⁹ Their characterisation recalls precisely Antigone and Ismene in Book 8, and even Antigone and Ismene at the end of Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* (957–974, 978–985, 989–1004), where the grieving sisters utter a long lament alternating on, or even sharing, every line. It thus offers a confirmation that what we are dealing with here is a temporary assumption by Argia of the role of Ismene, becoming Antigone’s sister even for the length of the lament episode in Statius’ last book.

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⁶⁹ The *Thebaid* has already been described as structured on “the gendered *antiphony* of male heroic death and female lament” (Fantham (1999) 222; my emphasis).

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