

# Spaces of Becoming: Subjectivity as Encounter in the *Thebaid*.

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## Declaration of Authorship

I, Joscelyn Elizabeth Cole, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

Statius' *Thebaid* is an epic which constantly unsettles the readers' desire for unity and purpose, instead presenting a bleak, violent, and oftentimes digressive narrative. The *Thebaid's* lack of resolution has led to many differing readings of the text, and, despite its rehabilitation within classical scholarship, the epic remains allusive and open to new interpretation. Taking inspiration from the "spatial turn" in the humanities, this thesis undertakes a series of close readings of encounters from throughout the *Thebaid* in order to reconcile the different rhythms of Statius' narrative. In particular, this thesis focuses on the concept of the 'Third Space of enunciation', that is, the space of intersubjective communication, as posited by Homi Bhabha (1994:37), in order to explore how the spaces between individuals have ramifications for the *Thebaid's* landscape, and vice-versa. Centring around three main forms of space: the forest, the battlefield, and the threshold, my analysis suggests that the action of the epic's narrative takes place predominantly in the in-between spaces, those which elude hegemonic control. In many cases the fluidity of the symbolic economy within such border spaces causes a sense of dislocation and, as individuals attempt to impose meaning in order to orient themselves within their environment, their attempts end in tragedy for themselves and those around them. However, whilst the *Thebaid* remains an inescapably tragic account of conflict, by approaching simultaneously the physical, mental/psychological and social aspects of the places in Statius' epic world, we become sensitive to the ways the great "rhythms" of the *Thebaid* unfold in complex interrelation with its more imperceptible ones, allowing for the co-existence of multiple and often competing rhythms, spaces, identities and even at times, outcomes.

## Acknowledgements.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Efi Spentzou, for her consistent support and genuine interest over the last four years. It was only through our lively discussions that the thesis turned from an idea to reality. It is a pleasure to have not only completed the Ph.D. but to have also gained a friend. I would also like to thank Professor Richard Alston, who frequently gave instructive comments on early drafts and bravely agreed to read the thesis in its entirety prior to examination. Special thanks also to my examiners, Professor Anthony Augoustakis and Professor William Fitzgerald, whose insightful comments led to an interesting and enjoyable Viva.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the Classics department at Royal Holloway. In particular, I am grateful for the friendship and support of Margaret Scrivener, Sue Turnbull, and the postgraduate squad: Dr. Emma Ramsey, Dr. Ruth MacDonald, Dr. Aaron Turner, Dr. Sarah Bremner, Dr. Dave Preston, Dr. Matthew Johncock, and soon-to-be Drs. Tim Brady, Matthew Ward, Pietro Morlacchi and Giulia Maltagliati. Thanks for always making space for me.

Thank you also to my family and friends, without whom this thesis would not have been completed. Whilst I lack the space to name you all individually you know who you are. Deepest gratitude goes to my parents, Helen and Peter Davies, who didn't despair when their daughter announced her desire to go back to university, and to my grandmother, Dessie Poole, for always being proud.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank Christian for the endless supply of tea, agreeing to proof-read my Latin, many many dinners, and the encouragement and love that got me through.

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## 1. Introduction

Every single one of us is a little civilisation built on the ruins of any number of preceding civilizations, but with our own variant notions of what is beautiful and what is acceptable—which, I hasten to add, we generally do not satisfy and by which we struggle to live. We take fortuitous resemblances among us to be actual likeness, because those around us have also fallen heir to the same customs, trade in the same coin, acknowledge, more or less, the same notions of decency and sanity. But all that really just allows us to coexist with the inviolable, untraversable and utterly vast spaces between us.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson 2006:224.

## 1.i. The *Thebaid*: an unsettling epic

Given its recent revival within current classical scholarship,<sup>2</sup> it is tempting to approach the *Thebaid* as a known entity: a text that neatly fits within our conceptual framework of Latin epic and post-Augustan literature. However, whilst the *Thebaid* has, hopefully, now been successfully rescued from accusations of mannerism and incoherence,<sup>3</sup> it is still a text that frustrates our desire to find unity and purpose in Polynices' meandering journey towards Thebes. The *Thebaid* remains the 'complex and puzzling work'<sup>4</sup> that Ahl encountered in 1986, and the 'novel and experimental nature'<sup>5</sup> of Statius' poetry continues to thwart attempts at finding resolution within its digressive and bleak narrative.<sup>6</sup> Despite our renewed attentions, the *Thebaid* remains allusive and open to new interpretation.

One of the ways in which the *Thebaid* eludes easy categorisation is its relationship to its contemporary political and historical context. Unlike that of its major predecessors, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *De Bello Civili*, the *Thebaid's* relationship to contemporary politics and the ideology of empire is at most implicit rather than explicit. This is not to say that the *Thebaid* is removed from its political and historical context, indeed it is possible and enlightening to draw parallels between the tyrannical power of Eteocles and that of Domitian,<sup>7</sup> or the

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<sup>2</sup> Since 2010 there have been six edited volumes published on Flavian epic and poetry (Miller & Woodman 2010; Manuwauld & Voigt 2013; Augoustakis 2013, 2014; Newlands, Gervais & Dominik 2015; Maniotti 2016), which all heavily feature Statius and the *Thebaid*. Since 1990, five single book commentaries have been published in English alone (Dewar 1991; Smolenaars 1994; Parkes 2012; Pollmann 2004; Augoustakis 2016), and alongside this we have seen three new English translations of the *Thebaid* (Melville 1992; Ross 2004; Joyce 2008).

<sup>3</sup> The dismissive tones of Butler's 1909 claim that 'Statius' episodes do not cohere; how far have they any splendour in their isolation? The answer to the question must be on the whole unfavourable' are now, happily, rarely repeated. Yet his and E. R. Curtius 1948 dismissal of "Silver" Latin epic as mannerist and derivative of Virgil heavily influenced key Statian scholars such as Vessey 1973 and Williams 1986. A firm rebuttal to such views can be found in Ahl 1986, Henderson 1993, and, more recently, Newlands, Gervais & Dominik 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Ahl 1986:2805

<sup>5</sup> Newlands, Gervais & Dominik 2015:4.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of those who acknowledge the *Thebaid's* lingering uncertainty include Augoustakis 2010:34 who sees an 'utter refusal to provide any future hope for possible resolution' and Feeney 1991:340 who acknowledges the epic's persistent 'capturing of confusion'. The debate as to the effectiveness of the epic's ending still continues — as Pagan 2000:423 acknowledges: 'Both the political and the literary-historical approaches to the problem, however, still fail to convince opponents that the poem does or does not end conclusively. Valid arguments accrue on both sides, and the mosaic of interpretations itself recreates the stunning effect produced in book 12.'

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Dominik 1994:148-59.



domination of the Theban other by Athens and the totalising empire of Rome.<sup>8</sup> Yet Statius' choice of topic, the mythological story of the house of Oedipus, situates the reader within a world that lies outside the reaches of the empire *sine fine* (Virgil, *Aeneid*. 1. 279). Though the *Thebaid* is a story of fratricide and civil war, concerns inherent to the formation of Roman identity,<sup>9</sup> it presents a world removed from contemporary time and place and, therefore, to an extent, remains unbound by the influence of the eternal city.<sup>10</sup>

Leaving aside its dialogue with the reality of the Roman Empire, the main way in which the *Thebaid* unsettles its readership is that it seems to consistently delay its own progress towards completion, narrating digression after digression before finally allowing the climatic battle between the two warring brothers. Particularly puzzling is the extended stay of the Argive war host in Nemea, an epyllion of sorts where we are temporarily transported into the story of the Lemnian women via the narration of the exile Hypsipyle. On its surface, this episode does little to further the narrative, and yet dominates Statius' epic for three books. Whether we are to follow Henderson's assertion that some delay is essential for epic narrative, 'anachronic time for hermeneutic thickening, for atmospheric amplification,'<sup>11</sup> or Toohey's claim that Statius uses digression as a form of 'imaginative evasion,'<sup>12</sup> criticism is united in its acknowledgement that the *Thebaid* consciously labours to thwart its own advance towards its telos.<sup>13</sup>

The *Thebaid* does not only seem to suffer from endless delays, but even when the end of the epic is reached the reader is confronted with a lack of closure. Perhaps this lack should be unsurprising, as the choice of topic, the Seven against Thebes, is itself part of a much larger story.<sup>14</sup> The intervention of Athens might bring temporary relief, as Creon's decree

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<sup>8</sup> e.g. Braund 2006:259-73.

<sup>9</sup> See Braund 2006:267-9.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Statius' own heritage as a native of Naples presents another degree of separation between author and the ideology of empire. As Newlands (2012:2) notes 'He stands out in Flavian literature as the poet who resisted the centripetal pull of the capital'.

<sup>11</sup> Henderson 1993:182.

<sup>12</sup> Toohey 2010:45.

<sup>13</sup> Almost every treatment of the *Thebaid* comments on Statius' employment of delay, but of particular note are Feeney 1991:340-3; Augoustakis 2010:58; and Newlands 2012:40-41.

<sup>14</sup> The cultural import of the, now lost, Theban epic cycle within the ancient imagination is often overshadowed by the survival of the Trojan cycle in the form of Homeric epic. Yet, as Braund (2006:260-2) argues, the Theban

forbidding burial, and therefore closure, is overturned by Theseus (*Thebaid*. 12. 779-81), but we know that after the epic's end the conflict will be reprised by the Epigoni.<sup>15</sup> Even as Statius draws his story to a close, Thebes is left exposed and vulnerable to invasion, and the exile remains alienated from his family even in death: Polynices' body is ejected from the pyre (*Thebaid*. 12.429-36).

Yet, as with his use of delay, it seems as though Statius is consciously playing with notions of closure and resolution as he is bringing the narrative to an end. Once again this has been an area of much scholarly debate,<sup>16</sup> leading some to posit that the *Thebaid* actually has multiple endings.<sup>17</sup> Questions linger: does the epic's true close come at the deaths of Polynices and Eteocles, and, if so, how do we read the final book? Or, does Theseus finally provide resolution, and if this is the case what should we make of Statius' final focus on the grieving women? How we answer these questions affects how we then thematise the *Thebaid's* use or denial of closure, even then remaining unsure as to how much our own desire for resolution conflicts with the reality of the epic. After all, as Don Fowler wryly noted, 'readers notoriously rearrange their own endings'.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside its lack of closure or dominant ideological message, the *Thebaid* frustrates our generic expectations by presenting us with a world populated with unexpected characters. Women, children, and the elderly all find their voices within a genre that has traditionally rendered them silent.<sup>19</sup> Gender is explored in ways previously unseen in this genre of Latin literature, as female figures such as Hypsipyle, Argia, and Antigone all participate actively in the progression of the narrative. This use of the traditionally 'oppositional [feminine] stance

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saga is commensurate in length and predates the Trojan wars, therefore it was a powerful symbol of an ancient age.

<sup>15</sup> The clearest account of the campaign of Alcmaeon and the rest of the Epigoni against Thebes can be found in Apollodorus. *Library*. 3.7.2-5. cf. Diodorus. 4.6.6; Pausinas. 9.5.10-ff, 9.8.6, 9.9.4-ff; Hyginus. *Fab.* 70. For evidence of the story within epic see Hdt. 4.32. There is also fragmentary evidence of two different tragedies entitled *Epigoni*, by both Sophocles and Aeschylus.

<sup>16</sup> Again, the list is extensive: Dietrich 1999; Fantham 1999; Lovatt 1999; Braund 1997; Hardie 1997 and 1993; Hershkowitz 1995 and 1994; Dominik 1994; Henderson 1993 and 1991; Ahl 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Braund 1997: *passim*

<sup>18</sup> Fowler 1997:22.

<sup>19</sup> Though Alison Keith (2000:2-6) is clear in her work, *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic*, that Latin epic is an 'androcentric' (2) and exclusively 'male authored' (4) genre, she suggests the *Thebaid's* exception as a 'ostensibly non-Roman mythological epic' (6).

towards epic<sup>20</sup> has some readers going as far as to claim Statius' 'demarginalization of the female voice'.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not we would agree with this claim, it is clear that the *Thebaid* portrays a range of female experience, be it a sister's love<sup>22</sup> or a mother's grief,<sup>23</sup> with a richness that demands our attention. The presence of the feminine-other presents a challenge, once again unsettling our ideas with regard to how we should begin to encounter Statius' text.

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<sup>20</sup> Lovatt 2006:66 and more generally pp. 60-66

<sup>21</sup> Boyle 1993:52.

<sup>22</sup> e.g. Manioti 2016:123-42.

<sup>23</sup> e.g. Augoustakis 2010:1-61.

## 1.ii. Subjectivity as encounter: resonances from theory

How, then, should one approach the *Thebaid* in a way that acknowledges the epic's tendency to unsettle our desire for resolution alongside its continuous dialogue with the other? Ahl, in his discussion of the epic's complex temporal boundaries, suggests that we begin by considering how the *Thebaid* is structured:

Stattius, like Virgil, is concerned, I think, with discerning the relationship of the individual person or event to the sequence of events (series) in a chronological, vertical descent as well as the relationship of that individual to simultaneous events (*ordo*, to give us a contrasting term) on a lateral, horizontal plane. He sees the individual in a complex nexus of causes.<sup>24</sup>

In order to better understand the *Thebaid's* complexity, Ahl visualises the story and characters in a way that begins to utilise spatial thinking. According to this model the individual, be it Polynices, Adrastus or even Tisiphone, is situated in relation to the overarching flow of the narrative *as well as* the events within his immediate environment. Though Ahl is primarily concerned with causation, his use of the terms 'vertical' and 'horizontal' expand our understanding of the flow of the narrative from a linear chronological progression into a multi-temporal network of spaces where individual encounters occur to create textual 'event[s]'.<sup>25</sup>

Ruth Parkes' recent work on the journeys within Statius' narrative also acknowledges the spatial intricacies of the epic.<sup>26</sup> For Parkes, journeying in the *Thebaid* takes on a meta-poetic function:

In light of the convention whereby a poet can be viewed as acting out his subject matter, we may even see Statius as travelling to Thebes in the course of

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<sup>24</sup> Ahl 1986: 2818

<sup>25</sup> Ahl also sees these events as having ramifications which expand beyond the self-imposed limits of Statius' narrative: 'indissociably linked with what has happened before, what will happen later, and what is happening to others who live at the same time.' (1986:2818)

<sup>26</sup> Parkes 2014: *passim*.

his work: on one level, the composition of the epic, whose narrative path mirrors the path of expedition for much of the poem, is a journey.<sup>27</sup>

So, the act of composition is analogous to that of travelling through space and as the poet travels towards the epic's completion he does so alongside its inhabitants. Whereas Ahl utilised a panoramic view,<sup>28</sup> Parkes' approach is hodological, where the poet travels the path of his work.<sup>29</sup> In this way Statius' own journey to Thebes occurs alongside the journeys of the Seven, the Argive women and, ultimately, Theseus. The *Thebaid* can only be understood as a web of interwoven paths, often repeated and sometimes thwarted, that together forms its complex narrative.<sup>30</sup> The concept of epic-as-journey, that is an event unfolding within space as opposed to a fixed, one dimensional, text, is not limited in its application to the *Thebaid*. Indeed, the act of journeying is integral to many epics, in particular Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Yet, unlike the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, the *Thebaid's* narrative does not follow one central journey: it has no Odysseus or Aeneas.<sup>31</sup> Nor do its journeys always advance towards the same destination. Instead, Statius' spatially intriguing text gives weight to all its multiple paths forming a palimpsest of journeys imagined, journeys taken, and journeys unfinished.

Taken together, Ahl's panoramic view and Parkes' hodological reading both suggest the value of considering the epic through a spatial lens. Indeed, Parkes' article was published as part of a larger volume that recognises the value of the 'spatial turn' to classical literature, and explores further the potential of such a turn. In their introduction to the same volume, *Geography, Topography, Landscape: Configurations of Space in Greek and Roman Epic*, editors Marios Skempis and Ioannis Ziogas argue for the importance of a dialogue with geographical, or spatial, modes of thinking to understand a genre which 'memorialises places'<sup>32</sup> as it 'comes

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<sup>27</sup> Parkes 2014:405-6.

<sup>28</sup> Ahl 1986:2818

<sup>29</sup> A method that resonates with the Roman tendency towards linear mapping of the landscape, as opposed to our modern aerial perspective (c.f. Skempis & Ziogas 2014:6).

<sup>30</sup> See Parkes 2014:418-23 for more on the effects of this repetition.

<sup>31</sup> Ahl 1989:4 '[the *Thebaid* does] not provide any one figure, good or bad whom we could describe as the narrative centre'.

<sup>32</sup> Skempis & Ziogas 2014:3

into existence by describing persons' movements through space'.<sup>33</sup> It seems the *Thebaid* is ripe for spatial analysis, the only question, now, is where to begin.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre, a central inspiration behind the spatial turn in the Humanities and Social Sciences, posited a three-fold understanding of space as a product of '*representations of space*', '*representational spaces*', and '*spatial practice*'.<sup>34</sup> The first aspect, *representations of space*, describes the framework planners and, more generally, those in positions of authority impose on space, either through processes of mapping or monumentalisation. The second, *representational spaces*, is the space of everyday life, where the mundane is played out. The third aspect, that of *spatial practice*, describes the space created through everyday play and interaction.<sup>35</sup> It is important to view these three aspects as interwoven with one another, not forming a hierarchy but a dialogue: a holistic model of space, one that takes into account the concrete, the abstract, and the dialogue between the two.<sup>36</sup> Crucially, what Lefebvre's model achieves is to highlight how space plays a crucial part in all dimensions of life, and as such how the spatial is a profound influence within human experience.

Of the three categories posed by Lefebvre, *representations of space*, or, as Soja further refines it, 'Firstspace',<sup>37</sup> is the aspect most obviously represented within scholarly analysis. This is perhaps to be expected, as Firstspace with its maps and monuments is often the most accessible element of space, and the aspect of the spatial most likely to survive the changes of history. This is not to say that *representations of space* are somehow more easily comprehended than *representational spaces* or *spatial practice* as each aspect of Lefebvre's spatial triad works in dialogue with the others. Indeed, ancient monuments are particularly open to misinterpretation, as they are removed from *spatial practice* and their original symbolic

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<sup>33</sup> Skempis & Ziogas 2014:3. They are not alone in furthering this spatial turn. See also Clay 2011, Gilhuly and Worman 2014, Laramor & Spencer 2007, Purves 2010, Rimmel 2015, Thalmann 2011; Tsagalis 2012 and (forthcoming) Fitzgerald and Spentzou 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Lefebvre 1974:33

<sup>35</sup> Lefebvre 1974:33 & 38.

<sup>36</sup> Of the three aspects, the one Lefebvre claims is most frequently ignored by students of 'representational spaces' i.e. ethnologists, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts (I would add students of literature) is spatial practice. (1974:41)

<sup>37</sup> Soja 1996:75-77. I follow Soja's own capitalisation of the terms Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace throughout this thesis, unless referring to Bhabha's 'Third Space of enunciation' (1994:37).

meaning by the loss of collective memory through the passage of time.<sup>38</sup> Yet, in spite of these difficulties, the concrete nature of Firstspace lends itself particularly well to analysis through established methodologies within archaeology and geography.<sup>39</sup>

However, any methodological approach solely based on *representations of space* is, by its nature, limited. The problem is summarised by Lefebvre himself, when he begins to approach the complexity of social spaces:

How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question.<sup>40</sup>

When approaching the spatial from a primarily Firstspace perspective it is natural to begin to think in terms of landscape; that is, to think of a location within a physical environment. As we seek to locate others and ourselves we engage in the process of mapping our position: that place between the mountain and the forest in the east, the last house on the left. The maps created as we negotiate Firstspace can be simple or incredibly complex, they can cover small or large areas, describing the landscape on a macro or micro scale. Yet, as they are only concerned with Firstspace, these maps are ultimately inadequate for the purpose of beginning to understand the other aspects of space, that is *spatial practice* and *representational spaces*. In short, purely Firstspace methodologies fail to account for movement, or for one individual's flexible/impermanent position in relation to another. A map is a fixed entity, a snapshot of a moment in time. As social interactions are fluid and constantly changing, the number of maps needed to decode Secondspace and Thirdspace is infinite, each attempt rendered potentially obsolete as time progresses.

The limits of a Firstspace epistemology become clearer still when applied to the analysis of literature, where the Firstspace is only experienced as it is presented in relation to the

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<sup>38</sup> The 'temporal horizon' of our collective cultural memory extending back only 80 to, at most, 100 years from the present day. (Assman 1995:127)

<sup>39</sup> The use of Firstspace methodologies ranges from those strictly concerned with the processes of mapping (e.g. Mayer 1986) to those who combine their reading of Firstspace with the other aspects of Lefebvre's spatial triad (e.g. Spencer 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Lefebvre 1974:85.

experience of the characters, or, to return to Ahl's language,<sup>41</sup> as part of the events of the narrative. Such an imperfect perspective gives us only a partial understanding of landscape and, conversely, to focus only on environment provides a partial understanding of the text. For these reasons, any approach to literary space must also take into account the abstract, or conceived, dimensions of space.

In Lefebvre's spatial triad conceived spaces actually form an organic part of the scheme, as his theory seeks to disrupt the traditional binary schism between the physical and psychological approaches to space.<sup>42</sup> Yet, Edward Soja, as part of his exploration of Lefebvre's work, does make a distinction between concrete and abstract in his definition of what he terms Secondspace:

Secondspace is entirely ideational, made up of projections in to the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies. This does not mean that there is no material reality, no Firstspace, but rather that the knowledge of this material reality is comprehended essentially through thought, as *res cogito*, literally "thought things."<sup>43</sup>

If Firstspace epistemologies are fundamentally material then Secondspace epistemologies desire to explore the mental, that is, the way we imagine space.<sup>44</sup> A clear example of Secondspace is found in the Latin love elegists' alternative interpretation of Augustan architecture: their poetry transforms the Firstspace symbolism of empire as it repurposes monument as the space of erotic love. One striking example of this spatial disruption is Ovid's treatment of Rome in *Ars Amatoria*. 1.61-228. In his treatment of this passage, Miller notes 'the literal structures of Augustan power, its cityscape, are transformed into the site of a sexual feast that cannot help but subvert its studied image of serene virtue.'<sup>45</sup> As in the definition above, elegiac poetry does acknowledge a Firstspace reality, the marble ideology

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<sup>41</sup> Ahl 1986:2805

<sup>42</sup> In order to demonstrate the relationship and interconnectedness of the different aspects of his spatial triad, Lefebvre utilises the metaphor of the body (1974:40)

<sup>43</sup> Soja 1996:78.

<sup>44</sup> Soja 1996:78-9. cf. Lefebvre 1974:39.

<sup>45</sup> Miller 2007:152. For more on the role of monuments within elegiac poetry see Welch 2005, Boyle 2003, and, more generally, Miller 2004 *passim*.



of the principate, but sublimates it beneath a layer of secondary meaning, that of the elegiac lover.

Because Secondspace is the aspect of space most closely linked to the imagination, as a theoretical tool, it lends itself particularly well to the analysis of literary spaces. However, as with purely Firstspace epistemologies, any spatial approach that only takes into account Secondspace is, by its nature, limited. In answer to the limits of a purely material or purely psychological approach to spatial analysis, both Lefebvre and Soja engage in a process that Soja calls ‘thirding-as-othering’.<sup>46</sup> The desire here is to introduce a new term into the original binarized categories in order to expand and critique the original duality, opening up new theoretical possibilities. Applying the technique of thirding-as-othering to spatial theory, Soja defines a new ‘Thirdspace epistemology’, one ‘arising from the sympathetic deconstruction and heuristic reconstitution of the Firstspace-Secondspace duality’.<sup>47</sup> The aim of this Thirdspace epistemology is to expand our traditional understanding of space and ‘reinvigorate’ the spatial turn.<sup>48</sup> By introducing a third, fourth, or even fifth, term into our established theoretical dualisms we begin to move away from the language of ‘oppositions, contrasts, or antagonisms’.<sup>49</sup>

The theoretical difficulties inherent in the process of thirding-as-othering are evident in the imprecision with which Soja is able to define the ‘all-inclusive simultaneity’ of Thirdspace, a problem he acknowledges in the course of his analysis:

Any attempt to capture this all-encompassing space in words and texts, for example, invokes an immediate sense of impossibility, a despair that the sequentiality of language and writing, of the narrative form and history-telling, can never do more than scratch the surface.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Soja 1996:60. Soja himself provides a translation of Lefebvre’s move to expand a dialectic approach from *La Présence et l’absence* (1980:143): ‘is there ever a relation only between two terms...? One always has Three. There is always the Other.’ (cited and translated Soja 1996:55)

<sup>47</sup> Soja 1996:81

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Lefebvre 1974:39

<sup>50</sup> Soja 1996:57.

The fixed nature of language does not lend itself to describing that which is constantly changing. Yet, despite its limitations, Soja's desire to open out our theoretical understanding of space to new 're-combinations and simultaneities of the "real-and-imagined"'<sup>51</sup> provides a starting point from which to begin building our own Thirdspace methodology. Any new spatial approach to the *Thebaid* must take part in the process of thirding-as-othering, always moving beyond the binary *either/or* to comprehend the *and* that links the different conceptualisations of space.

Before we proceed with exploring how this conceptual framework might enable us to appreciate the hermeneutic value of the *Thebaid's* spatial complexity, I wish to acknowledge two further important influences on the spatial understanding that underpins my approach here: Homi Bhabha and Rosi Braidotti. Their consistent engagement of spatial language in their study of subjectivity affirms the composite nature of lived spaces and reiterates the need to move away from binary frameworks. In particular I wish to focus on two key concepts from their work: Bhabha's 'Third Space of enunciation',<sup>52</sup> and Braidotti's figuration of 'subjects-in-becoming'.<sup>53</sup> Both of which make an inextricable link between individual and space explicit, and thus also render the interactions between different subjects a predominantly spatial affair.

Like Soja, Bhabha also explores the idea of a 'Third Space' in his work *The Location of Culture*. Beginning his approach by drawing attention to the 'in between' spaces of cultural difference, which he sees as providing the 'terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood',<sup>54</sup> Bhabha then turns to the work of artist Renée Green<sup>55</sup> and voices his excitement about Green's installation *Sites of Genealogy*, which uses the architecture of the exhibition space to dissect the binary identities of black/white high/low with the intermediary space of a stairwell:

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Bhabha 1994:54. Throughout this thesis I refer to Bhabha's Third Space of enunciation as either "Third Space" or the "space of enunciation".

<sup>53</sup> Braidotti 2011:14.

<sup>54</sup> Bhabha 1994:2.

<sup>55</sup> Bhabha 1994:4-6.

The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities.<sup>56</sup>

For Bhabha, Green's stairwell provides a concrete metaphor for the process of thirding-as-othering: it not only provides a new space between two polarities but also opens out the binary opposition of, in this instance, black or white, high or low, to an infinite number of recombinations. Its interstitiality reflects its hybridity.

Continuing on from the metaphor of the stairwell as an in between state or identity-in-process, Bhabha gives his own definition of the 'Third Space'. This definition centres on the difference, or distance, between the self and the other, and how these intersubjective spaces engender meaning:

The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. *The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space*, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. *What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation.* The pronominal I of the proposition cannot be made to address — in its own words — the subject of the enunciation, for this is not personable, but remains a spatial relation within the schemata and strategies of discourse. The meaning of the utterance is quite literally neither one nor the other.<sup>57</sup>

My emphases in the above quote highlight the aspects of Bhabha's work on space that I consider germane to my approach. Firstly, space, and—within space—meaning requires movement. Just as in order to reach the different states of black/white, high/low in Green's artwork participants must move through the transitional space of the stairwell, so language and other forms of communication must move through the intersubjective space of enunciation between individuals and communities. Bhabha's 'Third Space', therefore, is

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<sup>56</sup> Bhabha 1994:5.

<sup>57</sup> Bhabha 1994:53, my emphasis.

always dynamic, and his approach echoes Lefebvre's desire to examine space as alive, an ongoing, open-ended process of constant creation and recreation of meaning.<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, Bhabha's space of enunciation is a space of ambivalence and negotiation, where the 'meaning of symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.'<sup>59</sup> In the space of enunciation, the gap between "I" and "You", is the space where meaning is negotiated, where the speaker relinquishes control to the listener. As such, it destabilises hierarchy and allows for the existence of difference. Just as the inclusion of a third concept into a binary construction frustrates attempts at polarity, so Bhabha's Third Space intervenes and disrupts the dualism of Self and Other.<sup>60</sup> The way in which Bhabha's Third Space allows us to question established notions of hierarchy, even if such a challenge does not prevail, has important implications for the potential of intersubjective spaces within a traditionally hierarchical genre, such as Statius' Roman Imperial epic.

Rosi Braidotti also works to puncture our (innate) attachment to the self as a static form of being offering instead nomadic subjects, 'subjects-in-becoming',<sup>61</sup> observing in them 'an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes without an essential unity'.<sup>62</sup> But she also notices the lure of unity. Braidotti's work constantly acknowledges the tension between the individual's attachment to place and micro-community and their constant dynamic transversal through different locations, in ways that resonate with the ambivalence with which, as we shall see, characters in Statius' epic embrace their ambitious as well as precarious journeys. Her claim that 'we live in permanent processes of transition, hybridization, and nomadization'<sup>63</sup> echoes Bhabha's claim that the Third Space of enunciation, the space between, 'carries the burden of meaning'.<sup>64</sup> It is in the interstices where

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<sup>58</sup> Lefebvre 1974:37. Cf. Merrifield 2006:105-8.

<sup>59</sup> Bhabha 1994:55.

<sup>60</sup> Bhabha 1994:37-9.

<sup>61</sup> Braidotti 2011:14. Cf. Braidotti 1994:18

<sup>62</sup> Braidotti 1994:57. For more on the modes and figurations of Braidotti's nomadic subject and nomadic consciousness see Braidotti 1994: 21-68.

<sup>63</sup> Braidotti 2011:14

<sup>64</sup> Bhabha 1994:56.

the symbolic frameworks of society ‘have no primordial unity or fixity’,<sup>65</sup> in the liminal spaces that, as we will see, abound in Statius’ epic, that identities can be negotiated, transformed, and challenged.

So far, our exploration of the interstitial Third Space has been focused on the relationship, or space of enunciation, between individuals. Yet, it is also vital for our project here that we consider the spaces between groups of individuals, between communities. The relationship between the intimate, interstitial spaces of the *Thebaid* and the epic’s wider environment, or to put it another way, that of the individual to the epic’s ‘complex nexus of causes’,<sup>66</sup> can be difficult to articulate in a way that preserves both micro and macro perspectives. How might we begin to understand the momentary, ephemeral space of enunciation between, for example, Adrastus and Hypsipyle, whilst simultaneously recognising their position within the perpetual conflict with nearby Thebes?

Returning to *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre lends us a metaphor that encourages us to reconcile the different threads of Statius’ narrative as his perspective oscillates between the great journey towards Thebes and the smaller excursions into Nemea, Arcadia or Argos. While describing the way in which social spaces overlap and interact Lefebvre turns to the world of hydrodynamics for inspiration:

Great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves — these all collide and ‘interfere’ with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate.<sup>67</sup>

If we were to define the ‘great movements’ of the *Thebaid* then these would encompass the Argive’s advance towards war or the machinations of Jupiter and Tisiphone: events with far reaching ramifications incorporating spaces where the larger concerns of the epic are played out. As these different rhythms ‘collide’ they necessarily precipitate change. In contrast, the ‘lesser movements’ within the epic, the everyday rhythms of its individual characters and seemingly insignificant moments of momentary encounters, sit alongside and within the

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<sup>65</sup> Bhabha 1994:56.

<sup>66</sup> Ahl 1986:2818.

<sup>67</sup> Lefebvre 1974:87

wider narrative. They may not alter the epic's 'vast rhythms' but they have the capacity to question and unsettle.

Lefebvre's work on rhythms is further refined in *Rhythmanalysis*, a later work of his that suggests language with which to begin to analyse the rhythms of any given space:

The notion of rhythm brings with it or requires some complementary considerations: the implied but different notions of *polyrhythmia*, *eurhythmia* and *arrhythmia*. It elevates them to a theoretical level, starting from the lived. *Polyrhythmia*? It suffices to consult one's body; thus the everyday reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia from the first listening. *Eurhythmia*? Rhythms unite with one another in the state of health, in normal (which is to say normed!) everydayness; when they are discordant, there is suffering, a pathological state (of which *arrhythmia* is generally, at the same time, symptom, cause and effect). The discordance of rhythms brings previously eurhythmic organisations towards fatal disorder.<sup>68</sup>

The notion that any given space might be composed of (individuals and groups engaged in) multiple rhythms, each of which work in harmony or discord, and into which new rhythms might be introduced and existing rhythms may be changed resonates powerfully with the conception of space as dynamic and in process. Approaching the *Thebaid* as a polyrhythmia enables us to begin to consider it comprehensively: seeing at once how its great "rhythms" unfold in complex interrelation with and alongside its smallest. Such a perspective does not attempt to erase the epic's tendency to unsettle as it allows for the co-existence of competing rhythms and spaces. It also prevents us from favouring one reading of space over another. The epic's Secondspace and Thirdspace rhythms consistently temper the imposing ideology of Firstspace. Statius' characters emerge in their encounters with each other and the places through which they pass. Since encounters are inherently unpredictable, these processes of identity formation are always unstable and remain incomplete and in transit.

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<sup>68</sup> Lefebvre 1992:16.

1.iii. *Limes mihi carminis* (*Thebaid*.1.16): Setting the limits of this thesis.

In order to demonstrate what form a Thirdspace reading of the *Thebaid* might take, I wish to begin at the beginning, turning first to the proem, where Statius sets out the scope of his narrative. These first forty-five lines form a synopsis of the poem and therefore provide a tool with which to access the remainder of the epic. This is not to say that the proem sums up the entire *Thebaid*, but that it reflects the main questions and themes raised throughout its remainder. This might seem like a strange claim to make, given that the majority of the proem is given over to two *recusationes*— the first concerning the larger Theban myth cycle (*Thebaid*. 1.3-16), and the second, Domitian's military victories in Germany (*Theb.* 1. 17-33). Yet hidden between the story of Cadmus and the nod towards contemporary Rome is a sentence which clearly defines the types of spaces the poet intends to explore in the *Thebaid*:

... limes mihi carminis esto  
Oedipodae confusa domus... (*Theb.* 1.16-17)

...the limit of my song will be  
the disordered household of Oedipus...<sup>69</sup>

From this, the opening of the narrative, the *Thebaid* is concerned with the lived-space of the *domus*, that is the real and imagined spaces of everyday life.<sup>70</sup> Within this context the two *recusationes* form a change in perspective from the traditional grand narratives of epic, both mythological and historical, in favour of a story centred around family relationships. Though the *Thebaid* remains a tragic exploration of the horror of civil war, a war which spreads throughout earth, heaven, and hell, it is the intimate nature of the brothers' conflict that defines the epic's boundaries. It is not the space between warring armies that most intrigues Statius, but the interstices between individuals, between brothers, fathers, mothers, sisters, husbands and wives. Love, loathing, desire, greed, and the struggle for authority create a web of interdependencies between members of the royal households in Thebes and Argos. As we are going to see, these spatial interconnections are paramount and throughout the epic

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<sup>69</sup> own translation.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Lefebvre 1974:39.

identities will be challenged as people inhabit, traverse, and invade locations marked by contested claims of ownership and belonging. The disruption of the ‘space of enunciation’, to remember Bhabha,<sup>71</sup> transforms the wider landscape in turn, as the arrhythmia of familial conflict reverberates throughout the entire epic.

What this thesis hopes to draw attention to is that the *Thebaid* occurs primarily in interstitial spaces, that is to say, those spaces which lie outside and between place. Whereas place is fixed, stable, immutable, space is the dynamic intersection of moving subjects. Here I follow de Certeau’s distinction:

...in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization.<sup>72</sup>

Some of the *Thebaid*’s ‘in-between’<sup>73</sup> spaces are marginal in location, such as the ancient forests that spread between Argos and Thebes: spaces oppositional to and predating the symbolic order of the city and within which civic roles are diluted and challenged. Other spaces are interstitial in that they are temporarily imposed on existing places, such as the battlefields and other similar spaces of conflict that are created and destroyed through the process of the epic narrative. Finally, some of the spaces within the *Thebaid* are momentary: thresholds between past and future, beginning and ending as decisions are made and boundaries are crossed.

Comprising of physical, mental/psychological and social elements, the Third Space that exists between individuals is as worthy of our attention as the wider setting of the narrative. As the epic’s preoccupation with the *domus* of Oedipus suggests, we access the spatial in the *Thebaid* through a nexus of encounters between Statius’ characters, each providing their own unique perspectives. When taken individually these encounters are limited to what lies within the participants’ horizon but when put all together they form the epic’s environment. Many different stories compete and collide. For example, as readers we experience the forests of Nemea as navigated by a king (Adrastus), an exile (Hypsipyle), a child (Opheltes), and even a gigantic snake. Thrown together in an opaque and fluid space these individuals have their

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<sup>71</sup> 1994:37. See p.18 of this introduction.

<sup>72</sup> De Certeau 1984:117

<sup>73</sup> Bhabha 1994:2



personal roles suspended and rendered fragile, leading to death, displacement, and delay. Likewise, in order to survive the bewildering and dislocating chaos of the battlefield, identities must be able to shift. This demand of flexibility challenges the polarised binary of warfare. It causes problems for those used to the strict hierarchy of warfare, such as the heroic Seven, but allows those with already composite identities, primarily women, to thrive where they were once banished. As events begin to converge around the city of Thebes people are brought into closer and closer proximity and the conflict and contact between individuals contaminates and transforms character, status, and coherence. In the *Thebaid's* world-in-flux it becomes increasingly harder to speak about friends and foes, winners and losers.

The opening chapter of this thesis, 'Where the wild things are', is concerned with the greater rhythms of the *Thebaid*, specifically the narrative's movement towards its close. I show that the action of the *Thebaid* presents a move away from a city-centric narrative,<sup>74</sup> and is instead concentrated within the forests and groves which litter its landscape. I take my cue from the *Thebaid's* proem, using Statius' own synopsis to guide my journey through the remainder of the epic. In order to maintain a Thirdspace methodology, I approach these forests not from their geographical location but through the experiences of the Thebans, Argives, Arcadians and Argive women in turn. Each of these groups approaches the forests with different desires and, within the unfixed symbolic economy of the forest, these differences come into collusion and conflict. Accordingly, this chapter consists of three sections. The first, 'From Amphion's walls to Cithaeron's groves', centres around the Theban relationship to forest and their Bacchic opposition to civic order. The second section, 'Uncertain Positions: moving from Argos to Nemea', then turns to the journey of the Argives as they leave the safety of the city and enter into the fluid wilderness of Nemea. The final section, 'Wilderness persists: women at home and in exile', considers those who are driven from and driven to the wilderness as they are dislocated by the brothers' conflict. From the wild permeability of Thebes to the regulated grove of Clemency in Athens, non-civic spaces permeate the *Thebaid* and play host to many vital, if unsettling, encounters.

The second chapter of the thesis, 'Blurred fields', takes as its starting point a space defined less by physical geography and more by spatial practice. The battlefields of the *Thebaid* are

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Harrison 2007:129, 153 and Hardie 2008:88.

spaces of conflict superimposed on pre-existing place, depending on the participants of war to define their boundaries. Alongside treating the more traditional battlefields of the *Thebaid*, i.e., the Theban Plain and the open warfare that dominates Books 7 to 12, this chapter also explores some less expansive spaces of conflict that arise from the beginning of the narrative. These battlefields reflect both the greater and lesser rhythms of the epic, and show how war penetrates even the safest of spaces and contaminates the interstices of everyday life. Again, following a brief introduction, the chapter itself is split into three parts, structured around three striking aspects of Statius' battlefields: their relationship to the *domus*, their location within the waters and rivers, and their continuation past the traditional boundary of nightfall. As with the previous chapter, these aspects relate to those highlighted by Statius in the proem and beginning of the first book.

The final chapter, 'Thresholds and gatekeepers', addresses the most constricted, most interstitial, spaces within the *Thebaid*: its doorways, gateways, and thresholds. Even more transient in nature than the epic battlefields, these liminal spaces hold moments of possibility existing as pauses between the now and the not-yet. Reflecting the concentrated nature of the liminal space it addresses; this chapter is the shortest of the three. However, it is also that which most clearly provides a glimpse of the alternative possibilities for reconciliation that are littered throughout Statius' text. Beginning with the gateway to the Argive palace and the tumultuous encounter between Polynices, Tydeus and Adrastus, I then move on to Tydeus' failed diplomatic mission to Thebes and Maeon's resulting suicide. Finally, this chapter turns to the Ogygian gate, the ultimate threshold for the warring brothers. Once this threshold has been crossed there shall be no return: its opening closes the way for Polynices' and Eteocles' reconciliation and ushers the end of the *Thebaid*.

#### 1.iv. Notes on the text.

Throughout the thesis, my approach was directed first and foremost by the *Thebaid* itself, therefore my analysis is centred around a series of close readings of the text. The theoretical voices discussed in this introduction form conversation partners to open up the text to new meaning, but are always used in response to questions raised by the epic itself. Similarly, where others have previously engaged with Statius' narrative I have done my best to encounter them with openness, and rightfully acknowledge my debt to their expertise and ideas. Though we may ultimately differ in approach, all of the readings I acknowledge have challenged and refined my own ideas, and this thesis would be poorer without that robust dialogue.

All translations follow that of Jane Wilson Joyce,<sup>75</sup> except where I have made my own adjustments, which is clearly indicated. The text of the *Thebaid*, in line with Wilson Joyce's translation, is that of the latest Loeb edition by Shackleton Bailey.<sup>76</sup> Where appropriate I have also made use of the most recent English-language commentaries for individual books. For ease, these are as listed below as well as in the bibliography:

Augoustakis, A. 2016. *Statius, Thebaid 8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dewar, M. 1991. *Statius: Thebaid IX*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Parkes, R. 2012. *Thebaid 4*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pollmann, K. F. L. 2004. *Statius, Thebaid 12: introduction, text and commentary*. Paderborn: Schöningh.

Smolenaars, J. J. L. 1994. *Thebaid VII: a commentary*. Leiden: Brill.

Williams, R. D. 1972. *Thebaidos liber decimus*. Leiden: Brill.

Finally, all abbreviations for primary works follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Rev. Ed. edited by S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth. Translations of ancient works cited other than the *Thebaid* are listed below:

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<sup>75</sup> Statius. *Thebaid*. trans. J. Wilson Joyce. 2008. London.

<sup>76</sup> 2003a and 2003b. Harvard. (volumes 207 and 498) cf. Wilson Joyce 2008: xxxv.

Catullus. *Carmen*. trans. G. Lee. 1990. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lucan. *De Bello Civili*. trans. S. Braund. 2008. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ovid. *Amores*. trans. A. D. Melville. 1990. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ovid. *Fasti*. trans. A. J. Boyle and R. D. Woodard. 2004. London: Penguin.

Propertius. *The Poems*. trans. W. G. Shepherd. 2004. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Virgil. *Aeneid*. trans. D. West. 2003. London: Penguin.

## 2. Where the wild things are: forests, trees, and scrubland in the *Thebaid*

The forest is before-me, before-us, whereas for fields and meadows my dreams  
and recollections accompany all the different phases of tilling and harvesting.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Bachelard 1958:188.

## 2.i. Moving outside the walls.

### Spaces of Identity.

...nunc tendo chelyn; satis arma referre  
 Aonia et geminis sceptrum exitiale tyrannis  
 nec furiis post fata modum flammisque rebelles  
 seditione rogi tumulisque carentia regum  
 funera et egestas alternis mortibus urbes (*Thebaid.* 1. 33-7)

... now my tight strung lyre strains just  
 to tell of Aonian arms and scepter fatal to twin  
 tyrants; of fury unchecked after death, a seditious pyre  
 whose flames renew battle, of kings' corpses in want of tombs;  
 of cities in dire straits, laid waste by mutual carnage

From its opening lines, the world of the *Thebaid* is characterised by broken relationships (*Theb.* 1.34), distorted ritual (1.35-6), and corrupted social spaces (1.36-7). As the narrative progresses from exile to open warfare the brothers' anger grows, their arrhythmia resulting in a feud that overflows limits of family and ultimately disrupts the polyrhythmia of everyday life in Argos and Thebes.<sup>78</sup> Polynices and Eteocles' discord is such that the *Thebaid's* cities are rendered untenable: their inhabitants forced into exile or onto the battlefield to die. Though the epic concludes with a return to city-spaces in the supplication of the Argive women to Theseus (*Theb.* 12.464-655), the majority of the *Thebaid's* encounters occur in the spaces outside the walls of Argos, Thebes, and Athens. Instead it is Nemea, Arcadia, and the Boeotian countryside that play host to the conflict between Oedipus' sons.

This movement out of the city initially manifests itself in a linguistic shift, one which becomes apparent when we consider the work of Statius' two major predecessors, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *De Bello Civili*. As with the *Thebaid*, the *Aeneid*, the earliest of the three epics, begins with a proem that announces the concerns of entire narrative:

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<sup>78</sup> Here I am taking a cue from Lefebvre's 1992:16 use of rhythm to describe social spaces.

multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem,  
 inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum,  
 Albanique patres, atque altae moenia Romae. (*Aeneid*. 1. 5-7)

Great too were his sufferings in war before he could found his city and carry his gods into Latinum. This was the beginning of the Latin race, the Alban fathers, and the high walls of Rome.<sup>79</sup>

From the outset, the *Aeneid* makes clear that Aeneas' journey lays the foundations for Rome: the city without limit.<sup>80</sup> The walls, *moenia* (*Aeneid*. 1.7), will be mentioned three more times by Jupiter in his prophecy regarding the foundation of Rome,<sup>81</sup> and a further four times before the end of the first book.<sup>82</sup> This repetition reflects the crucial role of the city within an epic that often presents an 'ordered and teleological view of the world'<sup>83</sup> as by defining the boundaries of the city, Aeneas imposes order onto the landscape just as Augustus sought to impose order on Rome.<sup>84</sup> By exerting control over the Firstspace through physically defining the limits of civic space, the city's *moenia* enforce a polarising dialectic of inside and outside clearly marking that which is Rome and excluding all that it is not.<sup>85</sup>

As the *moenia* introduced in the proem and first book begin to define the limits of a new national identity in the wake of the destruction of Troy, so Aeneas becomes the "synecdochic hero", the individual who stands for the totality of his people present and future, part for whole'.<sup>86</sup> Though Aeneas makes many false starts, breaking ground four times

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<sup>79</sup> West 2003:3.

<sup>80</sup> Virgil. *Aeneid*. 1. 279: '*imperium sine fine dedi*'.

<sup>81</sup> *Aeneid*. 1. 259, 264, 277.

<sup>82</sup> *Aeneid*. 1. 366, 410, 437, 645.

<sup>83</sup> Ganiban (2007:8) defines this as the "Augustan" ("optimistic" or "public") voice' and though he notes that some elements work against this, suggesting some ambivalence on Virgil's behalf, the presence of Augustan voice remains inescapable.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Morwood 1991, who makes a compelling case for the theme of city building within the *Aeneid*, and for Augustus' role as builder.

<sup>85</sup> See Bachelard 1958:227-46 for an illuminating take on this dialectic within poetry. The dialectic between inside and outside is a powerful metaphor but often any attempt at a clear distinction is shattered as spaces 'multiply with countless diversified nuances' (231)

<sup>86</sup> Hardie 1993:4.

before reaching his final destination,<sup>87</sup> the act of ordering previously untamed *space* into civic *place* excludes everything undesirable from Aeneas' environment, and therefore from his heroic identity. As Morwood neatly surmises in his take on Aeneas' role as city-builder, whether it is 'no city, sacked cities, a Theme Park city, the wrong city, an escapist city, a dream city, aborted cities, [or] stopgap cities'<sup>88</sup> the *Aeneid* is an epic concerned with building and, by extension, with redefining the symbolic framework of civic life.

By contrast, in the *De Bello Civili*, Lucan presents a world which is neither ordered, nor under the rule of Fate. Lucan's response to Virgil's story of Rome's beginnings is a bleak account of the city's descent into civil war.<sup>89</sup> If Virgil's *moenia* are being built, then Lucan's *moenia* are being torn down:

at nunc semirutis pendent quod moenia tectis  
urbibus Italiae lapsisque ingentia muris  
saxa iacent nulloque domus custode tenentur  
rarus et antiquis habitator in urbibus errat (Lucan. *De Bello Civili*. 1. 24-7)

But now the walls are tumbling in the towns of Italy,  
the houses half-destroyed, and, the defences collapsed,  
the huge stones lie; no guardian occupies the homes  
and in the ancient cities wanders only the occasional inhabitant.<sup>90</sup>

Cities emptied by civil war (*De Bello Civili*. 1. 27), just as they are within the *Thebaid* (1. 37), litter the landscape of Lucan's Italy. Yet, though they have been destroyed, the focal point of the *De Bello Civili* remains its towns and cities. This is evidenced by the way in which the *moenia* (*De Bello Civili*. 1.24), though barely standing, remain prominent throughout the first book of the epic,<sup>91</sup> and through Rome's continual presence, made manifest with the

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<sup>87</sup> Here I am indebted to Morwood 1991:216, who draws attention to each of these attempts, which are found at *Aeneid*. 3.17, 123; 5.755-7 & 7. 157-8.

<sup>88</sup> Morwood 1991:216.

<sup>89</sup> For more on the relationship between centre and relationship in civil war see Myers 2011: *passim*, and for the associated intertextual relationship between Lucan's epic and the *Aeneid* see Casali 2011: *passim*.

<sup>90</sup> Braund 2008:3.

<sup>91</sup> Lucan mentions *moenia* a further six times within the first book: *De Bello Civili*. 1.195, 247, 345, 468, 586, 593.



personification of Roma and her confrontation with Caesar on the shores of the Rubicon (*De Bello Civili*. 1. 185-92).

Just as the *Aeneid* manipulates Firstspace in order to mould social identity, the *De Bello Civili* is acutely aware that changes within Firstspace can necessitate deeper changes within the symbolic economy. In Lucan's anti-epic, the city, a place where social identity is managed most effectively and which had previously provided safety and stability, now crumbles from within. Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon not only transgresses the literal limits of the city, but also erases that symbolic boundary between inside and outside initiating the dissolution of social and civic identity. Yet, within this act of destruction, Caesar is claiming ownership of the landscape both inside and outside the city walls, bringing the entire world of the *De Bello Civili* under his control. Where Aeneas establishes hegemonic control through the creation of a city, Caesar does so through destruction. Therefore, the difference between Virgil and Lucan's use of the city to define the physical and symbolic landscape of epic is the direction of influence. As Hui elegantly states: 'For Virgil the energy of the epic is centripetal, drawing everything towards Rome; for Lucan it is centrifugal, radiating outwards.'<sup>92</sup> The conclusion for both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *De Bello Civili* is the same: all is brought within the totality of the synecdochic hero and that hero brings new meaning to Rome.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to its predecessors, the *Thebaid* moves away from a city-centric narrative, and this is evidenced in the language Statius uses to describe the physical landscape. In comparison to the preliminary books of the *Aeneid* and the *De Bello Civili*, *Thebaid*.1 utilises the word *moenia* only twice: once within the proem (*Thebaid*. 1.11) and again just before Polynices reaches the city of Argos (*Thebaid*. 1.381). This lack of civic boundaries is the first indication that Statius' epic will not present a world dominated by a totalising and polarised ideology. In blurring the physical borders of civic space, the *Thebaid* opens those spaces to the possibility of hybrid identities, as those within them are largely unbound by a restrictive Firstspace designed to enforce hegemonic control.

The comparative lack of concrete and symbolic boundaries in Statius' epic landscape not only leads to the blurring of identity within the cities of the *Thebaid*, but, more crucially,

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<sup>92</sup> Hui 2011:156.

<sup>93</sup> This conflict between duality and oneness within Imperial epic is explored by Hardie 1993: 1-18.

relocates *spaces of representation* and *spatial practice* outside traditional spaces of community. Instead of the city, it is the forests, woods, and groves that litter the epic landscape that provide the setting for many key moments in the narrative. Though forests are by no means unique to the landscape of the *Thebaid*, their removal from the periphery of spatial practice and their transformation into central and decisive loci of social interaction in the epic is unsettling.<sup>94</sup>

These are literally and metaphorically confusing spaces, marginal to the daily rhythms of community, such as rest, work, or ritual.<sup>95</sup> A lack of Firstspace and Secondspace markers (i.e. monuments of all kinds) hampers a clear understanding of time and space in the forest. Without monuments, defined by Augé as ‘an attempt at the tangible expression of permanence or, at the very least, duration’,<sup>96</sup> it can be difficult to position oneself within a particular location or chronology:

The forest appears as a place where the logic of distinction goes astray. Or where our subjective categories are confounded. Or where perceptions become promiscuous with one another, disclosing latent dimensions of time and consciousness.<sup>97</sup>

Inside the forest, space is not marked by *either/or* divisions, carefully delineated by walls or society. Rather, space inside the forest is a hybrid entity: a palimpsest formed through individual encounter where identities dependent on the rhythms of the city are confounded as these rhythms are interrupted by the presence of difference.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> It is true that the relationship between city and forest is negotiated differently by different cultures, sometimes leading to the intertwining of forest and city spaces (Konijnendijk 2008:1-15). However, the process of urbanisation in Ancient Greece and, later, within the Roman Empire is now quite clearly understood to have had a direct relation to steady deforestation (Meiggs 1982:371-403; Hughes 1982:60-75), resulting in the positioning of forest spaces to the margins of lived space (Vitruvius. *De Arb.* 2.1.1-2). Forests became peripheral: standing at the borders of social space they signified the very edge of civilisation (Meiggs 1982:41,188,246).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Lefebvre 1992:15.

<sup>96</sup> Augé 1995:49.

<sup>97</sup> Harrison 1992: x.

<sup>98</sup> With the introduction of difference, repetition is interrupted and the rhythms become discordant. However, at the same time repetition produces difference. See Lefebvre 1992:7-8 & 15.

It is thus, I contend, such interstitial, disorientating places that provide the primary loci of identity formation in the *Thebaid* via encounters vital to the progression of the epic. The journey of the Argives through Nemea (*Theb.* 4.646-5.47); the ambush of Tydeus by the fifty (2.496-712); the death of baby Opheltes (4.499-637); Atalanta's supplication to Diana (9.575-675); and, finally, the Argive women's supplication to Theseus (12.481-518), are all instances where individuals must find a way to survive within the disorienting spaces that were previously on the edge of spatial practice. On occasion this leads to the forests fulfilling the social function the cities no longer can, as trees are burnt for funeral pyres,<sup>99</sup> dedicated to deities,<sup>100</sup> and fashioned into weapons.<sup>101</sup> The forests of the *Thebaid* provide a place of refuge as hidden spaces within spaces, like the grove of Clemency in Athens (*Theb.* 12.481-518) or Diana's Arcadian home (9.603-36), yet are also simultaneously rendered locations of death, like the grove of the Sphinx (2.519-706) or the woods of Lemnos (5.152-63). They are the loci of ritual practice and, paradoxically, become the spaces where the social symbolic is formed.

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<sup>99</sup> *Theb.* 3.174; 6.54-8; 6.84-117; 12.50-3.

<sup>100</sup> *Theb.* 2. 707-12; 8. 298-306; 9. 585-601.

<sup>101</sup> *Theb.* 3. 590; 4. 176-7; 7. 312-14.

## 2.ii. From Amphion's walls to Cithaeron's groves.

### Spaces of Diversion and Delay

The hybrid nature of the interstitial forests, spaces without ownership that allow for the persistence of difference, presents a challenge to those within the *Thebaid* who seek to establish orderly, controlled resolution. The clearest example of this is found within Jupiter's speech to the heavenly council (*Thebaid*. 1.214-47) where the father of the gods proclaims his desire for vengeance on the houses of Cadmus and Tantalus. As has already been noticed, this speech performs a similar function to Jupiter's prophecy in *Aeneid* 1. 254-96, which sets out the telos of Virgil's epic: the foundation of Rome. Indeed, the structural similarities between the first books of the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid* provide a basis for a reading of *Thebaid* 1. 214-47 as intentionally engaging with Virgil's characterisation of Jupiter as the *deus ex machina* of the genre.<sup>102</sup> Thus, it is within this highly programmatic passage that the centrality of the forest within this epic story is first established, albeit in a rather roundabout way, when authorial Jupiter draws attention to the correlation between the forest and Theban criminality, listing the deeds of Cadmus and his descendants as evidence:

“mens cunctis imposta manet: quis funera Cadmi  
nesciat et totiens excitam a sedibus imis  
Eumenidum bellasse aciem, mala gaudia matrum  
erroresque feros nemorum et reticenda deorum  
crimina?” (*Thebaid*. 1. 227-31)

“Human nature! It never changes. Who doesn't know  
the deaths Cadmus caused, the troop of Furies so often  
called from the Pit to do battle, depraved maternal delights,  
fanatics roaming the forests, divine crimes that must be hushed up?”

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<sup>102</sup> I am by no means alone in noting this intertext. Hill 2008b:55 offers a concise side-by-side structural comparison of the two epics. For further detailed discussion on how *Thebaid* 1, including this speech, uses the *Aeneid* to build the readers' expectations and then undermine them cf. Ganiban 2007:51-5 and Hill 1990: 105-106 & 2008a:129-41.

Whilst depicting the forest as the location of Theban depravity, Jupiter simultaneously acknowledges its importance as a site of personal encounter. The stories of Cadmus, Pentheus, Agaue and the Bacchantes alluded to in this extract are concerned with intimate personal relationships: brother and sister, mother and son. Included in this authorial account of the story, intimate relationships and encounters in the uncharted territories of the forests surrounding Thebes thus become themes with significant programmatic weight. And as Jupiter's Virgilian prophesy looms in the intertextual background, such allusions to the past blend with potential references to the future. The 'deaths Cadmus caused' (1.227-8), might anticipate the upcoming massacre caused by his descendants, Polynices and Eteocles.<sup>103</sup> Other parallels are more obvious: Oedipus' first act of *Thebaid* is to summon the Furies from the pit (*Theb.* 1.46-87); the *mala gaudia matrum* (1.229) foreshadow Hypsipyle's account of the Lemnian slaughter (5.152-63); and the *erroresque feros nemorum* (1.230) could be describing the Argives' upcoming journey through Nemea.<sup>104</sup> The prophetic overtones of Jupiter's speech underscore that the forests were not only important spaces of encounter in the mythical past, but remain so for those with Thebes' present conflict.

However, Jupiter does not simply reference moments of encounter within the forest, he also passes judgement upon these encounters as *mal[i]* (evil, wicked or destructive),<sup>105</sup> and depicts the forest as an abhorrent other: a site of that which is shameful or perverse. Within this process of "other-ing", the forest, therefore, is immediately placed in opposition to Jupiter's desire to impose control, the criminality occurring within these spaces becoming his justification for allowing Tisiphone to begin the strife between the brothers, setting the conflict of the *Thebaid* in motion. To Jupiter, it seems that the forests are solely places of disorder, where humanity reverts to its wicked nature: '*mens cunctis imposta manet*' (*Thebaid.* 1.227).

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<sup>103</sup> This parallel between the actions of Cadmus and those of his descendants is further emphasised by the phrase '*mens cunctis imposta manet*' (1.227), which draws upon ideas surrounding ancestral stigma. Cf. Davis 1994:471-2 and Keith 2002:386

<sup>104</sup> c.f. 4.711-774 and 4.804-30

<sup>105</sup> Lewis & Short s.v. *malus*

With Jupiter traditionally portrayed as the driver of the epic towards its telos,<sup>106</sup> his rejection of the forest as a troublesome other carries special weight. Leaving Lucan's epic aside,<sup>107</sup> the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, and *Metamorphoses* all depict an omnipotent father of the gods,<sup>108</sup> who guides the epic hero in accordance with fate.<sup>109</sup> This role is crucial if, like Virgil, one is concerned with the foundation of a city which will become Rome. Within the *Aeneid*, Jupiter is needed to ensure that Aeneas will fulfil his role and establish the city so that it will reflect Augustan ideology, strengthening the emperor's legitimacy.<sup>110</sup> However, returning to the *Thebaid* 1.227-31, we see that the forest, as evidenced in the crimes and subversive actions of the Thebans, sits on the margins of the socially acceptable, and undermines Jupiter's authority by resisting ideological control.<sup>111</sup> Within the wooded landscape of the *Thebaid*, Jupiter is often (willingly) absent, a disapproving god reluctant to engage with many of the crucial encounters that take place there.<sup>112</sup> The forest thus slips away from his control: it is a distant space where his perspective, feels—and is—remote, and can even be questioned.

But if, within the *Thebaid*, Jupiter is no longer the uncontested voice of authority, the one responsible for epic unity,<sup>113</sup> then we are invited to question his assertion in the speech above that the forests are purely spaces of moral disorder. Indeed, upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that Jupiter's perspective is heavily flawed: the criminality within the

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. e.g. Vessey 1973:81 who makes claims for a continuation of this role within the *Thebaid* when he explores Jupiter's synonymy with Fate.

<sup>107</sup> Though within the *De Bello Civili* 'the poet commonly addresses the gods and effects to attribute to them motive and skill' (Feeney 1991:274), the gods themselves are absent from Lucan's radical take on epic.

<sup>108</sup> This is perhaps unsurprising given the Roman transformation of the 'panhellenic, supranatural' (Feeney 1991:115) Zeus into a Jupiter who is 'the god who ordains the destiny of the world, the guiding force of the universe, is the god of Rome and her empire' (Feeney 1991:114-15).

<sup>109</sup> There are, obviously, times within the narrative of these epics where Jupiter is thwarted or contradicted, but such occurrences do not normally detract from the direction of the epic as a whole.

<sup>110</sup> Much has been written regarding the presence of an "Augustan voice" within the *Aeneid* (cf. Ganiban 2007:8-9; Hardie 2008: 85-6) and, though many acknowledge the presence of other "voices" within Virgil's epic (notably Parry 1963; Lyne 1987 & Thomas 2001), it remains a key element of the epic. Evander's description of Jupiter's temple (*Aeneid*. 8.347-54) suggests that 'people and god will together occupy all available space assimilating everything' (Feeney 1991:141)

<sup>111</sup> This subversive potential is visible even within the well-ordered world of the *Aeneid*, particularly when Dido waylays Aeneas in the grove outside Carthage (*Aeneid* 4.151-175). Particularly striking is Dido's likeness to the hunter-goddess Diana, who makes her home in the forests. However, within Virgil's epic Jupiter is always able to return Aeneas to the correct path, as he does when he sends Mercury to Aeneas in *Aeneid*. 4. 220-295

<sup>112</sup> An absence that is particularly notable at Polynices' and Eteocles' duel (*Thebaid*. 11. 119-35). Cf. Bernstein 2004:62-85, Feeney 1991:346.

<sup>113</sup> An idea supported by Hardie's claim that the *Thebaid* moves away 'from singular pre-eminence to the paradoxes and confusions of duality.' (1993:8)

forests surrounding Mount Cithaeron is not only a result of depraved human nature, as the god would have us believe. As well as being symptomatic of social transgression, the deeds of Agaue and the Bacchantes also constitute evidence of Jupiter's own moral failure. The *deorum crimina* are Jupiter's own infidelities and, if we look more closely, the other crimes listed are also indirectly a result of divine intervention: Cadmus' destruction was a result of Jupiter's abduction of Europa and the death of Pentheus came at the hands of Bacchus, Jupiter's own son.<sup>114</sup> Each of these stories exposes the hypocrisy of a god who acts in a similarly dishonest and duplicitous manner as the mortals whom he condemns. By orchestrating the destruction of the house of Oedipus, and while ostentatiously acting on a just desire to punish moral wickedness, Jupiter also erases evidence of his own crimes, as it were. To phrase it inversely, as Jupiter seeks to characterise the forest as a corrupt *other* that should be destroyed he brings attention to the part he himself plays in that corruption.

The forests' hybridity may well present a challenge to Jupiter and others who desire hegemonic control, but it does not follow that they are inherently immoral. The interstitial nature of these spaces of difference diminishes the relevance of any structures associated with prescribed spaces of hierarchy. These 'suspended' environments become spaces of possibility engendering, as we will see, fresh and unscripted encounters between agents that have previously inhabited elaborate separate spheres of existence. Bacchus and Diana both exemplify the potential of these interstitial encounters as they fight against and alongside the *Thebaid's* mortal protagonists in an attempt to thwart Jupiter's desire to bring destruction.<sup>115</sup> Bacchus is successful, for a time, in delaying the Argive advance through Nemea (*Thebaid.* 4. 652-730), and Diana consistently protects Atalanta and Parthenopaeus, dwelling alongside Atalanta within the Arcadian grove (9. 712-840). Though the Argives do, ultimately, continue their journey (7. 105-44), and Parthenopaeus, tragically, dies (9.877-907), both Bacchus and Diana cause delays with their interventions, and in doing so question the *Thebaid's* momentum towards disaster. By allowing diverging subplots to persist within the narrative, the forests of the *Thebaid* empower alternative voices that undermine traditional figures of authority.

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<sup>114</sup> Even Bacchus himself is a result of an unusual birth - he is born out of his father's thigh.

<sup>115</sup> I explore how the interstitial nature of these gods gives them an affinity with the forests in my full treatment of Bacchus' encounter with the Argives (see p. 62), and Diana's relationship with Atalanta (see. p. 83).

## Lost in the forest: Polynices

With the memory of Jupiter's speech warning against the depravity he sees as inherent to the forests fresh in her mind the reader is nonetheless swiftly exposed to their uncertainties and equivocating signals. Polynices, the *exul* (*Theb.* 1.312), has been wandering for over a year,<sup>116</sup> cast out of Thebes as his brother reigns, and is about to head straight into a violent tempest (1.346-63). Having begun his journey in the Ogygian glades (*Theb.* 1.328-9), and passed Mt Cithaeron (1.330), his path takes Polynices through the same forests and glades previously condemned by Jupiter (1.30), where the Bacchants transgress social norms through their orgiastic and sometimes bloody revelry (1.328-32).<sup>117</sup> Yet, whilst Jupiter distances himself from these spaces of difference, Polynices, himself the product of the transgression of social norms,<sup>118</sup> boldly, *impavidum* (1.326), strides through them, imbuing the reader, who realises that Jupiter's aversion has been overlooked, with a sense of foreboding. But Polynices shows no signs of sharing such trepidation.

In the course of three lines, he climbs up past Sciron's cliffs and has left the infamous fields of Scylla and pleasant Corinth behind (*Theb.* 1.333-5). Impatience and speed are hardly concealed within the terseness of the description. These spaces, like the Boeotian forests, are also temporally hybrid spaces, defined by past events reaching into the present, blurring the boundaries between memory and reality. The Corinthian Isthmus (1.335), the next location on Polynices' itinerary, is interstitial by virtue of its physical position, both between mainland Greece and the Peloponnesian peninsula and between two seas: the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic gulf in the Aegean.<sup>119</sup> We are tempted to surmise that Polynices feels at home in these inhospitable, ambivalent realms that reflect his own in-between, undecided state of being: an exile who is also king, his brother's year of alternate reign already ended with Eteocles clinging on to Theban rule (*Theb.* 1.314-16). And his affinity with these indomitable surroundings metonymically also reveals, I suggest, an epic keen on exposing its characters to worrisome, remote places unafraid of the incongruities that may result.

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<sup>116</sup> *Thebaid.* 1. 315-6: *longum signis cunctantibus annum stare gemit.*

<sup>117</sup> See Alston & Spentzou 2011:179.

<sup>118</sup> I am referring, of course, to his birth as a product of the incestuous union of Oedipus and Jocasta, a link which is underscored by Statius' use of the patronymic *Oedipodionides* (*Theb.* 1.313)

<sup>119</sup> This is referenced by Statius as Polynices hears *duo litora* (*Theb.* 1.335)



We should be able to appreciate this, if we compare Polynices' attitudes during his exilic journey in *Thebaid* 1 with Aeneas' reactions to his own forced journey in the first book of the *Aeneid*. The first stop in this comparative reading comes immediately after Aeneas and his companions have weathered Juno's storm and find themselves on the shores of Libya. Faced with the fear of the unfamiliar, Aeneas at once works to reassure his men:

Aeneas scopulum interea conscendit, et omnem  
prospectum late pelago petit...  
... curisque ingentibus aeger  
spem voltu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem. (*Aeneid*. 1. 180-1 & 208-9)

Meanwhile Aeneas climbed a rock to get a view over the whole breadth of the ocean... he was sick with all his cares. He showed them the face of hope and kept his misery deep in his heart.<sup>120</sup>

It is highly significant that one of Aeneas' first acts upon arrival in this new landscape is to find a vantage point where he can survey the whole of his environment (*Aeneid*. 1.180). Having only recently arrived via sea, Aeneas is never assimilated into the wild, uncultivated environment. Instead he and his companions work to establish their own proto-civilisation: lighting fires (*Aeneid*. 1.174-6), hunting deer (184-94) and drinking wine (195-7).<sup>121</sup> These actions tally with Aeneas' characterisation as a city builder (*Aeneid*. 1. 1-7) whose role will be to establish foundations of the '*imperium sine fine*' (1.279). Though beset with great difficulties, Aeneas immediately suppresses his own emotions, gaining control over his own self, and seeks to regain a command of the landscape. His arduous but also largely successful 'taming' of the unfamiliar landscape of Libya is an eloquent metaphor of the leadership qualities he maintains, and through which he is able to present his companions with the hope they need to survive.

The contrast with Polynices' solitary, aimless figure absorbed within the wastelands in *Thebaid* 1 is rather stark:

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<sup>120</sup> West 2003:8-9.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Vitruvius. *De Arch.* 2. 1. 1-6.

Interea patriis olim vagus exul ab oris  
 Oedipodionides furto deserta pererrat  
 Aoniae...  
 ... spes anxia mentem  
 extrahit et longo consumit gaudia voto. (*Thebaid.* 1. 312-14 & 323-4)

Meanwhile, Oediponionides, long an exile far from his father's shores,  
 had slipped thief-like, into Aonia's wastelands...

Anxious hope absorbs him,  
 eating up the present joy with prayers for the distant future

Unlike Aeneas, Polynices does not stand commandingly above the landscape. Instead he furtively skulks about, *furto* (*Theb.* 1.313), mulling over the seeming injustice of his exile alongside the possibility of a triumphant return, all the while allowing his emotions to cloud his perception of his present predicament (1.322-3). In contrast to Virgil's portrayal of the active and heroic Aeneas, Statius presents a passive and morally dubious Polynices, who instead of overcoming a storm is about to be overcome by one.

As night falls and the storm begins to rage, the already opaque landscape (*Theb.* 1. 343-4) loses any sharp definition. Swollen rivers destroy forests, exposing previously hidden spaces:

frangitur omne nemus, rapiunt antiqua procellae  
 bracchia silvarum, nullisque aspecta per aevum  
 solibus umbrosi patuere aestiva Lycaei. (*Thebaid.* 1. 361-3)

Groves were all splintered, gales tore ancient boughs off trees,  
 and Lycaeus' shady summer haunts, where never before  
 had a sunbeam strayed—these lay stripped and open to view.

Caught within the cacophony of thunder and water (1.365-7), dodging avalanches (1.364-5) and unable to orient himself (1.367-9), Polynices is not only fearful of the storm but is unable to control his continuing fear of Eteocles: *pulsat metus undique et undique frater*' (1.369). His emotional state mirrors the turmoil of the storm-ridden forests. Prevented from reaching higher ground and unable to gain a vantage point from which to take command of his environment, Polynices is forced to forge his own path through the resistant woods:

talis opaca legens nemorum Cadmeius heros  
 accelerat, vasto metuenda umbone ferarum  
 excutiens stabula, et prono virgulta refringit  
 pectore (dat stimulos animo vis maesta timoris) (*Thebaid.* 1. 376-79)

Like him, the Cadmeian hero picking a path through dark  
 groves at top speed. With his huge shield, he brushed aside wild  
 beasts' fearsome thickets; with chest thrust out, he forced a path  
 through tangled underbrush, fear's grim urgency spurring him on

Though Polynices suffers the effects of the storm alongside the forests, he also contributes to their destruction.<sup>122</sup> That Polynices should simultaneously suffer and be the cause of that same suffering becomes possible when we take into account the young Theban's complex relationship with the forests via his ancestors' sylvan transgressions and we begin to analyse the exilic landscape as a metaphor for the conflict within Polynices' self. Just as the dark and stormy forests he scurries across are spaces that allow for the proliferation of strife and incongruity, Polynices' own dissonant identity places him at odds with his aspiration for resolution. He is both victim and agitator in the plot he seeks to resolve.<sup>123</sup> In need of new relationship with a new land, having been expelled from Thebes, his instinctive reaction is to try to conquer the landscape by force. But, unlike Aeneas, Polynices is no city-builder, and is ultimately unable to bring these dark, sylvan spaces under his control.

Destined to build a city that will provide the ultimate authority over the symbolic, Aeneas was able to stand up high (literally and metaphorically) and navigate the inhospitable Libyan shores. In contrast, Polynices meshes with the landscape whose fluidity resonates with his ambivalent identity. And yet, towards the end of Book 1 his exilic state overwhelms him entirely, alienating him even from the composite environment that has encompassed him. Consumed by the storm, close to perishing and denied any (even hybrid) identity, Polynices only escapes with his life when he is able to find a place of fixed meaning within the fluid

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<sup>122</sup> If we expand the analogy of Polynices as the destructive storm then the fact that the storm begins in Nemea (*Thebaid.* 1.355), where Opheltes will become the first casualty of war (*Theb.* 5.739-40 and p.76 of this thesis), becomes almost prophetic.

<sup>123</sup> Though Thebes is a city, its inhabitants continual crossing of social boundaries mean that it can never be the protected, walled 'epic-city' where the narrative reaches its telos.

landscape. In the genre of epic such a place can only take the form of a city, and for Polynices this city is Argos (*Theb.* 1.385-89).

The forest lingers on: Laius and Eteocles.

If the engulfing territory outside Argos stops just short of sucking Polynices past a boundary of death and into a land of no return, even this partition gives in when Laius is preparing to travel to Thebes in Book 2. 1-133. In a journey similar to that of Polynices' journey to Argos,<sup>124</sup> Laius is taken from the Underworld by Mercury, just as Jupiter decreed in the heavenly council (*Theb.* 1. 292-311), and travels towards Thebes. As the ground gives way to readmit Laius and Mercury to the surface (*Theb.* 2.14),<sup>125</sup> we are confronted with a striking spatial representation of the on-going conflict, where the physical weakening of the environment meets and reflects the political and emotional withering brought on by sibling strife. The ease with which the winged god and his ghostly companion abandon the underworld, unhindered even by Cerberus (2. 27-31), suggests that within the permeable landscape surrounding Thebes even the boundaries between life and death no longer hold.<sup>126</sup>

Sanctioned by Jupiter and facilitated by the Fury, Laius rushes towards Thebes unable and unwilling to contain his wrath. And yet, the by now familiar, tactic of delay is once again deployed by Statius. Before Laius enters the city, the ghost cannot resist a glance towards Delphi,<sup>127</sup> where he received the fatal prophecy regarding Oedipus' patricide, and Phocis where he was killed and buried.<sup>128</sup> And in these brief moments of loitering, narratives and locations of the past enter the text, prejudicing our understanding of the city of Thebes which we have not yet met first hand. Those places still matter (for Laius and for Thebes), both as Firstspace landmarks and thus as part of a symbolic economy which emphasises ancestral

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<sup>124</sup> The parallels between *Thebaid.* 1. 312-89 and 2. 1-70 are well attested by Gervais 2013: xxi-xxi & 35.

<sup>125</sup> An event which foreshadows Amphiaraus being swallowed up by the earth in Books 7 and 8. Amphiaraus falls through the earth at *Thebaid.* 7. 794-823, and then his arrival in Hades is chronicled at 8.1-126.

<sup>126</sup> The fact that Mercury and Laius travel via the Taenarean Gate, that is, the same route taken by Tisiphone upon her entrance into the epic (*Theb.* 1.96), suggests that the Fury's journey may have forced the gate open.

<sup>127</sup> *ardua Cirrhae* (*Theb.* 2.63) cf. Gervais 2013:72.

<sup>128</sup> *pollutamque suo despectat Phocida busto* (*Theb.* 2.64). again cf. Gervais 2013:72.

*nefas*.<sup>129</sup> To be Theban is to be part of a messy, ongoing story, within which memory and past action has profound implications for the present generation.

Laius' ghost and his fleeting glance at past landmarks allows the old sylvan memories to cross the threshold of the present and contaminate the narrative of the city that is about to start with their spectral presence. Within the genealogical story of Thebes, it becomes clear that the city is a constantly contested space. Whilst there are short periods of respite, Thebes' history tells the story of a land that is repeatedly claimed, often with blood.<sup>130</sup> Founded by an invader, Cadmus, Thebes is subsequently populated by the Spartoi: the men "sown" by Cadmus with the teeth of the snake.<sup>131</sup> After the deaths of Pentheus, Polydorus and Labdacus,<sup>132</sup> Cadmus' direct descendants, the Spartoi gain power through the regent Lycus.<sup>133</sup> After Lycus follow Amphion and Zethos (twin sons of Antiope and Zeus),<sup>134</sup> before power is returned to the Cadmeian line through the succession of Laius.<sup>135</sup> Many of these kings died violent deaths at the hands of a family member or divinity,<sup>136</sup> and the evidence of such deaths remains within Theban spatial practice, and monumentalised within the geographical landscape. I have already mentioned Phocis (*Theb.* 2.64),<sup>137</sup> the site of Laius death, and Amphion's crumbling walls (4.356-60). In a similar way, Pentheus' death becomes synonymous with Mt. Cithaeron, and the deaths of the Spartoi with the Boeotian Plain. As we shall see shortly, Thebes is currently celebrating Cithaeron's day and the Thebans' ongoing worship of Bacchus. This intertwining of sinister forests where decisions on the

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<sup>129</sup> As Bernstein (2003:353) notes 'Affiliation with a distinguished kingroup typically represents a potent form of symbolic capital for the characters of Greco-Roman epic'. Within the *Thebaid* the value of this form of symbolic capital varies in accordance with the character's location within the epic landscape. In the case of Thebes, it is vital.

<sup>130</sup> The mythology surrounding the rulers of Thebes is, as expected, somewhat fluid. However, most attempts to clarify the path of succession agree that the city was founded by Cadmus, who was succeeded by his grandson Pentheus, who upon his death was followed by Polydorus. (cf. Levi-Strauss 1955: *passim*; Carroll 1978:810; Bock 1979:906.)

<sup>131</sup> For a comprehensive list of sources for Cadmus' sowing of the Spartoi see Gantz 1996: 468-9.

<sup>132</sup> Labdacus was the result of a marriage between Polydorus and a Spartan woman, but still maintains the link to Cadmus through his father.

<sup>133</sup> Lycus was the son of the Chthonius. See Bock 1979:906.

<sup>134</sup> We have few sources for Amphion and Zethos' rule. However, the building of the walls of Thebes is sometimes attributed to them. e.g. Hom. *Odyssey*. 11.260-65. cf. Gantz 1996:286 and Krappe 1925.

<sup>135</sup> Gantz 1996:488-92.

<sup>136</sup> Pentheus, Amphion, Zethos and Laius all die violently.

<sup>137</sup> See p. 43 above.

future of Thebes were made, undone, and re-made is crucial to our reading of how the Thebans, in this case specifically Eteocles, navigate the *Thebaid*.

Whilst Laius and Mercury hurtle towards the city, Eteocles, sprawled drunkenly across his couch (*Theb.* 2.90-2), remains oblivious to their coming:

nox ea cum tacita volucer Cyllenius aura  
 regis Echionii stratis allapsus, ubi ingens  
 fuderat Assyriis exstructa tapetibus alto  
 membra toro. pro gnara nihil mortalia fati  
 corda sui! capit ille dapes, habet ille soporem. (*Thebaid.* 2. 89-93)

On a night like this, winged Cyllenius sped along silent  
 airways to royal Eteocles' bedside, where the massive  
 man had flung himself down on a couch piled high with Assyrian  
 tapestries

(How poignant that mortal hearts never know  
 their fate! This fellow had taken his meal and fallen asleep!)

Depicting the king as unaware and exposed, Statius also takes a moment to emphasise Eteocles' current contentment (*Theb.* 2.92-3). In contrast to Polynices' struggles, Eteocles is at peace, safely within the comforting eurhythmia of Thebes. War has not yet disrupted usual patterns of sleeping and eating, not yet interrupted the rhythms of Eteocles' daily life.

Indeed, Eteocles is not alone in his abandon, for the whole of Thebes is caught up in the chaotic aftermath of Bacchic revelry, having celebrated the god's unusual birth (*Theb.* 2.71-5). Despite Jupiter's determination to frame Thebes' forest festival as a source of debauchery and murder (*Thebaid.* 1. 227-31), Jupiter's censure of the festival is undermined by his role in Bacchus' birth, having carried Bacchus to term within his thigh (2.71-3). Indeed, Statius depicts celebration of Bacchus' birth primarily as an opportunity for legitimised transgression of spaces and identities:

effusi passim per tecta, per agros,  
 serta inter vacuosque mero crateras anhelum  
 proflabant sub luce deum (*Thebaid.* 2. 75-7)

In towns, in fields, amid garlands and  
 wine bowls drained to the dregs, men were snoring as dawn came up  
 giving off fumes of the Breathless God...

As the Thebans begin to transgress the boundaries of their usual social role, places that also previously performed a specific social function, the house (*tectum*) and the field (*ager*), become muddled (*Theb.* 2.75-7).<sup>138</sup> Yet, the blending of these distinct social loci does not lead automatically to violence or disorder. Instead of representing a perversion of the symbolic economy, the Bacchic revelry needs to be understood as an integral part of the expression of Theban identity. To be Theban is to engage with the other, to paradoxically embrace the possibility of social transgression within one's own social identity.

As his depiction of the celebration continues, Statius contrasts the *mala gaudia matrum* condemned by Jupiter (*Theb.* 1.229) with an intriguing paradox: sane women being driven through the woods in Bacchic ecstasy. Statius begins with a mention of a *Baccho meliore*, a kinder Bacchus:

ipse etiam gaudens nemorosa per avia sanas  
 impulerat matres Baccho meliore Cithaeron (*Thebaid.* 2. 79-80)

Cithaeron himself had merrily driven sane mothers through the wooded wilds  
 under a kinder Bacchus.<sup>139</sup>

After introducing the festival as an innocent celebration, Statius then follows with a puzzling simile, likening this celebration to the far bloodier festival of the Bistonians, who are under the influence of *Ogygii Iacchi*: Theban Bacchus (*Theb.* 2.81-8). In his effort to accommodate the two conflicting images of the Bacchic revelry, Gervais argues that the poet is drawing 'a false comparison'<sup>140</sup> to undermine the image of the kinder god. However, as I noted in the introduction to this chapter, the *Thebaid* is a text that challenges attempts at imposing

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<sup>138</sup> An image which foreshadows that of the Lemnian men unwittingly awaiting slaughter (*Theb.* 5.186-200). See p. 72.

<sup>139</sup> Here I am favouring Shackleton Bailey's Loeb translation (2003a:101), as it better preserves the sense of *Baccho meliore*.

<sup>140</sup> Gervais 2013:81

hegemonic control through its depiction of interactions within interstitial spaces of difference. With this in mind I believe that the comparison of *Baccho meliore* with *Ogygii Iacchi* does not undermine the image of Bacchus as kind, but instead reinforces the composite nature of Theban identity, which in turn places Thebes in opposition to Jupiter's totalising narrative.

Alongside the celebration's confusion of social and spatial boundaries, Statius' naming of Theban people as *Tyriis colonis* (*Theb.* 2.73), descendants of the Tyrian Cadmus, again weakens the boundary between the present and the past.<sup>141</sup> This use of an alternative to *Thebanus*, Theban, is common throughout the *Thebaid*, and, as Davis has shown, the references to Cadmus and Tyre are the most frequent.<sup>142</sup> The choice to continually 'point to earlier generations and to Theban origins'<sup>143</sup> thus creates a temporal dislocation that intensifies the sense of porousness prevalent, it seems, in Thebes: to be Theban is to continually inhabit the landscape of the past.<sup>144</sup>

It is thus only after we have been confronted by the multiple fusions at work outside the walls of the city, that we are allowed to enter the city with Laius. But even there, at the heart of the civic economy, we are not allowed any respite from the messy entanglements with the forest that seem to define Thebes. Immediately after crossing the gates, the ghost is confronted with a monument to his own death: his bloody chariot, still lying in the entranceway (*Theb.* 2.67-8). The lurid evidence of Laius' own murder transports him back to the moment of his death, causing Laius to re-experience the fear and horror of that time (*Theb.* 2.69). This temporal dislocation to the space of death is so powerful that only Mercury's wand can persuade Laius to continue to obey Jupiter and enter the palace (*Theb.* 2.70).

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<sup>141</sup> It is interesting that Statius consistently prefers the original foundation story of Thebes over that of Amphion, as Cadmus story is one concerned with wild, forest spaces and Amphion's with the construction of walls.

<sup>142</sup> Davis 1994:474

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> As Davis (1994:464-5) notes: 'In moments of crisis they look back to events which have befallen earlier generations as a means of understanding their present predicaments: the Thebans are an aetiologically-minded people'.



After transforming his appearance to resemble that of Tiresias, in order that his words are not dismissed as a figment of the imagination (*Theb.* 2.94-7), Laius speaks to Eteocles in his dream (2.100-19). Angrily desiring the destruction of his neglectful grandsons,<sup>145</sup> he appeals to Eteocles to defeat Polynices and preserve Thebes' Cadmeian lineage:

“...habe Thebas, caecumque cupidine regni  
 ausurumque eadem germanum expelle, nec ultra  
 fraternos inhiantem obitus sine fidere coeptis  
 fraudibus aut Cadmo dominas inferre Mycenae.” (*Thebaid.* 2. 116-119)

“...hold on to Thebes, drive out this kinsman  
 blind with desire to be king, this bold schemer panting to mourn  
 his sibling's demise! Let him trust his treacherous plots no  
 more. Don't bring in Mycenae to queen it over Cadmus.”

Cadmus' story, that of an exile attempting to establish a foothold in a hostile wooded landscape, is a reminder yet again of the origins of the tension at the heart of Theban identity: the Theban inability to resolve and unify their own identity as both invader and autochthonous, Cadmeian or Spartoi, exile or conqueror. Here, Laius invokes Cadmus' name in order to remind Eteocles of this tension, and of the fragility of his current position.

Though Statius does not treat Cadmus' story at length, frequent allusions to the foundation of Thebes frame his epic narrative.<sup>146</sup> However, Ovid's sustained treatment of Cadmus' story in the *Metamorphoses* (3.1-603),<sup>147</sup> hovers in the background of this episode.<sup>148</sup> Ovid's account begins with a mention of Cadmus' mission to find his sister, Europa (*Met.* 3.1-5), before beginning in earnest with the story of how he is led by a cow to the site of future Thebes (*Met.* 3.6-27). The first act of Cadmus, when he arrives at the site of his future city, is to kill

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<sup>145</sup> Laius' anger and desire to destroy his perverted lineage are both treated successfully by Bernstein 2003:358, who draws the link between Laius' desire and that of Jupiter, who also wishes to destroy the Theban other.

<sup>146</sup> From the proem (*scrutantemque aequora Cadmum* 1.6) to the final book (*Cadmea ad moenia* 12.635) the name of Cadmus is synonymous with Thebes throughout the *Thebaid*. For a full catalogue of such allusions see Davis 1994:467.

<sup>147</sup> Gantz 1996:471. For a comprehensive treatment of the many and varied sources we have for the Theban cycle (literary and artistic) see Gantz 1996:467-530, specifically 467-73 for his treatment of Cadmus.

<sup>148</sup> The use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a source for the *Thebaid* has been well argued by Newlands 2004 specifically 135-9. Cf. Feeney 1991:344 & 337-91; Hardie 1990: 226; Keith 2002:381-402.

a serpent of Mars (*Met.* 3. 28-80). Cadmus' attendants encounter this beast when they enter the woods to obtain water (*Met.* 3. 28-34).

The setting of this encounter, the *silva vetus* (*Met.* 3.28), situates the birth of Theban identity firmly within the forest. After the snake has killed all of the attendants (*Met.* 3.48-9), Cadmus rushes in and kills it with a spear (*Met.* 3.55-71). From the body of the defeated creature he then takes its teeth and sows them in the ground. From these, the remains of the conquered, rise the Spartoi (sown-men) who, in turn, destroy one another: brothers killing brothers.<sup>149</sup> Depending on the source, Cadmus either is given a chance to appease the gods for the destruction of their serpent or he is turned into a serpent himself.<sup>150</sup> Once again, it is the forests that are formative of the Theban identity, rather than the city itself: they are where the snake was slain (*Met.* 3. 28-80), where Acteon and Pentheus were killed (*Met.* 3.155-255; 511-733), where Oedipus defeated the Sphinx (*Theb.* 2. 505). The woods and groves of Boeotia are the Theban story made manifest: the physical reminder of the past that repeatedly asserts itself within the present Theban identity.

Cadmus' story is vital to our understanding of the Theban relationship to the other, or the non-I. Even if we discard the idea of Cadmus' own metamorphosis, the Theban foundation narrative remains a story which denies any neat resolution. Cadmus may have killed the snake, seemingly destroying any opposition, but that death leads to the birth of the Spartoi, which in turn begets further conflict. This conflict between those born from the landscape, the Spartoi, and the Tyrian invaders continues on through to the hostility between Oedipus (Cadmeian) and Creon (Spartoi).<sup>151</sup>

Not only does Cadmus' story expose the otherness at the heart of Theban identity, but it also shows how the Thebans are viewed as the other by Jupiter, epic's master narrator. To Jupiter the Thebans are the people who refuse to surrender to his control, the target of his vengeance and the evidence of his *deorum crimina* (*Theb.* 1.227-31). With one word, *Cadmo*, Laius, (the

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<sup>149</sup> a precursor to the fratricide of Eteocles and Polynices.

<sup>150</sup> For examples of the former see Apollonius *AR.* 4. 517-18 and Apollodorus *ApB.* 3. 5. 4. For the transformation see Ovid. *Met.* 4. 563-603 and Euripides. *Bacchai.* 1330-39.

<sup>151</sup> Bock 1979:905-6 notes this back and forth between the two lineages, and also notes the tendency for the marriages of the Theban kings/queens to temporarily resolve this conflict by pairing those from different lines, ending in the marriage of the last two surviving direct descendants of Cadmus and Echion, Antigone and Haemon.

city's past attempting to take over its present), wrenches Eteocles away from his safe couch in the palace and exposes him to the ancient forest where Theban identity was debated but not resolved. It is the forest that still makes decisions on behalf of the people and, as we will see, the people still make decisions crucial for their future in the forest, that space of stubborn difference that undermines Jupiter's drive towards unity. Through the frequent identifications of the Thebans as Cadmus' descendants, the text exposes the futility of any aspiration for assimilation that Jupiter or the Thebans themselves may nurture. Instead, we shall see that the Theban hybrid identity of invader/native resonates and amplifies other hybrid identities with the *Thebaid*.

In the encounter between Eteocles and Laius (*Theb.* 2. 89-133) it is possible to see how the rejection of the Jovian-same undermines the young Theban's attempt at kingship. For Eteocles, the implication that Cadmus' story creates is that the totality of control he desires is at odds with the Theban rejection of that same totality. The permeability and hybridity of Thebes demands a continual renegotiation of the symbolic economy. Full ownership of the city, the goal which Eteocles strives to achieve, is impossible as the forest is always lurking just beyond the walls, waiting to invade and destabilise. By destroying the snake, on the orders of Jupiter, Cadmus was able to clear the way for the new space of the Theban city. However, in doing so he also placed himself into a position of conflict with the previous owners of the space. Like Cadmus, Eteocles' kingship is an attempt to assert his ownership of a space that resists. As Eteocles tries to impose the symbolic order of the city on a land that is dominated by the fluid and challenging spaces of the forests, again aligning with Jupiter's desires, he emulates Cadmus and seeks to eliminate all which is other rather than choosing to coexist.

Eteocles' inheritance is the knowledge of the uncertainty of his position. Despite being a descendant of Cadmus his position as ruler is by no means assured, in fact, such a heritage almost guarantees that he will be usurped. Therefore, the young king must cling onto the space he occupies: a space that continually resists. As I have already shown, Laius, who fully understands the contested nature of Theban rule, addresses his grandson in terms that explicitly define Eteocles as Cadmus' descendant (*Theb.* 2. 115-119). His command, "*Habe Thebas!*" (*Theb.* 2.116), is a reminder that the ground of Thebes has been hard won, and that Eteocles is part of a continuing cycle where power is contested, lost, and then reclaimed.

To claim kingship (and therefore kinship) is to claim this inheritance, and therefore the peace that the Theban people found in their celebration of the Bacchic other, is deceptive and about to be proven very short-lived.<sup>152</sup> The fluidity of space achieved during the festival, where Thebes coexisted with the Bacchic other, has been replaced with totalising language of ownership, where to be Theban is to be Cadmeian, and to be Cadmeian is to destroy. Laius seduces Eteocles with the lie that Jupiter desires to re-assimilate Thebes into a new unified world. Yet, in allowing Thebes to be defined by Jupiter, Eteocles colludes with Thebes' definition as inherently corrupt, and therefore ensures its destruction.

Once Laius has delivered his message to Eteocles he sheds his disguise:

... dirique nepotis  
incubuit stratis; iugulum mox caede patentem  
nudat et undanti perfundit vulnere somnum. (*Thebaid.* 2. 122-4)

... he leaned over his grim grandson, bared the gaping  
vein in his throat, and flooded the dream with his gushing wound.

Laius' drenching of Eteocles, as a final, visceral, act, serves to obscure Eteocles beneath the blood of his grandfather, just as Oedipus himself would have been bloodied in the original act of patricide. It is as if, up to this point, Eteocles has been able to deny his relationship to his father,<sup>153</sup> allowing him peace to feast, sleep, and enjoy the fluidity of identity possible within the Theban forests. But once Eteocles is forced to recognise Laius as grandfather (*Theb.* 2.127), he is also forced to acknowledge his brother, and his father, and in doing so act in a way that fixes his identity within the symbolic economy of kinship:

illi rupta quies; attollit membra toroque  
eripitur plenus monstribus, vanumque cruorem  
excutiens simul horret avum fratremque requirit (*Thebaid.* 2. 125-7)

The other, his rest disrupted, thrashed about, then leapt

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<sup>152</sup> By Book 4, with the fraternal strife fully acknowledged, an ancient vulnerability is manifest even on the city's walls: *ipsa vetusto moenia lapsa situ magnaevae/ Amphionis arceiam fessum senio nudant latus* (*Theb.* 4.356-8).

<sup>153</sup> Indeed, it is the brothers' neglect of their Oedipus that causes him to pray for their destruction: *orbem uisu regnisque carentem/ non regere aut dictis maerentem flectere adorti,/ quos genui quocumque toro* (*Theb.* 1. 74-6)

from his bed, filled with horror, shaking off phantom gore  
as he shrank back from his grandsire and roared at his brother.

Though Eteocles found peace within the hybrid atmosphere of the Bacchic sylvan festival, the moment he allows his identity to be solely determined by ancestry he is driven to continue the cycle of *nefas*.<sup>154</sup>

Of course, alongside all this past strife, the forest will continue to accommodate grief and generate debilitating bewilderment for Thebes. The ambush and killing of the fifty Theban ambassadors by Tydeus outside the gates in Book 3, defies basic civic expectations of hospitality, and thus unleashes an outpour of dejection in the Theban city. Such is the grief that cannot be contained within the walls (*Theb.* 3.114-215). Immediately following Maeon's message of utter despair and subsequent suicide (*Theb.* 3. 53-113) the Theban people pour out from the city and race to find the dead (3.114-20). Within the forest the Theban mothers cease to be individuals as their grief transforms them into a single voice, *ore... uno* (*Theb.* 3. 123).<sup>155</sup> Once again the forest is shown to be a space where identity is stretched up to, and beyond, its limits. Here, through mourning, individuals mesh with each other and desires beyond logic are allowed to be uttered when, for example, mothers, maddened by grief, pray they were barren: "*mibi quippe malorum/causa labor*", "Oh! what evils my labour has caused me!" (*Theb.* 3.159-60).

Once the bodies have been claimed, and as if in a bid to erase the slaughter, the Thebans clear the forest:

tunc ferro retegunt silvas collisque propinqui  
annosum truncant apicem, qui conscius actis  
noctis et inspexit gemitus (*Thebaid.* 3. 174-6)

Men clear-cut the woods with axes, stripped the thick-timbered  
peak of the hill nearby, for it had been party to last night's  
deeds and now observed their groans.

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<sup>154</sup> c.f. Bernstein 2003:358

<sup>155</sup> c.f. Alston & Spentzou 2011:77 and Markus 2004:111 for more on the way the mothers' grief unites them in a form of protest.

The woods, as witness to the Tydeus' slaughter of the fifty, must be obliterated. But the destruction of the grove is also an attempt to break the link the forest provides between the Thebans' present identity and their past. There is a determined, if desperate, attempt by the symbolic here to claim the area as safe, controlled Firstspace, eradicating with this mutilation any lingering confusion and instability that could re-ignite the murderous cycle of conflict and violence that has always lurked in these woods as we saw earlier in the chapter.

However, even as the pyres of ancient wood are burning, aged Aletes offers a speech of consolation to the Theban mourners, restoring the stories of the Theban other just as the fire attempts to erase them.<sup>156</sup> His words catalogue past acts of destruction of Thebes by the divine: the burning of Cadmus' city by Juno (*Theb.* 3.183-4); the murders of Learchus (3.186-7) and Pentheus (3.189-190) by their crazed parents; the slaughter of Niobe's children (3.191-8); and, finally, the tragic metamorphoses of Actaeon (3.201-4) and Dirce (3.204-6). Each of these incidents, as Dominik has noted,<sup>157</sup> is an example of the exercise of divine control over mankind, and in each incident it might be argued that such an intervention was unjustified. Aletes' narrative once again works to cast doubt upon the characterisation of the Thebans as abhorrent by emphasising the arbitrary nature of the crimes committed against Thebes by Jupiter and other divinities. Whereas the destruction of the grove is an attempt to control cultural narrative through the domination of Firstspace, Aletes reframes the act of destruction in a way that reaffirms the connection between the fluidity of the sylvan landscape and the complexity of Theban identity, questioning the repeated attempts to fix Thebes as the simple and spurious other.

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<sup>156</sup> c.f. Bernstein 2003:356 and Davis 1994:466-7.

<sup>157</sup> Dominik treats Aletes speech within the context of his reading of the *Thebaid* as a critique of monarchical power (1994:16-17). His conclusion is that Aletes' comparison of the death of the fifty with the crimes of Thebes' past highlights the lack of justification for the ambush itself.

## 2.iii. Uncertain Positions: moving from Argos to Nemea.

### Inside high walls: Adrastus of Argos

If Thebes is permeable and inextricably intertwined with the hybrid forests, then in contrast Argos sits apart; clearly separated from the rest of the epic landscape. Like an island within a turbulent sea, behind Argos' *moenia* King Adrastus has created a space of order, one which, at least initially, provides Polynices with the security he desires (*Theb.* 1.385-9). This distance between the city and the outside world is clearly depicted in the description of Adrastus' journey to the gates of his palace, after he is woken by the sound of Polynices' and Tydeus' struggle:<sup>158</sup>

isque ubi progrediens numerosa luce per alta  
 atria dimotis aduerso limine claustris  
 terribilem dictu faciem... (*Thebaid.* 1. 435-7)

Proceeding through his high halls with many a torch,  
 once the bolts had been shot back, he saw across the sill  
 a scene terrible to tell of..

By maintaining the distance, and therefore the difference, between the city and the wilderness outside Adrastus is able to impose and sustain hegemonic control over that which is inside.<sup>159</sup> The *alta atria* (*Theb.* 1. 435-6) of Argos are also reminiscent of Virgil's *altae moenia Romae* (*Aeneid.* 1.7): they nourish a certain purity of meaning within their enclosure which the porousness of the spaces we have encountered so far in the epic has not been able to keep

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<sup>158</sup> I treat the *terribilem faciem* itself in the final chapter of this thesis, beginning on p.207.

<sup>159</sup> cf. Bachelard 1958:227-46, who works to expose the way in which the arbitrary distinction between outside and inside colours our metaphysical thinking, and how this is reflected phenomenologically. I go on to address this polarity in more detail in 3. Blurred Fields, but in this context, it is interesting to note the link between this binarism and the language of conquest. The distinction between what is included and excluded is often formalised, leading to conflict: 'And so, simple geometrical opposition becomes tinged with aggressivity. Formal opposition is incapable of remaining calm' (228).

safe. Argos' affiliation with Rome, the city's seemingly labyrinthine halls, and its locked gates, all suggest that it is a fundamentally different place from permeable Thebes.

The first clear impression we get when Statius brings us inside by describing the palace's interior (*Theb.* 1.514-24) is of comfort and opulence. The decor of the palace is bright and luxurious as it shines with purples, *ostro* (*Theb.* 1.517); gold, *auro* (1.517); and the light of fires, *focos* (1.514), and lamps, *lychnis* (1.521). The interior is also soft and welcoming, covered in tapestries and cushions, *toros* and *tapetas* (*Theb.* 1.518). Finally, the hall is filled with an abundance of food in the form of meat, *viscera caesarum pecudum* (*Theb.* 1.523), and bread, *perdomitam saxo Cererem* (1.524).

Adrastus' hall is not only luxurious, it is also organised and productive: everywhere there are signs of industry as the servants hurry about in preparation for the celebration of Phoebus Apollo:<sup>160</sup>

... adolere focos epulasque recentes  
instaurare iubet. dictis parere ministri  
certatim accelerant... (*Thebaid.* 1.514-16)

He ordered the hearth fires stoked and the recent banquet  
renewed. Lackeys sprinted like racers, quick to obey  
his bidding.

The servants perform their allotted tasks promptly, vying with each other, *certatim* (*Theb.* 1.516), to be the first to respond to Adrastus' orders. This small detail displays the authority with which Adrastus commands his household. Indeed, though the celebration is ostensibly in Apollo's honour, it is primarily a reflection on the power and authority of the Argive king, and culminates in the image of Adrastus, seated looking over the entire scene, glowing in reflection of the light and order set before him:

laetatur Adrastus  
obsequio fervere domum, iamque ipse superbis  
fulgebat stratis solioque effultus eburno. (*Thebaid.* 1.524-6)

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<sup>160</sup> Adrastus gives his libation to Phoebus at *Thebaid.* 1.552-6.



Adrastus beamed as his house  
seethed with service. Now he sat, the resplendent master,  
high on his ivory throne, leaning back, heaped against cushions.

Each of these details combines to paint a picture of a wealthy ordered city. Statius makes it clear that, within Argos, Adrastus' rule is absolute.

It is from this position of status and control that Adrastus narrates the myth of Coroebus: hero of the Argive people surpassing all in arms and courage, *armorum praestans animique* (*Theb.* 1.605), who, by killing a monster, defied Apollo and yet was spared (1.557-668). Coroebus' story is a precursor to Adrastus' invitation to Tydeus and Polynices to share their own lineage (*Theb.* 1.661-72), and the myth's place within the narrative suggests that its aetiological function is not limited to an explanation of a particular festival, but that it also forms part of how the Argives, and in particular Adrastus, see themselves.<sup>161</sup> As the myth's narrator, Adrastus is far from being 'blindly pious'<sup>162</sup> as some would suggest. On the contrary, Adrastus takes control over the myth as it relates to his own story, imposing order on the muddled and amoral tale of Psamathe, Linus and Apollo, to make it reflect the order he maintains within Argos.

Storytelling has always been the primary mode through which epic heroes and kings shape their own identity, and in many cases, shape the outcome of their own narratives. Possible sources of inspiration for Statius are therefore as numerous as the kings of epic themselves. However, of the many scholars who have treated this episode,<sup>163</sup> the majority allow for a connection between Adrastus' narration of Coroebus' story and Evander's telling of the myth of Hercules and Caucis (*Aeneid.* 8.185-305).<sup>164</sup> The initial similarities are easy to see: both

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<sup>161</sup> Bernstein 2003:364 includes the Coroebus myth as part of Adrastus' rejection of ancestral stigma offering of a new identity to Polynices. However, he concludes that the story ultimately undermines Adrastus' claims.

<sup>162</sup> Cf here Hill 1990:114 who continues the assessment of Vessey 1970:323.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Legras 1905: 38-9, Heuvel 1932, Aricò 1960, Caviglia 1973:22-6, Vessey 1970 & 1973:101-7, Ahl 1986:2853-4, Hill 1990:113-5, Brown 1994:164-74, Dominik 1994:63-70, Bernstein 2003:369 & revised 2008:73-6 and, finally, Ganiban 2007:9-23, to whom I am indebted for the majority of this comprehensive bibliography.

<sup>164</sup> The one particularly notable exception is Hill 1990:113 who sees the link to *Aeneid.* 8 as merely an assertion of Legras 1905 and Vessey 1970. He suggests instead that any similarities might 'have arisen naturally from the fact that both are treating similar material'.

kings invite in strangers<sup>165</sup> to share in the food of a sacred festival,<sup>166</sup> both tell the story of a heroic avenger<sup>167</sup> who kills a half-human monster<sup>168</sup> to save their people.<sup>169</sup> Each might be seen as a mini-epic, an *epyllion*, explaining one of the traditions of their people, and thus also helping to form a collective identity through narrative.<sup>170</sup>

Yet it is the position of the stories within the narratological structure of the epics, rather than their content, that is of greatest importance to our reading of *Thebaid*. 1. 557-601. In *Aeneid* 8.306-69, Evander immediately follows his tale by walking Aeneas through the site of his future city and Virgil names Evander as *Romanae conditor arcis*: ‘founder of the citadel of Rome’ (*Aeneid*. 8.313). The implication of this intertext is that just as Evander and Aeneas are the builders and controllers of the epic city, so is Adrastus. However, Adrastus is attempting to establish his city as core space within an epic dominated by hybrid spaces of difference: the forests. And his desire for civic order not only contrasts with the *Thebaid's* sustained movement towards disorder, but also places him in opposition to the other main story-tellers within the *Thebaid*: Jupiter and Tisiphone, both of whom seek destruction and discord. In his narration of Coroebus’ story, Adrastus’ desire to defy discord and restore the epic’s drive towards unity and harmony, ironically finds its voice in Coroebus’ defiance of the ultimate inspiration for Roman epic: Apollo.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Though Evander does recognise Aeneas (*Aeneid*. 8.154-6), Aeneas himself does not tell the king his name (8.126-52) and Evander’s son, Pallas, refers to Aeneas as *quicumque es* ‘whoever you are’ (8.122). This is not the only example of a stranger being invited into a king’s city and eating and drinking before their identity is revealed. The most striking is perhaps Odysseus’ visit to Alcinoos, where Odysseus is referred to as ξένος ‘stranger’, for three entire books (Homer. *Odyssey*. 6-8) before he reveals himself in book 9. The difference between these kings and Adrastus (correctly pointed out by Ahl 1986:2855) is that they only offer the strangers hospitality, not marriage to their daughters.

<sup>166</sup> Cf *Thebaid*. 1.522-4 with *Aeneid*. 8.179-81.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. *maximus ultor... Alcides* (*Aeneid*. 8.201-3) and *armorum praestans animique Coroebus* (*Thebaid*. 1.605)

<sup>168</sup> Cacus is described as *semihominis* (*Aeneid*. 8.194), and Παιονή as part woman, part snake (*Thebaid*. 1.598-600)

<sup>169</sup> The way in which Adrastus introduces the story (*Thebaid*. 1.557-61) is also evocative of Evander’s introduction (*Aeneid*. 8.184-9)

<sup>170</sup> Vessey 1970:315-6 gives C.A. as Statius’ source for Coroebus’ tale, itself an elegiac poem concerned with the origins of various Greek traditions and histories. He also notes the link between Adrastus’ telling of the tale, and Evander’s telling of the myth of Hercules and Cacus in Virgil. *Aeneid*. 7. 185-ff.

<sup>171</sup> For a compelling overview of importance of Apollo within the landscape of Augustan Rome, and its implications for the *Aeneid*, see Morwood 1991. Also, as Hill 1990:114 notes, Apollo was usually treated favourably by the poetic tradition and Virgil himself portrays him as ‘the most powerful source of poetic inspiration’ in *Eclogue*. 4, which references a different telling of Linus’ myth.

From the beginning of Adrastus' tale Apollo is depicted as amoral at best. Weary from slaying a monstrous snake, Phoebus encounters the beautiful Psamathe by the River Inachus, in Nemea. The god rapes her, begetting a child (*Theb.* 1.562-78). Psamathe is ashamed and afraid of the consequences of being discovered so she leaves her baby, Linus, in the care of a shepherd to be raised in the countryside (1.582-4). Unsurprisingly, Linus is violently killed by wild dogs as he lies exposed on the grass (*Theb.* 1. 586-90). Psamathe is so distraught that she reveals all to her father, Crotopos, who orders her death (1.590-5). Apollo then sends an infernal monster, half woman half snake,<sup>172</sup> to kill the Argives' new-born babies. The reason given for the god's vengeance is merely *maestae solacia morti*, 'consolation for [Psamanthe's] sad death' (*Theb.* 1.596), and it seems that his response is disproportionate to the crime. In order to stop this horrifying, and seemingly unjustified, slaughter of newborns, Coroebus, the hero of Adrastus' tale, raises a band of men and kills the monster.<sup>173</sup> This enrages Apollo further and his reaction is to send a plague and fire upon the Argive people (*Theb.* 1.628-31). Apollo then calls for the death of those who killed his monster (1.636-7), unwilling to end the plague until he is avenged. In order to stop the destruction, Coroebus travels to Apollo's temple at Delphi to claim responsibility (1.638-66). However, potentially as a result of the disproportionality of Apollo's rage (1.605-26),<sup>174</sup> Coroebus' attitude is not humbled and repentant, but defiant. He goes so far as to shame the god for his cruelty and lack of mercy, in response to which Apollo is left stunned, *stupefacti* (*Theb.* 1.665), and so Coroebus is allowed to live.

Coroebus' successful defiance of Apollo's disorder and his desire for peace make him the ultimate role model for Adrastus: in the words of Frederick Ahl, Adrastus is Coroebus' 'disciple'.<sup>175</sup> But Ahl,<sup>176</sup> alongside Vessey,<sup>177</sup> Hill,<sup>178</sup> Bernstein,<sup>179</sup> and Ganiban,<sup>180</sup> sees the Coroebus narrative as an example of Adrastus' misguided piety towards unworthy gods 'in

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<sup>172</sup> *cui uirginis ora pectoraque; aeternum stridens a uertice surgit et ferrugineam frontem discriminat anguis.* (*Theb.* 1.598-600)

<sup>173</sup> The monster is not named by Statius but elsewhere she is called Πονή - "Penalty". See Wilson Joyce 2008:23.

<sup>174</sup> I am purposely being tentative here, as the text is in no way explicit.

<sup>175</sup> Ahl 1986:2855.

<sup>176</sup> 1986:2853-7.

<sup>177</sup> 1970: 322-3.

<sup>178</sup> 1990:114.

<sup>179</sup> 2008:76

<sup>180</sup> 2007:22-3.

this post-Virgilian epic world',<sup>181</sup> where *pietas* is no longer relevant. However, in telling this story at a festival to Apollo, Adrastus is not naively acquiescing to a vengeful and petty deity, out of either excessive *pietas* or ignorance, for the Argive festival is not about *pietas* at all: it is about control. By telling the story of Coroebus' control of Apollo, Adrastus is claiming that power for himself. Reflecting this, the lit altars within the palace do little to magnify Apollo's greatness (*Theb.* 1.514-16); rather they embody the Argives' sovereignty over their own space in the form of a monument to Coroebus.

"*Deprendi, Fortuna, deos*", "Fortune, I have caught the gods!"<sup>182</sup> (*Theb.* 1.510), are the closing words of Adrastus' prayer to Night as he welcomes Polynices and Tydeus into his city. *Depre[he]ndi*, as opposed to *prehendi* or *reprehendi*, is almost exclusively used to describe the act of catching someone in an immoral or unsavoury act, causing either surprise or embarrassment.<sup>183</sup> Cicero uses it in the *Pro Caelio*<sup>184</sup> and twice in the third *In Catilinam*<sup>185</sup> to describe his own uncovering of the nefarious deeds of Caelius and Catiline, and Catullus uses it regarding the embarrassing discovery of a boy caught in the act of masturbation.<sup>186</sup> The implication of *deprendi* at *Thebaid.* 1. 510, is that Adrastus is fully aware of the destructive and immoral role that gods seem to play within the narrative, and is therefore using tools of control from earlier epic in order to create his own narrative within Argos. He believes he has embarrassed and overtaken Apollo, and that he will, like Coroebus, ultimately win.

Of course, at the same time, by choosing this particular narrative to introduce Polynices and Tydeus to his city, he has also allowed the memory and acerbic sylvan space of strife to enter Argos' high walls and settle in the Great Hall. From there it will question Adrastus' claim of control over the Argive narrative throughout the rest of the epic. The death of Linus foreshadows the death of baby Opheltes as the Argives will be marching through the woods of Nemea, and the grief that Polynices and Tydeus will bring to Adrastus' daughters echoes

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<sup>181</sup> Ganiban 2007:10.

<sup>182</sup> Here I prefer the translation of Shackleton Bailey 2003a:77

<sup>183</sup> Lewis and Short s.v. *Deprehendo*: 'II. In a wider sense, to catch, overtake, surprise, apprehend, detect, find out, discover any one, esp. in doing any thing wrong.'

<sup>184</sup> Cic. *Pro Cael.* 14. *cuius ego facinora oculis prius quam opinione, manibus ante quam suspitione deprehendi.*

<sup>185</sup> Cic. *In Cat.* 3. 4: *ut tota res non solum a me, sed etiam a senatu et a vobis manifesto deprehenderetur*, and 17: *Quae nunc illo absente sic gesta sunt, ut nullum in privata domo furtum umquam sit tam palam inventum, quam haec tanta in re publica coniuratio manifesto inventa atque deprehensa est.*

<sup>186</sup> Catullus. 56: *deprendi modo pupulum puellae/trusantem.*

Psamathe's destructive union with Apollo.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, though Coroebus himself was spared in that old narration, his killing of Πεινή only served to bring further destruction upon the Argive people, just as Adrastus' bid to restore justice to Polynices will cause the destruction of the Seven. In the penultimate book of the *Thebaid*, Adrastus will abandon the battlefield (*Theb.* 11.439-46), in the same way that Coroebus leaves Delphi (1.651-2). Matched with Adrastus' final self-removal from the public sphere, Coroebus' bid to wrest control from Apollo now figures as a solitary act of personal survival: perhaps not enhancing the symbolic narrative of the city as it might have first seemed.

### Venturing into the unknown: the Argive army through Nemea

One element ties the apparently arbitrary acts of destruction within the Coroebus narrative together: a persistent failure to acknowledge the gradual shift from the tightly controlled city to a realm altogether wilder and more unpredictable. Psamathe's downfall, Linus' death, and even the burning of Argos and the divine plague, all occur as a result of events in the world outside. Psamathe is raped by the shores of Inachus in Nemea (*Theb.* 1.575). Linus is killed lying upon the grass with only a cradle of oak branches as protection (*Theb.* 1.582-4). Coroebus' troubles start when he meets Πεινή as she is leaving the city (*Theb.* 1.608-9).<sup>188</sup> The untamed world outside the city walls resists the imposition of a symbolic order, confounding and disrupting those who fail to recognise its interstitiality and fluidity. Similarly, as we will see further below in this section, it is not Adrastus' misunderstanding of *pietas* or opposition to Jupiter that will undermine his attempt to establish a convincing role for Argos in *Thebaid*. It is his failure (in subsequent books and discussed below) to recognise the fundamental difference between Argos and the hybrid, uncontrollable spaces that surround it.

Coroebus' encased tale of civic pride, adds a tone of vulnerability to the portrait of a king and a city, at first sight strong, fair and generous. Speaking ambiguously for the origins of this flourishing citadel, the old tale also inevitably sheds ambivalent light onto the encounter

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<sup>187</sup> Vessey 1970:323-325 nicely summarises the parallels between Psamathe's story and those of Hypsipyle, Argia and Deiphyle. The connection is also noted by Hill 1990:113-4, Ganiban 2007:10 and 2013: *passim*.

<sup>188</sup> She is standing at either the city's double gates, or a crossroads near the gates: *portarum in bivio*. Shackleton Bailey 2003a:85 notes the ambiguity in his translation pointing to a similar phrase at Virg. *Aen.* 9.238.

of Adrastus with Polynices and Tydeus, when the heavy main wall gate recedes, exposing the warm city to the asperity of the cold and wet realms surrounding it. Unaware of the future, of course, Adrastus takes in Polynices and Tydeus conferring upon them a place in the palace and in his family. But before long, Polynices will embroil the prosperous city into new adventures, demanding of Adrastus a task that will alter his identity: to give up the security of the walls, and navigate through the perilous realms surrounding it, the same realms marked by conflict and deceit in the story of Coroebus, Adrastus' much admired predecessor.

After several books and a long period of debate and preparation, the Argives finally leave their city to go to war. Their journey takes them first to Nemea: the very site of Psamathe's destruction and Coroebus' defiance.<sup>189</sup> Until Adrastus decides to leave Argos, he remains unchallenged in his role of narrator, but as soon as the king leaves the city he encounters others who desire to retain control over their own narratives. First in his encounters with Bacchus and Hypsipyle and later with Eurydice and Lycurgus, Adrastus consistently overestimates his control over the space of enunciation within the forests, the space where identity is formed in the "in-between", or in excess of, the sum of the parts of difference'.<sup>190</sup> Though he persistently attempts to bring about reconciliation, Adrastus' attempts to unify turn out to be ultimately destructive. Unlike Coroebus, whose authority is sufficient to overtake the gods, Adrastus' grip on the narrative slowly wanes as he is forced to encounter difference in the form of the Nemean sylvan landscape and its inhabitants.

From the outset of their journey into Nemea the Argives experience a space that challenges that which they have previously inhabited. Immediately, Nemea is described as cold, *gelidam* (*Theb.* 4.646), drawing a contrast between this new environment and the warm fires of Argos (1.514). The harsh nature of the Nemean landscape is also emphasised through a reference to the toils of Hercules, *conscia laudis Herculeae dumeta* (*Theb.* 4.646-7), showing that this is a landscape where heroes are made through arduous encounters with inhospitable others. How the Argives navigate such encounters will define their suitability as protagonists of their story. There will be no couches or cushions to lounge upon here.<sup>191</sup> In fact, all the signs of wealth, comfort and respectful order, symbols of Adrastus' authority and narratological control

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<sup>189</sup> The arduous process of setting out shows how much time and preparation is required for the Argive armies to embark on their journey. *Thebaid.* 4. 1-30.

<sup>190</sup> Bhabha 1994:2 see also 36-7.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. *Thebaid.* 1. 517-19.

within Argos, are absent. In this new space, stripped of all symbolic capital, the king's true role within the *Thebaid* will be exposed.

As soon as they arrive in Nemea, Statius shifts perspective to Bacchus who is watching their advance. This shift in perspective transforms the Argives into a cloud of dust and iron, dehumanising them and placing emphasis on their destructive power:

... pulvereae Nemeen effervere nube  
conspicit et solem radiis ignescere ferri (*Thebaid.* 4. 664-5)

... he observed Nemea boiling up with a cloud  
of dust and iron blades igniting the sun with their fire

The inverted image of the Argives igniting the sun is already 'audacious',<sup>192</sup> but then Statius uses Bacchus to extend the metaphor with the god's own interpretation of the Argives' burning rage:<sup>193</sup>

"hoc mihi saevum  
Argos et indomitae bellum ciet ira novercae.  
usque adeone parum cineri data mater iniquo  
natalesque rogi quaeque ipse micantia sensi  
fulgura?" (*Thebaid.* 4. 671-5)

"Argos and  
my wild stepmother's wrath stir up war against me. Is it  
still too little—my mother unjustly reduced to cinders,  
the natal pyre, the glittering lightning bolts I myself  
felt?"

Argos' affiliation with Juno serves as a reminder of the goddess' role in the death of Semele, Bacchus' mortal mother.<sup>194</sup> The story begins when Semele, already pregnant with Bacchus,

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<sup>192</sup> Shackleton Bailey 2003a:255.

<sup>193</sup> *ex longo recalet furor* 'their rage reignited from long ago' (*Theb.* 4.671 translation is my own)

<sup>194</sup> Gantz 1996:473-8 gives a full account of the various ancient sources we have for Semele's story. Her link to Bacchus is attested by Homer in *Iliad.* 14. 323-25, and *Theogeny.* 940-42. Diodorus gives both conflicting accounts for the reasons behind her death, citing Juno's intervention at *DS.* 3. 64.3-4 and Semele's insecurity

asks Jupiter to make love to her as he would do to his divine wife. Jupiter complies but, even though he tries to control his power, Semele is burnt up by his thunderbolts. Regardless of Juno's role in this tragedy, Semele's demise is an example of the tragedy that can occur when an individual fails to recognise difference in an other. Semele is killed by Jupiter's power: a power that exposes the difference between mortal and divine. Jupiter ignored this difference and Semele was completely consumed. This myth fits with our previous experience of Jupiter's desire to control the other in the form of the houses of Oedipus and Tantalus. When he is thwarted by their incest, infanticide, and cannibalism, Jupiter orchestrates their destruction. In this passage, the close positioning of the fire of the Argives entering Nemea (*Theb.* 4.665) and the fire of Semele's death (4.673) draws a powerful connection between the two images. Just as Jupiter's denial of difference kills Semele, so the Argives' denial of difference will cause destruction and death in Nemea.

Having made this connection between the Argives and his mother's death, Bacchus works to dry streams throughout both Argos and Nemea in a bid to deny the brothers' war. He calls upon the Naiads (*Theb.* 4.649-51), suggesting that they might use the heat of the day, 'Phoebus at his peak',<sup>195</sup> to aid their drying of the rivers: *adiuvat ipse Phoebus adhuc summo... limite* (4.689-91). Leaves and tendrils, and intemperate lynxes follow his chariot as he approaches the Argive army (*Theb.* 4.656-8). He is a god comfortable with the unbridled forces of nature, and able to communicate with its versatile modes and rhythms. Bacchus' current appeal to the water nymphs for paucity is accompanied by a promise of future opulence and abundance in his rural altars (*Theb.* 4. 694-6). Born from both his mother's womb and his father's thigh, peaceful and violent, Bacchus is the archetypal other who persistently challenges social order, leads sinister plots (like the one we see him instigating here) but also acts as the protector of rural creatures against nature's sinister forces (such as the Centaurs or the Fauns he mentions at 4. 694-5).<sup>196</sup> In this way, the god we encounter

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at *DS.* 4. 2. 2-3. The fullest and most relevant source for the purposes of our reading of Statius is probably Ovid. *Met.* 3. 256-315, where Juno is heavily involved.

<sup>195</sup> Translation is my own

<sup>196</sup> Despite this, it is possible to discern four main areas for which he was worshipped: wine; ecstasy; masks, theatre and impersonation; death and a joyous afterlife. In his contribution on the god, (s.v. *Dionysus* OCD. 479-82), Henrichs suggests that 'if these four provinces share anything in common that illuminates the nature of this god it is his capacity to transcend existential boundaries.' (479).



within the *Thebaid* is an amalgamation of many different Bacchi.<sup>197</sup> Both a terrifying and bewildering power,<sup>198</sup> and a benevolent steward.<sup>199</sup>

Bacchus is at one with Nemea. For Nemea is itself an *other*, a wooded landscape which lies *between* the two defined places of Argos and Thebes. Nemea's interstitiality is not limited to its geography but, as Carole Newlands has noted in her treatment of this episode, 'is manifested in several other ways; generically affiliated with both pastoral and epic, it provides rest and death, loss and reunion'.<sup>200</sup> Such a between-space resonates with the god who is himself interstitial: one whose 'fluid persona [is] based on illusion, transformation, and the simultaneous presence of opposite traits'.<sup>201</sup> Bacchus and/in Nemea, both liminal entities, thus attempt to frustrate Adrastus' and the Argives' attempt to transfer the orderly structures of their civic symbolic into the wooded realms they need to cross to reach another city, Thebes.

Initially, it seems Bacchus' plan to stay the Argive advance will be successful. He positions himself at Argos (*Theb.* 4.679), cutting off any possible retreat to safety. Adrastus and his companions lose momentum and, dehydrated (*Theb.* 4.723-9),<sup>202</sup> wander the landscape in an attempt to find water to quench their thirst (4.733-38). Folded within Statius' extensive description of the now dry land is a small but important detail: the rivers have been drained by *caecis ignibus* 'hidden fires' (*Theb.* 4.735-6). This image sits alongside the earlier metaphor of the Argive host burning a path through the Nemean landscape (*Theb.* 4.664-5), suggesting the Argives themselves are responsible for this devastating drought. It may be Bacchus who asks the naiads to hide their water, but he does so only after the Argive fire has begun to burn. Bacchus' and Adrastus' narratives have become interwoven with one another as each vies for control. Outside of Argos, the seat of Adrastus' authority, Bacchus seems to have

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<sup>197</sup> By the time Statius was writing, Bacchus had already been characterised as both a god who could lead a mother to kill her son, and a deity more suited to dancing and peace. C.f. Ovid. *Met.* 3. 520-3 and Horace. *Carmen.* 2. 19. 25-8. For the role of Dionysus in our modern conception of the Other, and the current tendency to emphasise his wild, animalistic qualities (μειλιχίος) over his mild nature (ἀγρωτιος) see Henrichs 1984.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Euripides. *Bacchae. passim.*

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Sophocles. *Antigone.* 1115-52.

<sup>200</sup> Newlands 2012:44.

<sup>201</sup> Henrichs 'Dionysus' in OCD: 479.

<sup>202</sup> I follow Wilson Joyce 2008 and Shackleton Bailey 2003 in treating the seven disputed lines at *Theb.* 4.715 as spurious and therefore follow the bracketed line numbers of Shackleton Bailey's edition of the text for the remainder of Book 4.



“Goddess, Lady of the Groves—for your features and bearing both  
 deny you are of a woman born—You’re blessed, beneath that  
 dome of fire, *not* to be seeking water: come to the aid  
 of men close by!”

However, Adrastus’ attempts at organising the events within Nemea within a coherent framework are quickly thwarted.<sup>205</sup> Just as he is beginning to establish a place for himself within the forest, Adrastus’ words are cut short by the effects of dehydration:

dixit, et orantis media inter anhelitus ardens  
 verba rapit, cursuque animae labat arida lingua (*Thebaid.* 4. 765-6)

Here, a burning breath cut the speaker’s words short—he  
 was not half done—and his parched tongue failed in the rush of air.

Within Nemea’s forests Adrastus is weak. The command he had displayed within Argos is gone and he is no longer able sustain control over his environment. Bacchus’ intervention has rendered him voiceless, and therefore, deprived of a storyteller to guide them, the Argive journey is unable to continue.

This silence, as symbolic void, provides Hypsipyle with a chance to establish an alternative reading of Nemea, one which takes into account its interstitiality and hybridity. Unfortunately, like the Argive armies, Hypsipyle also currently inhabits an alien landscape and is by no means in control of her wooded surroundings. Though she is similar in appearance to the Nemean dryads,<sup>206</sup> and suckles the Nemean native, Opheltes (*Theb.* 4.741-2), Hypsipyle’s status as a slave means that she remains ‘displaced and never finally integrated’<sup>207</sup> into the landscape, which leaves her as vulnerable to confusion as the Argives themselves.<sup>208</sup> As we will see below, the forest is as much a challenge to Hypsipyle’s well

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<sup>205</sup> The unfamiliar land is not such an obstacle to Aeneas, though, who receives vital guidance from his mother and proceeds to act on it successfully.

<sup>206</sup> Keith 2000:58 gives a thorough reading of all the similarities between the description of Hypsipyle (*Thebaid.* 4. 740-5) and the description of the dryads (4. 697-717)

<sup>207</sup> Keith 2000:60

<sup>208</sup> For more on Hypsipyle’s place as a displaced person see Augoustakis 2010:32-3, who describes her as a ‘dislodged mother, without time and place’ (32).

being and self-awareness as it is to Adrastus'. And her fragile identity yields to Adrastus' suggestion that her current status as a slave is illusory, and she is, in fact, a divine agent in the Argive march to victory. In her reply to his request for aid it is possible to see Hypsipyle's eagerness to discard her current role of wet-nurse for one of greater significance:

“diva quidem vobis, etsi caelestis origo est,  
unde ego? mortales utinam haud transgressa fuissem  
luctibus!” (Thebaid. 4. 769-71)

“Goddess indeed! Though my origins are celestial, how could  
you think *me* that? Would my sorrow had not been more than  
mortal!”

Within the space of three lines, Hypsipyle has gone from correcting Adrastus' mistake to asserting her divinity, informing the Argive king of her divine ancestry whilst professing to have experienced suffering beyond that of a normal mortal.<sup>209</sup>

Although she acknowledges her role as foster mother to Opheltes (*Theb.* 4. 778-9), Adrastus' invitation has caused Hypsipyle to wonder at the fate of her biological children (4.779-80), and to remember her past life as ruler of Lemnos. Within this process of re-remembering her past identity Hypsipyle begins to turn her attention away from the present, and her sense of loss amplifies the disparity between her former status and her current role. Hidden (literally and metaphorically) in the forest she can live a detached existence, and thus easily reverts to a time where Opheltes does not belong. In this moment of grief and longing for her former life, Hypsipyle sets Opheltes, the symbol of her present, down on the grass (*Theb.* 4.778-85).

Unburdened, Hypsipyle then becomes immersed in her new role of guiding goddess, leading the Argives to water (*Thebaid.* 4.797-808). Their journey is disordered and disorientating: the space is unmarked and unyielding, dark and unfrequented: *opaca uirentibus umbris denia* (*Theb.* 4.797-8). Travelling further into the forest they become more disordered and indistinct from one another, *pars arta plebe sequuntur* (4.798), reflecting their desperation and maintaining the

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<sup>209</sup> Hypsipyle is the daughter of Thoas, son of Bacchus. For more on the implications of ancestry in defining epic identity see Bernstein 2008 & 2003 *passim*.

sense of de-humanisation from their entry into the Nemean landscape (*Theb.* 4.664-7). As they continue on, Hypsipyle is physically swept up by the army and become part of the Argive story (*Theb.* 4.798-800).

I will treat the army's arrival at the River Langia in detail in my second chapter,<sup>210</sup> but for now I wish to draw attention to the moments immediately following that chaotic scene. After Argives' desperate rush for water has subsided, one of the seven Argive leaders gives thanks to Nemea for their salvation:

“... bellis modo laetus ovantes  
accipias fessisque libens iterum hospita pandas  
flumina defensasque velis agnoscere turmas.” (*Thebaid.* 4. 841-3)

“... just greet our troops, returning triumphant,  
and in glad bounty spread Your waters again, Your streams so  
cheering to weary men, welcoming back the host You saved!”

Either the speaker is startlingly ignorant of the destruction that they have wrought on the landscape, or these words form a conscious re-framing of events as part of an ordered and glorious epic narrative. Yet, though words have, so far, been powerful tools for Adrastus and his men, the contrast in this scene between the Nemean reality and Argive fiction exposes the growing failure of Argive words to provide meaning for an increasingly complex and purposeless advance towards war. Nemea did not welcome the Argives on this occasion, and it certainly will not suffer any of them to return.

Renewed by the river, the Argives do their best to regroup and continue their journey. Out of the baffling woods, the army regains cognition of their own selves, their place, their leader:

dispositi in turmas rursus legemque severi  
ordinis, ut cuique ante locus ductorque, monentur  
instaurare vias. (*Thebaid.* 5. 7-9)

Deployed into squadrons once more and the stern strictures of rank

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<sup>210</sup> See pp. 130-133.

—each man had his previous post and leader—they heard  
 “Forward march!”.

It seems that once beyond the sinister influence of the forest, the symbolic order is recognised again.

Revived, Adrastus takes the opportunity once again to assert control over his environment by re-locating himself into a position of authority.

Hic rursus simili procerum vallante corona  
 dux Talaionides, antiqua ut forte sub orno  
 stabat et admoti nixus Polynicis in hastam (*Thebaid.* 5. 17-19)

Here, with a ring of chieftains round him like a wall once more,  
 Adrastus Talaionides chanced to stand beneath  
 an ancient ash and leaned on the spear Polynices held out.

Enclosed by the army and leaning on Polynices’ spear, Adrastus’ position emphasises his martial status (*Theb.* 5.17-18). He is the focal point of the action. Even the ash-tree Adrastus stands beneath is laden with epic symbolism: Virgil uses the destruction of an ash as a metaphor for the destruction of Troy and the ending of Priam’s line (*Aeneid.* 2. 264).<sup>211</sup> It is employed by Virgil,<sup>212</sup> Lucan,<sup>213</sup> and Valerius Flaccus<sup>214</sup> as a sign of a pre-urban age: in the *Aeneid* in particular, ash trees are repeatedly cut down by Aeneas and his companions as he works towards the foundation of Rome. Once again, it is as if Adrastus is employing the traditions of epic to underscore his own epic credentials and restore order to a narrative that has already escaped his control.

Though convincing, Adrastus’ new seat of authority remains a poor imitation of his place within the palace of Argos. The contrast between the two scenes is invited by Adrastus’

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<sup>211</sup> Gowers 2011:94-5 gives a compelling overview of the way Virgil uses tree imagery as part of his discourse on the fall of Troy.

<sup>212</sup> *Aeneid.* 2. 624; 4. 474; 6.180; 10. 755; 11. 122.

<sup>213</sup> *De Bello Civili.* 3. 440; 6.390.

<sup>214</sup> *Argonautica.* 1.391; 2.1; 3.430, 565; 7.153, 511; 8.68.

immediate desire to learn of Hypsipyle's ancestry: *dic quis et ille pater...?* (*Thebaid.* 5. 25), a repetition of the question he puts to Polynices and Tydeus after welcoming them into his home: *vos quae progenies?* (*Thebaid.* 1.668-9). Both are questions concerned with identity: Adrastus is inviting Polynices, Tydeus, and Hypsipyle to tell him whom they are, to provide their own narratives and, in doing so, fit their individual stories within the grand story of the *Thebaid.* Just as Adrastus takes the story of Coroebus and uses it to position himself as the best person to bring resolution and order in Statius' epic, he now invites Hypsipyle to follow his example.

Each of the three exiles respond to this challenge differently: there is stark contrast between the two young men in book one, where Tydeus proudly names his father (*Theb.* 1.463-4) but Polynices, trying to avoid his association to Oedipus, delays instead eventually admitting his ties to Cadmus and Jocasta (1.676-81).<sup>215</sup> Hypsipyle's response to Adrastus' question is somewhere between Tydeus' pride and Polynices' denial. She names and praises her father, Thoas (*Theb.* 5.38), but her countenance reflects the same shame Polynices displayed as he struggled to admit to his lineage.<sup>216</sup>

Hypsipyle's relationship to her past—and therefore also her present identity—is complex. Her current state of exile is a source of shame and sadness that renders her vulnerable, just like Polynices, to Adrastus' attempts to control and fix her identity. Adrastus treats Hypsipyle as an exiled queen, framing her actions as usurping Fate, "*innumeras Fato debere cohortes*" (*Theb.* 5.20), and worthy of honour which not even Jupiter himself would disdain: "*quem non ipse deum sator aspernetur honorem*" (5.21). Both these statements form the repetition of the desire to define his own telos, first voiced at *Theb.* 1.510: "*deprendi, Fortuna, deos!*". Adrastus will not be defined by Fate or by Jupiter and he takes Hypsipyle's ability to save the Argives from destruction as testimony to his forthcoming success.

Yet, whilst Adrastus was perhaps justified in making such claims within Argos, his success at controlling the narrative within Nemea is by no means assured. Throughout the encounter

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<sup>215</sup> On the unexpected nature of Polynices' identification with his mother see Bernstein 2003, in particular p. 354. I shall be treating the formation of Tydeus' and Polynices identities in more detail in my final chapter, 'Thresholds and gatekeepers'.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. *Thebaid* 1.673-5: *Deiecit maestos extemplo Ismenius beros/in terram vultus*, and *Thebaid.* 4. 768: *Reddit demisso Lemnia vultu*.

of Adrastus and Hypsipyle, the nature of the forest through which they travel is paramount. It is a space of difference which confronts the ordered 'same' of the Argives. The *opaca virentibus umbris denia* (*Theb.* 4.797-8) seek to thwart their advance, and Adrastus has already been proven to be an inadequate guide. In contrast, when they first encounter Hypsipyle she displays a command over the fluid and wild Nemean landscape and, sensing this, Adrastus attempts to use her to navigate this unfamiliar and unmapped space.<sup>217</sup> However, at the moment when Adrastus reaches out to Hypsipyle, providing her with a role in his city-centric narrative, Hypsipyle discards Opheltes, denying her own difference and therefore giving up her ability to navigate the landscape.<sup>218</sup> Unanchored, Hypsipyle returns to the more familiar landscape of her past. As the exiled queen speaks of the groves of Lemnos, they begin to spill out over into the forests of Nemea, and render Statius' epic even more tangled and opaque.

#### A stranger at odds with the woods: Hypsipyle in Nemea and Lemnos

At 450 lines, Hypsipyle's narrative is an epic in itself: an epyllion that temporarily eclipses the *Thebaid* and suspends the Argive journey to Thebes.<sup>219</sup> However, whilst Lemnos may be a space temporally and spatially distant from Nemea, the Nemean shady foliage, *obtenta comis et ineluctabilis umbra* (*Theb.* 5.45), provides a resonant setting for the story of the Lemnian sordid pact *lucus inga celsa Minervae propter opacat humum niger ipse* (*Theb.* 5.152-3) that blurs past and present. If Adrastus' account of Coroebus reflects his own desire for the *Thebaid* to be brought under the unified symbolic economy of Argos, then Hypsipyle's account of Lemnos reflects her desire to find a place within the *Thebaid*. Her alienation within Nemea means that she seeks this place within the familiarity of her own past, an act which in turn relinquishes her tentative association with Nemea and alienates Hypsipyle further from her present position. Just like Coroebus' story, the Lemnian narrative is primarily a story of disorder and destruction and cannot provide Hypsipyle with the control she seeks. Instead the Lemnian story further impairs Hypsipyle's already compromised capacity to understand her current location.

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<sup>217</sup> In this way Hypsipyle is similar to her grandfather, Bacchus, whose difference allows him to navigate and collude with Nemea.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Augoustakis 2010:41.

<sup>219</sup> As Augoustakis 2010:37 states: 'By definition the digression itself constitutes a displacement of the action from the centre to the margin, into the unknown, nefarious and deadly Nemean landscape.'



The story of the Lemnian women is a tragic and horrifying portrayal of a complete breakdown of social identity. As revenge for the Lemnians' neglect (*Theb.* 5.57-60), Venus drives out love from Lemnos, inspiring the men to neglect their wives in favour of a lengthy war with Thrace (5.61-84). After four ominous volcanic eruptions (*Theb.* 5.85-9) Polyxo, one of the Lemnian women, is driven into a frenzy (5.90-103) and extols her companions to kill the men upon their return (5.104-29 & 132-42).<sup>220</sup> Her madness then spreads throughout Lemnos (*Theb.* 5.143-51).

The departure of the Lemnian men leaves the women suspended: they are wives without husbands. Denied their civic identities they are exiled and move into the forests, *uiridi luco* (*Theb.* 5.152). There, in the shadow of Mt Athos (*Theb.* 5.153-4), the women pledge their fidelity to each other (5.155). Dark and hidden in *gemina caligine* (*Theb.* 5.154), the place where the Lemnian women make their vow evokes the *opaca virentibus umbris denia* (4.797-8) of Nemea where the Argives are listening to Hypsipyle's tale. Both forests are hybrid spaces where civic identity is challenged and distorted. Once vows are made, the Lemnian women seal their warped plans with the sacrifice of Charops' baby, denouncing that part of their identity they find vexing:

... ac dulce nefas in sanguine vivo  
coniurant, matremque recens circumvolat umbra. (*Thebaid.* 5. 162-3)

...in live blood swore allegiance to this  
sweet atrocity. Round the mother the new ghost hovered.

Infanticide allows the women to fully deny their sex following Polyxo's entreaty: *firmate animo et pellite sexum!* (*Theb.* 5.105), 'Stiffen resolve, set your gender aside!'.<sup>221</sup> From then on, dominated by this gruesome transgression of social roles, the landscape of Lemnos begins to lose clarity and cohesion, as if encroached by the inauspicious, dark forests. After the sacrifice of the child, when the men have returned to the island, Lemnos is cloaked in darkness, *una gravi penitus latet obruta caelo Lemnos* (*Theb.* 5.183-4), and hidden from outsiders, *una vagis Lemnos non agnita nautis* (5.185). Hidden and unnaturally shaded, the entire island has

<sup>220</sup> For more on the link between sexuality and madness in the *Thebaid* see Hershkowitz 1994: *passim*.

<sup>221</sup> For further discussion on the breakdown of gender roles on Lemnos see Henderson 1993:182-85.

taken on the characteristics of the grove where the women make their perverted sacrifice (*Theb.* 5.152-5).

After the sacrifice, the Lemnian men arrive home, eager to feast, drink, and make love to their wives as Venus has allowed love to return (*Theb.* 5.170-205). However, instead of a warm welcome, they are met by a massacre where mothers kill children,<sup>222</sup> sisters kill brothers,<sup>223</sup> and daughters kill fathers.<sup>224</sup> Perhaps the most disturbing murder is that of Helymus by his wife, Gorge, as it blurs sexual intimacy with horrific violence as Helymus mistakes Gorge's attentions for a loving caress:

turbidus incertumque oculis vigilantibus hostem  
 occupat amplexu, nec segnius illa tenentis  
 pone adigit costas donec sua pectora ferro  
 tangeret. is demum sceleri modus; ora supinat  
 blandus adhuc oculisque tremens et murmure Gorgen  
 quaerit et indigno non solvit brachia collo. (*Thebaid.* 5. 212-17)

Eyes bleary and not quite in focus, he, befuddled, took  
 his foe in his arms; though he was holding her, still she struck him,  
 stabbed him hard in the back till the steel point pricked her own  
 breast. At last her crime reached its climax: his head lolled back;  
 amorous still, he was shuddering, searching with wide eyes and  
 moans for Gorgê, nor unwound his arms from her unworthy neck.

The cold, calculating, way in which Gorge dispatches her husband is more terrifying than if she had come at him in rage, for it does not just show the destruction of their relationship, but also its complete perversion. The discrepancy between Gorge's actions and Helymus' belief in her intentions exposes the extent of Gorge's transformation from loving wife to murderess. Though Helymus tries to maintain his role as Gorge's husband, his position, lying on the tapestried coach, *tapetum* (5.208), wreathed in branches, *euinctum ramis* (5.208), betrays a domesticity contaminated by Bacchic wilderness. Within the forests of Lemnos, love has

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<sup>222</sup> See Myrmidone and Epepeus (*Theb.* 5.223-5) and Lycaste and Gorge (5.226-30)

<sup>223</sup> See the deaths of Cydon and Creneas (*Theb.* 5.220-2) and of Lycaste and Cydimus (5.226-9)

<sup>224</sup> See Alcimede's murder of father (*Theb.* 5. 236-9).

been transformed into hatred. Deformed love has infringed upon life inside the Lemnian households so that the union of husband and wife can no longer beget life, but death.

In fact, neat civic interiors and untamed sylvan exteriors have merged even before the massacre, as the men celebrate their homecoming (*Theb.* 5.185), making it difficult to distinguish exactly where events are taking place. Just before the slaughter begins, Statius places the men in the city, where Sleep works to render them incapacitated (*Theb.* 5.196-200). Yet, after the slaughter, as an innocent Hypsipyle makes her escape with her father (*Theb.* 5.239-95), she suggests that the city is empty and that the men were in fact killed in the groves (5.249-50). Again, it is as though the forests now cover the whole island, obscuring civic space and rewriting social identities.

Amidst the panic and grief following the massacre, the Lemnian women are visited by the Argonauts (*Theb.* 5.335-444), who take wives and beget children. Jason chooses Queen Hypsipyle to bear his children: subjugation, rape and childbirth forming the ultimate act of reversal of the crimes of the Lemnian women (*Theb.* 5.445-467). In this way, the arrival of the Argonauts is Lemnos' temporary restoration of civic order through the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and reestablishment of family (*Theb.* 5.468-85). After the Argonauts leave, rumour circulates that Thoas, Hypsipyle's father, is still alive. This angers the Lemnian women and in her attempt to escape their wrath Hypsipyle is captured by pirates and enslaved (*Theb.* 5.496-99). It is in the end of this long adventure, that the Argives meet her in the Nemean forest, deprived of royalty, family, and any sense of belonging.

Whilst Hypsipyle's desire for place resonates with that of Adrastus, the Lemnian narrative does little to clarify her current position, as, rather than providing a space of belonging, it primarily emphasises her difference. Just as she is Lemnian but not one of the Lemnian women, so Hypsipyle is part of Nemea but not resident. Like Polynices in Argos, who is denied a place within his shameful home but who never-the-less is unable to accept Adrastus' offer of a new identity (*Theb.* 1.668-9), Hypsipyle is denied Lemnos and yet still remains unable to deny its place within her. Its continued presence looms over her, like the ghost looms over Charops' wife (*Theb.* 5.163), ultimately preventing her from fully integrating with her new surroundings.

## Destructive and destroyed: the final act of/in the forest

As happens time and again throughout the epic, in the forest of Nemea both Adrastus and Hypsipyle mistake the successful manipulation and control of the symbolic for power over the realities that surround them. However, attempts to fix one's own story within the *Thebaid* tend to be thwarted by the intrusion of the other. Characters rarely single-handedly control the spaces of the *Thebaid*. A multitude of narratives, emotions, goals and ambitions all have to co-exist and shape each other in interstitial places that give priority to none and frustrate many, up and down the social hierarchy of the epic, forming an 'ever more finely woven net of linguistically generated subjectivity'.<sup>225</sup> In Nemea, Adrastus attempts to navigate the malleable and complex forests as though they are a city-grid. But, unlike Argos, where Adrastus can control who comes and goes within his walls, the forest of Nemea is permeable: though he continually fights to retain control, Adrastus is disrupted by Bacchus and dependent on Hypsipyle to survive. In turn, Hypsipyle, who through her relationship to Opheltes has a chance to successfully negotiate Nemea, is disrupted and re-exiled through her interaction with Adrastus as he asks her to reject her reality, and remember her past in favour of his own symbolic order. But Hypsipyle's act of remembrance leads her to forget, and in (re-)becoming the exiled Lemnian Queen she ceases to be Opheltes' protector and nursemaid.<sup>226</sup> Forgotten and thus abandoned, the small boy falls asleep, vulnerable and exposed, in clear need of protection he is not going to get (*Thebaid*. 5.499-504).

Whilst the Argives have been listening to Hypsipyle's tale, another creature has been feeling the effects of Bacchus' drought. A humongous snake has been forced towards Langia in its search for water:

Interea campis, nemoris sacer horror Achaei,  
terrigena exoritur serpens tractuque soluto  
inmanem sese vehit ac post terga relinquit (*Thebaid*. 5. 505-7)

On the plains, meanwhile, holy terror of Achaean groves,  
up reared an earth spawned serpent. Coiling, uncoiling,

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<sup>225</sup> Habermas 1987:348.

<sup>226</sup> This act of forgetting symbolises the reversal of Augoustakis 2010:56 treatment of motherhood 'as forgetting oneself'.

it heaved its huge bulk forward, then left it behind.

Although the snake is large and awe-inspiring, it is not evil. Statius describes the snake as *terrigena* (*Theb.* 5.506), earth-born, underscoring its autochthonous relationship to its environment. Until Bacchus' drought gave rise to its anger (5.520), Nemea's inhabitants had peacefully co-existed with the snake for quite some time, treating it as the guardian of Jupiter's shrine (5.510-17).

The snake's recent anger, caused indirectly by the Argive decision to embark on Polynices' war, is an example of how the normal rhythms of spaces only tangentially involved in the brothers' conflict are beginning to become discordant. Forgetful of their surroundings and intent on traversing Nemea on their own terms, Hypsipyle and Adrastus disturb a space they do not understand. Tragically, Opheltes now suffers the consequences:

Occidis extremae destrictus uerbere caudae  
ignaro serpente, puer; fugit ilicet artus  
somnus, et in solam patuerunt lumina mortem. (*Thebaid.* 5. 538-40.)

You died, dear child, crushed by a flick from the tip of its tail—  
a blow the serpent failed to notice: instantly sleep  
fled your limbs, but your bright eyes opened only in death.

When she hears the death cry of Opheltes, Hypsipyle is brought back to Nemea with a jolt:

cum tamen attonito moriens vagitus in auras  
excidit et ruptis inmutuit ore querelis,  
qualia non totas peragunt insomnia voces,  
audiit Hypsipyle (*Thebaid.* 5. 541-4)

But when, on the air, a dying wail fell from your stunned  
lips and then your cries broke off, abruptly silent,  
like those interrupted screams in our dreams never complete,  
Hypsipyle heard.

The blurred boundary between the present and the past is reflected in the dreamlike quality of the baby's cry, and Hypsipyle is unable to distinguish between the two even as she is brought back to the present. But she is too late, the child has gone, and with Opheltes' death Hypsipyle's ability to navigate Nemea, to resume her place within its forests as a nursemaid, is destroyed. Reduced to a shrieking terror-stricken figure (5.544-8), Hypsipyle loses not only her ability to navigate the landscape but also her hold on her carefully constructed narrative.<sup>227</sup>

In response to Hypsipyle's inertia, Adrastus and his men spring into action desperate for a makeshift symbolic order to reign in the terrifying situation facing them. Resuming their military roles Parthenopaeus, *Arcas eques* (5.556), is designated scout and goes on ahead in order to bring back news of the snake. Hippomedon then hurls a rock at the creature, like a soldier sieging the city gates (5.559-61), but he misses his target and only succeeds in wrecking the forest itself as branches are broken and the earth trembles (5.562-5).

Throughout this initial assault Adrastus and Polynices are conspicuously absent. Where is the epic hero who will destroy the snake and bring about resolution? Of the Seven, Capaneus takes on this role:

“at non mea vulnera,” clamat  
et trabe fraxinea Capaneus subit obuius, “umquam  
effugies, seu tu pavidi ferus incola luci,  
sive deis, utinamque deis, concessa voluptas,” (*Thebaid.* 5. 565-68)

“But” (cried Capaneus) “you’ll not  
escape my strike!” And he sprang at the snake with his ashwood spear.  
“Never! Whether you’ve lived in these terrorized groves, a native,  
or as a pleasure accorded to the Gods—I hope it’s the Gods!”

Like Coroebus before Apollo, Capaneus stands defiant against Jupiter. He goes on to kill the snake, placing a spear through its brain (*Theb.* 5.570-78). Like Adrastus,<sup>228</sup> Capaneus hopes to

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<sup>227</sup> Augoustakis 2010: 39-40 provides a sensitive reading of the Lemnian digression as a constant fluctuation between the semiotic and the symbolic. Although I am hesitant to embrace his gendering of the semiotic as female I agree that Hypsipyle desires the well ordered symbolic which Adrastus offers and that this contributes to Opheltes' death.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. *Thebaid.* 1.510.

have conquered the gods, *utinamque deis* (*Theb.* 5.568). Also like Coroebus, Capaneus is, for the moment, spared (5.583-7).<sup>229</sup> It seems that, whilst the Argives were initially thwarted within this alien landscape, Capaneus has successfully re-established Argive supremacy over the Nemean forests with this heroic act.

However, whilst the successful killing of the snake might seem to be a victory for the Argives, Capaneus' arrogance is immediately juxtaposed with the portrayal of Nemea's grief:

illum et cognatae stagna indignantia Lerna,  
 floribus et vernis adsuetae spargere Nymphae,  
 et Nemees reptatus ager, lucosque per omnes  
 silvicolae fracta genuistis harundine Fauni. (*Thebaid.* 5.579-82)

You stagnant pools of Lerna, indignant kin of that snake;  
 Nymphs who often scattered his scales with springtime petals;  
 Nemea's fields where he slithered; the sylvan Fauns with reeds  
 broken, throughout the whole forest, you all lamented him!

The snake may have been other to the Argives, and may have killed an innocent child, but it was not the monstrous evil of Πονή: alien, vengeful, and designed to destroy.<sup>230</sup> Opheltes' death was not intentional, but accidental: the snake being so large and so desperate for water that it did not notice the baby left behind on the grass: *ignaro serpente* (5.539).<sup>231</sup>

Capaneus' re-enactment of Coroebus' story does serve to reiterate the Argives' desire for full narratological control, but it also calls into question their right to control when they are no longer the victim but the foreign invader. The lament of the landscape, inhabited by nymphs and fauns, paints a picture of a more innocent, pastoral world, free from the sounds of war.<sup>232</sup> Unable to recognise this, the Argives misread Nemea as a Herculean landscape filled with

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<sup>229</sup> That is, until his hubris is met with Jupiter's thunderbolt (*Thebaid.* 10. 921-39)

<sup>230</sup> Though Πονή is half snake her hybridity makes her monstrous. (*Thebaid.* 1.598-600)

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Ganiban 2013:251, who explores the snake's ignorance and Keith 2000:59, who suggests the snake's actions mirror that of Opheltes at play.

<sup>232</sup> A link strengthened by Linus' place as a figure in pastoral poetry. Cf. Ebbeler 2010:187-205.

dangerous monsters and trials to overcome. This act of misinterpretation then leads to Nemea's destruction.

When Hypsipyle discovers the baby's broken body, the total destruction of the child, *totumque in vulnere corpus* (*Theb.* 5. 598), provides a clear slate on which she can impose a meaning of her own: "*exsolui tibi, Lemne, nefas*" (5. 628), "I paid Lemnos the crime I owed". To Hypsipyle, the reasons for Opheltes' death are clear: unable to relinquish her attachment to Lemnos she has brought the suffering of her home to Nemea where, proudly believing that her *pietas* and *fides* made her immune to the madness which overtook the Lemnian women (5.627), she neglected Opheltes and committed the murder she escaped within her past narrative. By proclaiming her forgetfulness, Hypsipyle once again draws attention away from the baby and back to the Lemnian story, repeating her original sin of forgetting.

#### Harnessing the forest: Opheltes' funeral and games

Whilst the Argives join Hypsipyle in her grief (5.635-7), the association between Opheltes' death and the Lemnian slaughter is problematic for Adrastus in that it prevents the events of book five from being fully absorbed into his own epic narrative. If Opheltes' death is merely a result of the Lemnian epyllion then it has little consequence for the Argives' journey to Thebes and merely represents a digression from their goal. The forest needs to be tethered to Adrastus' carefully crafted teleology (where the Argives restore order through the destruction of Thebes) by giving the death of the child narrative significance.

In order to achieve the integration of Opheltes' death successfully within the Argive story, Adrastus must work to expiate Hypsipyle's (and therefore his own) guilt and frame the child's death so that it becomes part of the progress of fate towards the Thebaid's telos. This can only be done through spatial and linguistic manipulation of the Nemean symbolic economy inside the household of Lycurgus (King of Nemea and father of Opheltes) and away from the threatening woods that wreaked havoc to so many people's lives. Beginning with the rehabilitation of Hypsipyle and Amphiaraus' prayer at the close of book five, continuing throughout Opheltes funeral (6.1-248), and ending with the organisation of elaborate funeral



games (6.249-946) Adrastus and the Seven use prophecy, ritual, and epic convention in an attempt to make sense of the Argive digression into the forest.

When the Argives and Hypsipyle are met by Lycurgus the Nemean leader recognises Hypsipyle as the neglectful nursemaid who was so concerned with her lost Lemnian identity that she caused the death of his child:

“illa autem ubinam, cui parva cruoris  
laetave damna mei? vivitne? impellite raptam,  
ferte citi comites; faxo omnis fabula Lemni  
et pater et tumidae generis mendacia sacri  
exciderint.” (*Thebaid.* 5. 656-60)

“Where’s the woman so little concerned  
—so pleased!—at loss of my blood? Alive? Then, quickly, men!  
seize her! take her by force! I’ll make the proud creature forget  
her whole spiel—Lemnos, her father, lies about her divine  
bloodlines!”

In his anger, Lycurgus’ first point of attack is to undermine the legitimacy of Hypsipyle’s Lemnian narrative reducing her story to *mendacia*, lies. To the Argives, this is problematic: Hypsipyle’s aristocracy and Bacchic lineage are integral to her framing as their divine saviour who guided them safely through the forests and to call her story into question is to call into question their own legitimacy within Nemea.

As if in recognition of this fact, the Argive warriors rally around Hypsipyle. Tydeus, his own heroic status dependent on the legitimacy of Adrastus’ narrative,<sup>233</sup> immediately asserts the validity of Hypsipyle’s story (*Theb.* 5.676-6), the failure of the Nemean people to align themselves with the Argives in war (5.676-8), and the fated nature of Opheltes’ demise (5.679). Tydeus’ speech works to undermine Lycurgus’ anger (5.680-1), and Hypsipyle’s identity as saviour of the Argive forces is reasserted again by Adrastus. The Argive King

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<sup>233</sup> Tydeus’ transformation from exile to fated son-in-law is brought about by Adrastus when the king welcomes Tydeus and Polynices into the Argive palace. I treat this scene in full in my final chapter, section 4.ii.

proclaims her *gratique inventrix fluminis*, finder of the welcome stream (5.703),<sup>234</sup> whilst he rides in, raised above the crowd emphasising his authority (5.699-703),<sup>235</sup> to meet his companions. By the close of book five it is clear that the Argives will not allow any questioning of Hypsipyle's identity as their saviour.<sup>236</sup>

However, it is not enough to bring Hypsipyle into the Argive story, Adrastus must also reconcile this digression within Nemea by ensuring that Opheltes' death is recognised as fated, and therefore an essential part of the epic's move towards its telos. This is a task best accomplished by Amphiaraus, the Argive priest, whose position gives him the highest authority in discerning the will of the gods. Amphiaraus' supplication to Lycurgus and the Argive cohorts (5.733-53) explicitly states that Opheltes, renamed Archemorus ('Herald of Doom'), died as a fulfilment of the gods' will: *cuncta haec superum demissa suprema mente fluunt* (5.739-40). His final words deny Opheltes' parents, Lycurgus and Eurydice, their grief, commanding them instead to rejoice that their son has been immortalised through his part in the Argive story: "*nam deus iste, deus*" (*Theb.* 5. 751), "For your child's a God—yes, a God!".

In the Argives' grand teleology, where they are the heroes fighting in conjunction with divinity and fate, Opheltes is no longer a child abandoned in the forest and killed accidentally by a passing creature. Instead he is Archemorus, symbol of Argive destiny, and he is immortalised through the part he plays in order that the Argives might survive the hostile and monstrous landscape of Nemea and go on to defeat Thebes. Like Linus, who had to die in order that Coroebus might gain fame in defeating Πονή and defying Apollo, Opheltes is made to form part of a symbolic economy where the Argive cause reigns supreme.

The parallels between Opheltes and Linus move from being implicit in Statius' depiction of the former's death to explicit within the description of his funeral pyre (*Thebaid.* 6. 54-66). A curtain of Tyrian purple (6.62-3), embroidered with Linus' death scene (6.64-5), hangs over the body like the purple draperies drape over the couches in the throne room of Argos (*Thebaid.* 1. 17-18). So, the Nemean child is obscured in death by the symbolism of the mighty Argos that did nothing to save him. The absurdity of Opheltes' tragic and unnecessary death

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<sup>234</sup> Translation is my own.

<sup>235</sup> Statius doubles the affect of this regal entrance through the simile of Triton calming a storm (5.704-9)

<sup>236</sup> Hypsipyle's importance to the Argive story is also amplified when she is reunited with her sons, Thoas and Euneus, who are descendants of both Bacchus and Jason (*Thebaid.* 5. 710-30)

is underscored by his own mother's dislike of the tapestry, having always believed it to be an evil omen (6.66). Once again Adrastus is shown to have control over the symbolic economy, but Eurydice's own discomfort exposes Adrastus' inability to negotiate with the Other in constructive terms.

The Argives' folly continues when they build a second pyre, this time in honour of the snake. In attempting to atone for the snake's death the Argives commit yet another crime — the destruction of a sacred grove (*Thebaid.* 6.90-6). This wood is not only sacred but also ancient, *ueteres...silva* (*Thebaid.* 6.90-1), predating the age of men (6.94-5). As the Argives cut down its trees they are mounting an assault on everything which they do not understand, that is anything which falls outside of their idea of civilisation. Ironically, it is Amphiaraus the seer, perhaps the only one who might be able to recognise the significance of the wood they destroy, who oversees its destruction.

Throughout the *Thebaid*, Adrastus fails to recognise that the symbolic economy is not controlled by him alone. He underestimates the precariousness of the Nemean forests, expecting that his Argos-centric royal narrative will somehow effortlessly render them tame and homogeneous. As Fredrick Ahl noted when he commented on Adrastus' misperception of the nature of the gods in *Thebaid.* 1:

[Adrastus] has misunderstood much of what is happening about him. Changing one's concept of god does not change the way nature operates. God and nature do not become 'moral' simply because one man wants them to become 'moral'. Changing one's religious ideas, of course, may effect human society and history quite profoundly—but **only if one's changed views meet with some external acceptance, however minimal.**<sup>237</sup>

In his and the Seven's interactions with Bacchus, Hypsipyle, Opheltes, Lycurgus and Eurydice, Adrastus always expects his worldview to be accepted as correct and consistently fails to take differing views into account. He underestimates the change in the space of enunciation that occurs when he leaves the city, a change that leaves his words open to misinterpretation and distortion rendering them ineffectual. Within Argos he may hold the

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<sup>237</sup> Ahl 1986:2857. Emphasis is my own.

power to surpass the gods and beguile his subjects but outside, in the interstitial spaces of difference, his power is illusory. His inability to change upon his encounter with an other causes destruction and tragedy as the differing 'perspectives of the Nemeans, Hypsipyle, and Argives collide without any full resolution'.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Ganiban 2013:252.

## 2.iv. Wilderness Persists: women at home and in exile.

### Transitioning through the Arcadian Grove: Atalanta and Diana

... nemorum quos stirpe rigenti  
 fama sator, cum prima pedum vestigia tellus  
 admirata tulit; nondum arva domusque nec urbes,  
 conubiisve modus; quercus laurique ferebant  
 cruda puerperia (Thebaid. 4.276-80)

... men sown, says legend, long  
 ago by tough hardwood stock when astonished Earth  
 first bore marks of feet. No fields and homesteads then, no  
 cities or nuptial vows; oak trees and laurels endured  
 primitive childbirth...

Whereas Thebes' relationship to the forest is founded upon conflict, and Argos' on ignorance, there are others whose journeys through the *Thebaid's* woods and groves are not destructive, but creative. First among these is the Arcadian huntress, Atalanta, whose autochthonic relationship to the forest allows her to successfully navigate the fluid symbolic economy of these sylvan spaces. Before farming, building, and social ritual came to define the boundaries of civic life (*Theb.* 4. 278-9),<sup>239</sup> the Arcadians were born from the forest, and thus her Arcadian identity allows Atalanta to maintain an affinity with the same hybrid sylvan landscape the Thebans fear and the Argives misunderstand. Mother, hunter, and acolyte to the goddess Diana, Atalanta embodies the versatile nature of the forests in which she resides. As the warring brothers seek to impose their own framework of conquest and power upon the landscape, Atalanta's insistence on hybridity and intimacy remains defiant. Her partnership with Diana presents a consistent challenge to the mindless destruction of the civil war, despite ultimately failing to halt the war's progression.

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<sup>239</sup> Cf. Ovid. *Fasti*. 2. 290-300.

We first encounter Atalanta as early as *Thebaid.* 4. 246-344, when she attempts to stop her son, Parthenopaeus, from joining the Argive war-host. However, before going on to treat the relationship between mother and son, I first want to address Atalanta's relationship with Diana, as it is described in *Thebaid.* 9. 570-642, in order to better understand Atalanta's place within the narrative. This scene opens with a description of Atalanta washing in the Ladon in order to purge herself of evil nightmares (*Theb.* 9.570-4). The nightmares themselves are visions concerned with the destruction of Diana's shrine (9.575-7), Atalanta's exile from Arcadia (9.577-8), and Parthenopaeus' death (9.579-81). The final, most terrifying, dream details the destruction of Diana's sacred oak by Maenads (9.585-98). The bloodied tree, vividly described by Statius as wounded and weeping, '*rorantes sanguine ramos expirare solo*' (*Theb.* 9.596-7), finally shocks Atalanta from her slumber (9.600-601). At this point Statius again describes Atalanta's ritual washing (9.602-4) before following her to Diana's shrine where she sees the oak still standing (9.604-6). Though temporarily relieved, Atalanta seems aware of the import of her dreams and makes a prayer of supplication to Diana asking that Parthenopaeus be protected (9.606-35). Emotion overcomes her and tears stream down her face.

dixit, fletuque soluto  
 aspicit et niveae saxum maduisse Dianae.  
 illam diua ferox etiamnum in limine sacro  
 expositam et gelidas verrentem crinibus aras (*Thebaid.* 9. 635-8)

Speech failed her, she broke down; through her own tears,  
 she sees snowy Diana's stone face too is streaming  
 While she's still stretched out on the sacred doorsill, her hair loose,  
 sweeping ice-cold altars, the fierce goddess has—already!—  
 departed.

Diana's presence alongside Atalanta is striking. The goddess is not shown as journeying down to Atalanta from on high, but instead Diana's departure indicates that she was initially present within their shared space. Though Atalanta calls upon the goddess and stands before a statue, it is as if she meets Diana face-to-face. The goddess' first response to Atalanta's grief has set the tone for their entire relationship: empathy. Diana's tears elide the space between the mortal and divine as both women are brought together within a shared space of grief. In this moment, their identities are primarily defined by their mutual love of Parthenopaeus. It is

the malleability of the sylvan space they inhabit at the moment that suspends traditional hierarchies and allows mortal and goddess to intimately mingle.

As Atalanta and Diana coalesce their identities amalgamate, and this fusion is reflected in the co-ownership of the grove:

nota per Arcadias felici robore silvas  
 quercus erat, Triviae quam desacraverat ipsa  
 electam turba nemorum numenque colendo  
 fecerat                    (*Thebaid.* 9.585-8)

Famous throughout Arcadia's woods was an oak tree which  
 —fruitful, robust, chosen from all the thronging groves—she had  
 herself consecrated to the Lady of Crossroads and  
 had, by her worship, made divine.

This oak, the locus of Atalanta's worship and love for Diana, is rendered sacred not by Diana's presence but by Atalanta's own actions. It is on *her* oak, that we are told Atalanta would hang her bow, and massive antlers, and rural trophies on its branches (*Theb.* 9.588-9). Yet, Atalanta's continuing devotion to Diana also claims the tree for the goddess.

One reason why such a suspension of hierarchy is possible is the grove's spatial distance from the more defined Firstspaces of the narrative. In contrast to the rigid *moenia* of Argos and Thebes, Arcadia's boundaries are malleable and ephemeral making it difficult to ascertain Atalanta's precise location within it. However, from the journeys of Atalanta and Diana backwards and forwards across the epic landscape, and the location of the meeting between Diana and Apollo that immediately follows (*Theb.* 9.637-47), the grove can be placed somewhere in the vicinity of the Delian sanctuary. Alongside its imprecise boundaries, the grove itself lacks monuments to provide spatial anchors, mentioning only the River Ladon (9.572), sacred oak-tree (9.586, 606) and a small temple containing a statue of the goddess (9.636-9), as anchors of meaning within a vast amorphous wilderness. These monuments are themselves muddled: the oak-tree's placement and function making it a second altar within the shrine.

If the physical boundaries of the grove are hard to define, then so is its place within the chronology of the narrative. As previously mentioned, Atalanta's first appearance in the narrative is at 4.246-344, outside Argos, where she pleads with Parthenopaeus not to go to war. Atalanta makes the journey to Argos after a series of omens, including the spoils falling from the temple, alert her to Parthenopaeus' plans (4.330-4). At *Thebaid.* 9.575-7 this image is repeated, but it is as if this is the first time Atalanta is experiencing these signs. This immediately muddles the chronology, suggesting that the episode in book nine might precede, or coincide with, Atalanta's arrival in Argos in book four despite its position later in the *Thebaid.* Alongside the repetition of the omens, Atalanta's unbelievable speed in crossing the distance between Arcadia and Argos shortens the distance between the two cities, almost manipulating the flow of time (*Thebaid.* 4.309-15).

The use of *interea* (*Thebaid.* 9.570) to introduce the narration of events in Arcadia also emphasises the temporal fluidity of the Arcadian forest, as it marks a break in the flow of the narrative. It sets the events within Arcadia as parallel to, but outside of, the events taking place in the battlefield narrated immediately preceding it. In this way Arcadia, and in particular the grove of Diana and Atalanta, functions as a distinct chronotope, a time-space,<sup>240</sup> within the *Thebaid.* It is as if Arcadia forms a parallel temporal and spatial dimension to the action of the main narrative. Within the grove-chronotope space and time are inseparable,<sup>241</sup> and as the grove's ephemeral spatial boundaries mean that it exists throughout the landscape of the *Thebaid*, so it encompasses the epic temporally. In this chronotope past and future become fused and therefore the two women are liberated from any traditional context that might have fixed and regulated their identity and their relationship with one another.

### Shifting roles in the forest: Intersectional Identities

In order to successfully inhabit this nebulous forest, Atalanta and Diana must themselves be malleable and open to negotiation with the changing environment surrounding them. Within

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<sup>240</sup> Bakhtin 2008:84. Cf. Steinby 2013:106.

<sup>241</sup> Bakhtin 2008:84.



the *Thebaid* Diana Trivia (*Thebaid.* 9.586),<sup>242</sup> lit. Diana of the crossroads, frequently shifts identity in relation to her position within the landscape. Here, within Arcadia, she is Diana the virgin huntress, dwelling in a sacred grove, protecting hunters and symbolising wilderness, however, this is not her only form. Earlier within the *Thebaid*, Statius depicts her as Hecate (4.425-33), goddess of the underworld, and towards the epic's close Diana is called upon as Cynthia, goddess of the moon:

“arcanæ moderatrix Cynthia noctis,  
 si te tergemini perhibent variare figuris  
 numen et in silvas alio descendere vultu,  
 ille comes nuper nemorumque insignis alumnus” (*Thebaid.* 10.365-8)

“Cynthia, guiding force of the secretive night: if, as men hold, you ring the three changes on your divine shape and descend into the forest with aspect altered...”

Diana's ability to change shape as she transitions from the underworld, through the earth, and ascends to the heavens, is a physical manifestation of an identity that is in process. Rather than existing as a fixed being, Diana Trivia is a constantly becoming-subject, transforming in response to her need to negotiate and transition between different spaces and symbolic economies. More than any other character within the *Thebaid*, Diana exposes the ‘permanent processes of transition [and] hybridization’ at the heart of the formation of a social individual.<sup>243</sup> This heightened experience of intersubjectivity allows Diana to encounter Atalanta within the hybrid Arcadian forest in an intimate and empathic manner, as she risks no loss of divine-self through encounter with the mortal-other.

Whilst Diana's adaptation to her position within whichever space she finds herself is reflected through the transformation of her name and external appearance, Atalanta's negotiation of the forest takes the form of ritual. Barefoot and with her hair untied, ‘*crine dato passim plantisque*’ (*Thebaid.* 9.573), she washes her hair three times in the water, ‘*in amne nefas merso ter*

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<sup>242</sup> Trivia is an epithet frequently used throughout Latin literature: cf. Catullus 66.5; Prop 2. 32. 10; Virgil *Aen.* 6. 13, 11.566 (*triformis* but in the woods), 7. 774, .778; Hor. *C.* 3.22; Seneca Ag. 367; Ps.Sen. *Octavia* 977; Apul. *Apol.* 31.32; CIL X 3795

<sup>243</sup> Braidotti 2011:14.

*crine piavit*' (9.602) in order to prepare herself to enter Diana's shrine. Though Atalanta's lustration is far from the only example of ritual within the *Thebaid*,<sup>244</sup> it is unusual in that the subsequent encounter between goddess and acolyte is intimate and, at least initially, effects change.

The extent of Atalanta's willingness to transform is further exposed within her supplication to Diana (*Theb.* 9.608-34), where Atalanta narrates the events of her past. Raped and pregnant, Atalanta had come to Diana and had made no attempt to hide Parthenopaeus from the Virgin goddess, instead she laid him at Diana's feet when he was born (9.612-19), refused to leave the forest and continued to dedicate her life to Diana's service (9.608-11). In that speech she had declared herself still a maiden, '*animumque innupta remansi*' (9.616), despite the existence of her son. Living at the intersection of her two roles Atalanta is thus able to exist as both mother and virgin priestess. Atalanta's fluid subjectivity allows her to collapse the binary categories of motherhood and virginity in a process of thirding-as-othering,<sup>245</sup> reflecting Arcadia's freedom from the restrictive Firstspace frameworks of civic life.

#### Losing the forest: Atalanta and Parthenopaeus.

Lamentably, Atalanta's hybrid identity, which has enabled her successful habitation of Arcadian forests, is threatened and ultimately destroyed by her son's decision to reject the forest in favour of the battlefield. Last in the catalogue of the seven Argive warriors (*Thebaid.* 4.31-344), Parthenopaeus' skill is un-honed, '*rudis armorum*' (4.247),<sup>246</sup> making him a novice surrounded by older, more experienced warriors. From the beginning of his depiction of the Arcadian youth, Statius is at pains to emphasise Parthenopaeus' recent dependence on his mother, Atalanta, who is ignorant of his joining the war host.<sup>247</sup> Indeed, after a description of Parthenopaeus' youth and beauty (4.246-74), Atalanta arrives at Argos and attempts to

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<sup>244</sup> Cf. Dee 2013:187-8, who sees Atalanta's cleansing as part of a series of failed attempts at purification, alongside Tiresias' washing of Eteocles in the Ismenos (182-6), the washing of Polynices body (187), and Minerva's response to Tydeus' cannibalism (189)

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Soja 1996:81

<sup>246</sup> I follow Parkes 2012:158, Wilson Joyce 2008:92 and Shackleton Bailey 2003b:224 in the belief that Statius is referring to Parthenopaeus' inexperience with battle: *armorum*, rather than his youth: *annorum*.

<sup>247</sup> '*ignara matre*' (*Thebaid.* 4. 246). Parkes 2012:158 notes previous examples of parental ignorance such as Euryalus (Virg. *Aen.* 9.287-8) and Acastus (Valerius Flaccus. *Argonautica.* 1.53-4)

dissuade him (4.309-44). Though she is ultimately unsuccessful, her intervention combines with Parthenopaeus' youth, beauty and inexperience to paint a clear picture of his unsuitability for war. Within the catalogue of warriors, alongside '*longaevo...Adrasto*' (4.74), Polynices the '*exsul*' (4.77), '*fulmineus Tydeus*' (4.94), '*arduus Hippomedon*' (4.129), towering Capaneus (4.165), and the '*fatidici... auguris*' Amphiaraus (4.187-8), Parthenopaeus' naivety and dependence on his mother emphasise his incongruity within this martial community.

Not only is Parthenopaeus' assimilation into the structured symbolic economy of warfare unsuccessful, but his eventual death at the hands of Theban Dryas, (9.856-907), is what displaces Atalanta from the fluid symbolic economy of the grove. In her nightmares, Atalanta sees herself cast out from the forest, surrounded by monuments to her son's fatal campaign:

namque per attonitas curarum pondere noctes  
 saepe et delapsas adytis, quas ipsa dicarat,  
 exuvias, seque ignotis errare sepulcris  
 extorrem nemorum Dryadumque a plebe fugatam,  
 saepe novos nati bello rediisse triumphos,  
 armaque et alipedem notum comitesque videbat,  
 numquam ipsum... (*Thebaid.* 9.575-81)

For, in the course of nights appalled by the weight of her worries,  
 she often saw trophies which she had hung up in the shrine  
 fallen to the floor, herself lost among unknown tombs,  
 cast out from the dear woodland, pursued by her Dryad folk;  
 often her son's processions, returning fresh from the war,  
 his weapons his comrades his warhorse (one noted for speed),  
 but never *him*...

Within the distinct chronotope of the Arcadian forest, Atalanta experiences her future exile as a present event. In the face of such portents, motherly grief overwhelms Atalanta (*Theb.* 9.584). Though less visceral than her final dream regarding the bleeding oak (9.585-99), this first series of nightmares show Parthenopaeus' death with horrifying certainty. Atalanta's relationship to Diana becomes irrevocably altered when Parthenopaeus dies: he condemns

the goddess with his dying breath (*Theb.* 9.907) depriving Diana of her role as co-parent.<sup>248</sup> Also, in her attempt to save Parthenopaeus, Diana has left the grove and entered a space where she is bound to act in certain ways. She is defeated by *decorum* (9.840), that is, by the imposition of a constrictive social code. As Diana and Atalanta's interdependency is destroyed, so is their Arcadian grove. The ephemeral space that was created through relationship ceases to exist, and Atalanta can no longer remain within Arcadia. In this way, even though Atalanta herself does not fight, and the conflict does not destroy the physical landscape of the forest, the intersubjective space created by Diana and Atalanta is threatened, and ultimately, destroyed.

Despite her earlier assertion of her maiden virtue and dedication to her role as acolyte (9.608-16), Atalanta is forced to give up her hybridity and take on the social role of grieving mother, journeying among '*ignotis sepulcris*' (9.577) with the other mourners of the *Thebaid* as she searches for her son's body:

postrema gementum  
agmina Maenaliae ducit comes orba Dianae... (*Thebaid.* 12. 124-5).

Last, at the head of the sobbing line,  
here come[s] Maenalian Diana's devotee, bereft...

Once again, the arrhythmia of the brothers' conflict has destroyed a space of intimacy and interstitiality. The war challenges Atalanta and Diana's attempts at intersectionality, fixing their previously hybrid and fluid identities into the singular roles. Just as Atalanta becomes a grieving mother, so Diana undergoes her own transformation. From the moment she is forced from the battlefield (9.838-40), she no longer appears as the virgin huntress. In her next encounter with Atalanta, on the road following the end of the conflict, she assumes the guise of infernal Hecate:

illas et lucis Hecate speculata Lycaeis  
prosequitur gemitu (*Thebaid.* 12.129-30).

When, from the groves atop Lycaeus, she spied these women,

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<sup>248</sup> A role suggested in the Catalogue of the Argives (*Theb.* 4.256-9), in Atalanta's supplication (*Theb.* 9.617-21), by Diana's own affection for Parthenopaeus (*Theb.* 9. 712-3)

Hecate groaned to see them go.

Watching from a distance, the goddess can no longer communicate with Atalanta. She groans, mirroring the mother's grief just as in the doorway to the shrine (9.634-6), but these cries go unheard. In appearing as Hecate, she reprises the role forced upon her by Tiresias in his necromancy in book 4.425-30,<sup>249</sup> a guise associated with death and the underworld.<sup>250</sup> The goddess is no longer the manifest presence of comfort and empathy evident in book nine. She is a distant specter of death. By the epic's close, neither Atalanta nor Diana inhabit the liminal world of the Arcadian forest. As the world of the woods fades from the narrative, blended identities also disappear with it and a new authority and a new city emerge with the ambition to counteract the chaos left by the unsatisfactory clash between the two armies. Will the new symbolic economy provide a satisfactory antidote to the destitution reigning in these places? I turn to this in the sections that follow.

### Exile and loss: traversing the woods

It is the women who travel alongside Atalanta, and their journey to bury their dead, that lead to the final part of this chapter and the final sylvan space for our consideration. Despite the ongoing assault on multivalence as the landscape has succumbed to the inflexible needs of warfare,<sup>251</sup> the Argive widows' and daughters' disorderly journey towards Thebes once again frustrates any move towards resolution. Their desperate plans undermine the closure achieved by the cremation of the Theban troops at the opening of this final book (*Theb.* 12.1-104), sustaining grief past the limits of ritual mourning.<sup>252</sup> The Argive women also serve as a reminder that the deaths of Polynices and Eteocles (*Thebaid* 11. 552-79), though providing an end to the battle, fail to secure the epic's return from arrhythmia to eurhythmia. Instead, Creon, the new king of Thebes, in denying the Argives burial (12.100-4), has prolonged the chaos and grief of the war.

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<sup>249</sup> Cf. Parkes 2012:221-4.

<sup>250</sup> Hecate is the goddess who allows for Aeneas' katabasis in Virgil. *Aeneid.* 6.247. For her role as a chthonic figure in the *Thebaid* see Parkes 2013:166 & 176.

<sup>251</sup> A process that will be explored further in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Alston & Spentzou 2011:76-9 on the similarly transgressive sustainment of grief and mourning at *Thebaid.* 3.178-209: 'There can be no closure, and the rituals must fail' (79).

The news of Creon's decree soon reaches the Argive women as they travel to Thebes to bury their husbands, brothers, and sons. Oryntus, a lone Argive survivor, meets the women on the road:

“quo, miserae, quo fertis iter? funusne peremptis  
 speratis cineremque viris? stat pervigil illic  
 umbrarum custos inhumataque corpora regi  
 annumerat. nusquam lacrimae, procul usque fugati  
 accessus hominum: solis avibusque ferisque  
 ire licet.” (*Thebaid.* 12. 149-54)

“Where oh where, poor souls, are you bound? Do you hope to cremate,  
 to bury the men you have lost? A guard's posted *there*,  
 keeping the unburied dead under constant surveillance, the king's  
 corpse counter. Only birds and wild beasts are allowed to approach.”

Oryntus' words underscore that the rituals of community that define the civic space through spatial practice are no more. Wilderness has taken over: birds and beasts now rule the Cadmeian plain (*Theb.* 12.149). There will be no solace at Thebes, as Creon's barbaric decision has erased the last remaining boundary between the city and the forest. Thebes no longer subscribes to the symbolic framework of civic life.

Marooned within a non-place between desolate Argos and the wilderness of Thebes,<sup>253</sup> the women are left to decide their next course of action. They cannot remain where they are, but they also can neither advance or retreat: fratricidal war has irrevocably altered the character of both Argos and Thebes, destroying spatial markers and re-configuring the symbolic framework so that the Argive women have no place in either city. Argos, in particular, has been transformed from an ordered and wealthy society (*Theb.* 1.514-24)<sup>254</sup> into an empty

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<sup>253</sup> Cf. Augé (1995:63) who defines non-place as follows: ‘If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.’ The empty, isolated landscape of Polynices journey towards Argos is another example of such a non-place within the *Thebaid*.

<sup>254</sup> As discussed pp.55-56.

place devoid of men, similar to the state of Lemnos after the slaughter.<sup>255</sup> This transformation is what has led the Argive women to leave Argos, desperate to bury their dead and re-establish community through the ritual affirmation of their tragic loss.

When the women had begun their journey to Thebes they were travelling in order to fulfil their social obligation: to mourn the Argive dead. This provides them with a function, and, despite their physical displacement from the Firstspace of the city, with a temporary place within the symbolic economy of civic life. However, Creon's order deprives the women of such a function, denying them the transition from wife to widow, mother to bereaved and suspending them within the exilic state. Oryntus, the messenger, provides them with two choices: either return home to empty, *vacuis* (*Theb.* 12.105), Argos and hold funerals without remains (12.160-2), or seek the help of Theseus to defeat Creon and so claim their dead (12.163-6).

Until the women are informed of Creon's decree they are able to assume the role of mourner, but unable to bury their dead they are fully exiled; fear dominates their minds over and above grief. The crippling effect of this loss of social function is shown in their abrupt change in demeanor upon hearing Oryntus' news:

...sic fatus, at illis  
 aruerunt lacrimae, stupuitque immanis eundi  
 impetus, atque uno vultus pallore gelati. (*Thebaid.* 12. 166-8)

So said he, and the women's tears  
 dried up, their boundless compulsion to keep going stopped  
 in alarm, their frozen faces all turned deathly pale.

In response to this fear, Argia and the remaining women follow a course of action which is designed to re-establish the social framework and allow them to escape the non-place of exile. In Argia's case this is to be achieved through the burning of Polynices' body and her fulfilment of her role as grieving widow (*Theb.* 12.203-463). Paradoxically, this is only possible

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<sup>255</sup> Cf. *Thebaid.* 5. 305-12, where Lemnos is left silent. Though Argia does not choose to mourn an empty bier, like Hypsipyle does to disguise the escape of her father (5.313-19), it is interesting that in both cases it is only the king who survives.

as Argia is able to completely discard any traditional connotations of obedience associated with her gender and summon the non-feminine courage to challenge Creon (*Theb.* 12.177). For the others, who are unable to follow Argia's lead, the only course of action is to petition someone to restore order on their behalf. The only possible source of such aid is Theseus, ruler of Athens, the one city to survive the conflict. After a moment of fearful indecision, where return is all but discounted (*Theb.* 12.166-76), Argia voices her desire to continue on in defiance of Creon and asks the rest of the women to seek the aid of Athens (12.177-204).

The Argive women's exile and subsequent desire to be repatriated is important as it reflects the same desire for city-building which drives Aeneas within the ktistic world of the *Aeneid*: the teleological epic which seeks 'the re-establishment of harmony against chaos'.<sup>256</sup> Yet, as I have shown within this chapter, any previous attempts at containing the wild, hybrid spaces of the *Thebaid* within well defined *moenia* are repeatedly compromised. Just as Adrastus becomes waylaid within the interstitial forests of Nemea, and Eteocles is hindered by the forests of the Theban past, so these exiled women will be denied settlement within the epic city, condemned to a liminal world. Their journey towards Athens is an attempt to escape the slippery and unsettling sylvan world of the *Thebaid*, but, as we shall see, even within the city the Argive women will be denied access and confined to a space in-between wilderness and the civic inside the grove of Clemency.

### Sheltering in-between: Athenian women in the Grove of Clemency

The grieving women arrive in Athens heralded by the goddess Juno, who gives them favour among the citizens (*Theb.* 12.466-7), instructing them in the proper course of mourning: *fletibus addit honorem*, 'lending dignity to their tears' (12.467). Juno's re-dressing of the Argive women with symbols of peace, '*ramosque oleae uittasque precantes*' (*Theb.* 12.468), and mourning, '*uacuas sine manibus urnas*' (12.470), forms part of their re-integration into the symbolic economy of the city. In their exile and grief the women inhabited a non-place where the symbolic economy was subjugated to the semiotic,<sup>257</sup> but now as they move into Athens the

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<sup>256</sup> Feeney 1991:136.

<sup>257</sup> Here I am using the term semiotic as defined by Julia Kristeva 2002:34-5, as one of the two 'modalities' that form the signifying process of language, the other being 'the symbolic' (34). Though the two work in dialogue



women adopt the manners of the symbolic order in order to communicate their need to the citizens.

Yet, as the Argive women enter the city, with its prominent Firstspace markers, so the Athenians in their sympathy use the semiotic language, groaning (*Theb.* 12. 473-4) in response to the women's grief. Through this exchange Athens itself is changed: its inhabitants leave their homes and instead inhabit the streets and roofs (12. 471-2) spaces normally uninhabited or reserved for movement. This relocation of the population to the city's interstitial spaces is an apposite reminder of how spatial practice does not only result from Firstspace,<sup>258</sup> that is *representations of space*,<sup>259</sup> but can act in opposition to dominant social frameworks. Even though Juno works to mitigate the impact of the women's arrival onto the ways of the city, their very presence acts as a challenge to the stability and contentment of Athens as it changes the way the Athenians act within the city space.

However, before the women's arrival can fully disrupt the rhythms of the Athenian city, they are shepherded to a space within which their otherness can be contained: the grove of Clemency (*Theb.* 12.481-517). Situated in the middle of the city, *urbe...media* (12.481), this grove and altar provide a sanctuary for those who find themselves in the margins of society. Throughout his depiction of the grove Statius emphasises the lack of ritual needed to gain acceptance to the sacred space:

parca superstitio: non turea flamma nec altus  
accipitur sanguis: lacrimis altaria sudant,  
maestarumque super libamina secta comarum  
pendent et vestes mutata sorte relictæ.  
mite nemus circa cultuque insigne verendo,  
vittatæ laurus et supplicis arbor olivæ.  
nulla autem effigies, nulli commissæ metallo  
forma dei: mentes habitare et pectora gaudet. (*Thebaid.* 12. 487-94)

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there are 'nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic' (34). As Augoustakis 2010: 21-3; 39-42 shows through his reading of Hypsipyle and Lemnos, the semiotic continuously breaks into the symbolic within the *Thebaid*. I would argue that it performs a similar function to interstitial, non-epic space in its disruption of the narrative.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Soja 1996: 75-77.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Lefebvré 1974:33.

Elaborate rites? Hardly! No incense-fed flame, no libation of blood is acceptable—*her* altars are wet with tears; above hang locks of hair, votive offerings shorn from their mourners' heads, robes their owners exchanged with their luck.

All round, a grove, peaceful and truly holy stand of trees—suppliant olive and bay laurel wound with wool; no icon there, no deity's shape executed in metal—*she* delights to dwell in hearts and minds.

In order to enter the grove of Clemency visitors are not required to make any expensive sacrifice, nor bring spoils for the altar: it does not require that its supplicants hold symbolic capital.<sup>260</sup> Also, access to the grove is not limited to the social rhythms of the city: *noctesque diesque*, day and night (*Theb.* 12.485), all are allowed access. The accessibility of the grove of Clemency and the space's tolerance of difference at first suggests that this is a space like any other sylvan space within the narrative, and that, within the grove, the women may safely mourn and remain within the semiotic chora.<sup>261</sup>

Yet, though the grove itself offers a sanctuary to those who find themselves on the edge of the symbolic economy of the epic city, its position within Athens means that its otherness is completely regulated and contained. If we compare the grove of Clemency to the Lemnian forests (*Theb.* 5.49-498), or Atalanta's Arcadian home (*Theb.* 9.570-636), the difference between the clearly defined space in Athens and those sylvan spaces which allow for a blurring of social and spatial boundaries becomes apparent. The grove of Clemency is a place designated to contain those that have no place of their own within the civic narrative, those who are exiled and stateless. Its function has been designated by the gods, just as the laws and sacred rites were provided to ensure a stable and civilised society (*Theb.* 12.499-505). Yet, this space persists within the heart of Athens, allowing for precariousness, even possible disorder, at the very centre of the ordered city. The grove exists both outside Athenian civic life and inside the city's boundaries, questioning Athens' claims to civic harmony.

<sup>260</sup> Coffee 2009:225 notes that offerings of hair and clothing 'As cast-off items, such offerings cost little or nothing,' and the grove's frugality contrasts with the opulence of Theseus' triumph.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Kristeva 2002:24-25 & 54; Augoustakis 2010:14-21.

With the women safely contained within the grove, Theseus arrives home from battle. Riding a laureled chariot and preceded by wagons heaving with the exotic spoils of war (*Theb.* 12.519-28), the conquering hero is greeted with trumpets and joyful shouting (12.519-23). The Athenian warrior has defeated the Amazons and arrives home triumphantly parading his newly chastened wife, Hippolyte. Such an entrance does more than simply assert 'Theseus' martial prowess, considerable though it is. The fact that Theseus arrives accompanied by a domesticated Amazon, an exotic other that is now conforming to Athenian standards of beauty and decorum, is proof that 'Theseus' authority extends to society in peace as well as war.

The description of the once proud warrior queen is disquieting:

... nec non populos in semet agebat  
 Hippolyte, iam blanda genas patiensque mariti  
 foederis. hanc patriae ritus fregisse severos  
 Atthides oblique secum mirantur operto  
 murmure, quod nitidi crines, quod pectora palla  
 tota latent, magnis quod barbara semet Athenis  
 misceat atque hosti veniat paritura marito. (*Thebaid.* 12. 533-9)

... but Hippolytê too  
 attracts attention, her calm expression, her patience in face  
 of wedlock. With sidelong glances and hushed murmurs the women  
 of Athens marvel that she has now broken her tribe's strict  
 taboo, that her hair's coiffed, that beneath her robe both breasts  
 lie hid, that she—a barbarian!—dares join with mighty  
 Athens and come, ready to wed and to carry the child of her foe.

Hippolyte's assimilation into Athens seems total: she now conducts herself with humility, dresses in accordance with local custom and has married an Athenian man. Later we shall learn that she is already pregnant with 'Theseus' child (*Theb.* 12.635-8), providing a reason for her absence from the upcoming battle. This act of assimilation of the Amazons into the eurhythmia of the city of Athens would seem to suggest that Theseus has the ability to unite the fragments of the *Thebaid*.

Yet, though Theseus seems to offer a chance for the *Thebaid* to reach resolution, questions remain as to whether such a conclusion is desirable. If we return to the description of Hippolyte (*Theb.* 12.533-9), we can see that Theseus has conquered her physically through war and impregnation, and in doing so has succeeded in erasing nearly all of her former identity.<sup>262</sup> The powerful warrior queen has been reduced from an active participant to passive onlooker, and, in the process, she is diminished. Just as Hippolyte is silenced, so the exiled women watch Theseus' triumphant entry into the city from inside the grove, able to view the celebration but unable to participate, anchored to the altar and positioned within their allotted territory:

Paulum et ab insessis maestae Pelopeides aris  
 promovere gradum seriemque et dona triumph  
 mirantur, victique animo rediere mariti. (*Thebaid.* 12. 540-42)

Those daughters of Pelops sitting before the altar to mourn  
 stirred and stepped aside; they too admired the Triumph's  
 train of spoils, but it made them recall their conquered husbands.

With the women safely contained within the grove, Theseus deigns to hear their charge against Creon (*Theb.* 12.543-86). Looking down on the women from above from his chariot (*Theb.* 12.543), the king appears as a benevolent god as he listens to their plea and then moves to act against Thebes.<sup>263</sup> Though Theseus does listen to the exiled women at no point are they allowed to leave their marginal surroundings. Unlike Argia, who chooses to maintain her autonomy and seek her own solution to exile, the rest of the women allow their own narratives to be re-subsumed within Theseus' ordered framework, just as the interstitial space of the grove of Clemency is contained and defined by the symbolic economy of the Athenian city.

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<sup>262</sup> Cf. Ahl 1986:2896 and Coffee 2009:224, who both note the violence of Theseus' subjugation of Hippolyte and the Amazons.

<sup>263</sup> Indeed, Theseus is directly compared to Jupiter in a simile at *Thebaid.* 12.639-655. Though I agree with Coffee 2009:224 that proximity to the altar does not automatically confer that Theseus is merciful, his continuing argument for what he sees as a physical distancing by Statius of Theseus and Athens remains unconvincing.

Encroaching wilderness and rebuilt moenia.

When Theseus arrives at Thebes ready for battle with Creon it is clear that all is still in disarray: weapons and armour are still caked in the blood of the Argives (*Thebaid.* 12.699-703); the men are still wearied from the previous battle (12.706-8); and the walls of Thebes remain broken:

cessat fiducia valli,  
murorum patet omne latus, munimina portae  
exposcunt: prior hostis habet; fastigia desunt:  
deiecit Capaneus           (*Thebaid.* 12.703-6)

The ramparts gave them grave  
doubts, every stretch of the wall had been breached, the Gates required  
munitions—the last foe had theirs; they lacked battlements—those  
Capaneus had thrown down.

The broken walls of Thebes remain an antithesis to Virgil's *altae moenia* (*Aeneid.* 1.7) and paint a clear picture of disorder. The violent battle has destroyed Thebes' already permeable borders, and there is no respite for the Thebans as they remain exposed and vulnerable to attack. Whilst the brothers' deaths fulfilled Oedipus' curse, there is now no-one to rebuild the walls, as Creon is more concerned with his personal vendetta against the killers of Menoeceus than restoring civic harmony. Only the arrival of Theseus and the Athenian host will ensure that the *Thebaid* will achieve the closure it currently lacks.

Scholars have interpreted Theseus' victory over Creon in tandem with their understanding of the epic as a whole.<sup>264</sup> His intervention at the close of Statius' epic can either be read negatively, as a critique of monarchical power,<sup>265</sup> or positively, as the restoration of 'peace

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<sup>264</sup> The three different readings of 'optimistic', 'pessimistic' and 'pluralistic' are summarised firstly by Braund 1996: 16-18 and again by Ganiban 2007:5, Heslin 2008:471, and Coffee 2009:221-3.

<sup>265</sup> one notable example of this view can be found in Dominik 1989:87-91 and 1994: 92-4.



The hyperbolic description of the Athenian's conquest of the hundred cities, '*centum urbes*' (*Theb.* 12.667), and hundred walls, '*centenaque... moenia*' (12.667-8), surpasses that of Aeneas' shield, which only looks to one city, Rome (Virg. *Aeneid.* 7. 626-731), suggesting that Theseus himself eclipses the hero of the *Aeneid*. Theseus' dominance of the *moenia* of Crete signal that he alone is the one who can bring the disparate elements of the *Thebaid* under control.

Indeed, Theseus' victory over Creon does seem to provide resolution within the *Thebaid*. Firstly, Theseus undoes Creon's abhorrent decree as he slays the Theban King (*Theb.* 12.779-81), restoring the boundary between life and death and ending the Argives' suspension between the two. This not only allows the dead to pass on to their allotted territory of Hades, but also allows for the resumption of social roles by the living: the grieving may now fulfil their obligation to their loved ones (*Theb.* 12.796). As the social order is restored so is the spatial: the walls which were previously broken now clearly define the boundary of the city and Theseus is asked to enter (*Theb.* 12.784-6). His presence within Thebes restores the dichotomy between outside and in: the forests seem to have finally been banished from Thebes.

However, Statius does not follow Theseus inside; he remains outside alongside the grieving women. Instead of the establishment of the epic city the reader is presented with a lament for the liminal. The first part of this lament comes in the simile which compares the Argive women to Bacchants racing toward the city:

ecce per adversas Dircaeï verticis umbras  
 femineus quatit astra fragor, matresque Pelasgae  
 decurrunt: quales Bacchea ad bella vocatae  
 Thyiades amentes, magnum quas poscere credas  
 aut fecisse nefas; gaudent lamenta novaeque  
 exsultant lacrimae; rapit huc, rapit impetus illuc,  
 Thesea magnanimum quaerant prius, anne Creonta,  
 anne suos: vidui ducunt ad corpora luctus. (*Thebaid.* 12.789-96)

Look over there! through the shadows of Dircê's height,  
 women revellers rattle the stars of as Pelasgian matrons  
 come running: demented Thyiads they seem, called to the Wine  
 God's wars, women you'd swear were demanding—or had done—some

gross atrocity. Their wails are cries of joy, perverse  
 tears well up, impulse sweeps them here and there—should  
 they seek magnanimous Theseus first? or Creon? or their own men?  
 Widow's grief draws them close to their dead.

By staying outside the women are remnants of a different domain, the domain of the forest, with its different rhythms and resistance to control. By hovering outside, remaining in the space reserved for transgression and criminality (*Theb.* 12.792-3), they keep alive a sense of menace emanating from the forests nearby Thebes, who have been an impediment to civic orderliness and thus might become one again. Though Theseus is able to rebuild the city's symbolic walls, restoring the boundary between inside and out, the Bacchic forests remain on Thebes' periphery, waiting to encroach and destabilise this tentative peace. Indeed, the Epigoni will eventually reprise the conflict between Thebes and Argos and the polyrhythmia of the city will again descend into arrhythmia and discord. As Augoustakis astutely notes 'Boundaries are reset, same and other cannot converge at this junction, while there is utter refusal to provide any future hope for a possible resolution.'<sup>269</sup>

To the very close of his epic, Statius continues to allow the interstitial realms of the forest with their transient rules to hover over the restoration of the city. Using the voice of the poet, Statius narrates the mourning of Evadne, Deiphyle, and Argia in quick succession (*Theb.* 12.800-804) as they roam the desolate fields outside the walls of the city that is now attempting to return to orderly rhythms. The very last lines turn back to Atalanta and her lament of Parthenopaeus:

Arcada quo planctu genetrix Erymanthia clamet,  
 Arcada, consumpto servantem sanguine vultus,  
 Arcada, quem geminae pariter flevere cohortes. (*Thebaid.* 12. 805-7)

how the Arcadian's Eurythmian mother loudly bewailed him—  
 the Arcadian, who kept his looks though he lost his lifeblood,  
 the Arcadian, equally mourned by men on both sides.

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<sup>269</sup> Augoustakis 2010:34.



Mourned by both sides, Parthenopaeus, the forest born Arcadian, becomes an everlasting symbol of a world deprived of neat solutions. Even Theseus' seemingly successful restoration of the city, the closest to a positive outcome one can find in the *Thebaid*, is dogged by those who inhabit the interstitial and hold hybrid identities which present a challenge to hegemony. The *moenia* of previous epics continue to make way for the wildernesses of the *Thebaid*.

## 2.v. Conclusions from outside the walls.

From the beginning of the *Thebaid*, the fluid and permeable wilderness that lurks outside the epic's cities threatens to destabilise attempts at establishing a solid symbolic economic framework, delaying the advance of opposing armies and thwarting the *Thebaid's* progression towards its telos. Whether in the forests of Nemea or the grove in Arcadia, the wildernesses that dominate the epic persistently undermine attempts to impose totality of meaning. Those within them, such as Polynices, Hypsipyle, and the Argive women, find themselves dislocated from their social identities; free to choose new roles or revert to past identities. For those whose authority and security depend on the city, like Adrastus and Eteocles, the forests' comparative instability is confusing and unwelcome. On occasion, the *Thebaid's* sylvan landscape allow for acts of unspeakable violence and the complete perversion of social bond, as they do in Hypsipyle's Lemnian groves. Yet, these non-civic spaces are not only sites of disruption and disorder, they also present opportunities for relationship that transcend traditional boundaries. Atalanta and Diana are able, at least for a time, to create and inhabit a space where the mortal and divine can come together with empathy and synchronicity. Sylvan spaces also, like the Athenian grove of Clemency, provide a haven for those who have been exiled; who are adrift and unanchored as war suspends them within grief. What this chapter shows, is that the *Thebaid* is shaped by the encounters that occur outside any *moenia*, and that the interstitial forests, groves, and wildernesses that might previously have been considered peripheral are actually the locus of the epic's action. As individuals inhabit these fluid and dynamic spaces they are forced to adopt new strategies of becoming, and these processes of becoming shape the landscape of the *Thebaid* in turn. Even after they have returned to the city, the ongoing changes in identity wrought within and through the forests undermine Theseus' attempts at rebuilding the epic's walls.

### 3. Blurred Fields: Love and War in the *Thebaid*.

Because you died, I shall not rest again,  
    But wander ever through the lone world wide,  
Seeking the shadow of a dream grown vain  
    Because you died.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> *Roundel/ "Died of Wounds"* (1-4). a poem by Vera Brittain 1918.

### 3.i. Constructing the Battlefield

Bellum intrasse putes: fervent discursibus arces,  
 miscentur clamore viae, ferrum undique et ignes  
 mente vident, saevas mente accipere catenas.  
 consumpsit ventura timor (*Thebaid.* 10. 560-3)

You'd think War  
 had got in! The citadel seethed with scattering men,  
 the streets swirled with shrieks; everywhere, people thought they'd seen  
 blades and flames, and thought they'd submitted to cruel shackles.  
 Fear swallowed the future.

Conflict drives Statius' epic. Brother against brother, the *Thebaid* burns with the incendiary rage of Oedipus' sons (*Theb.* 1.1-3). Despite the delay in the Nemean forest, the Argives do eventually move out from the wilderness and onto the field of war (*Theb.* 7.616). The battle between the Theban and Argive armies stretches over the final six books of the epic, until the brothers' discord is eventually brought to an end by the sword and spilling of shared blood (*Theb.* 11.530-573). Yet, though the battlefield is seemingly contained within the latter half of the *Thebaid*, it soon becomes clear that the field of conflict stretches throughout the entirety of the epic landscape. War assails previously firm city walls and infiltrates the *Thebaid's* most intimate inner spaces. Though the military action is, predominantly, limited to the open plain outside the city, fear extends its borders within Thebes walls even before the city's gates are breached (*Theb.* 7.451-65). Later, when the battle has been raging for two days and the violence has been brought within Thebes during the night raid (*Theb.* 10.262-452), fear again distorts reality: though the gates are firmly closed, '*obsaeptas... fores*' (10.553), in the minds of the Thebans war now resides within: '*bellum intrasse putes*' (10.560).

Within the *Thebaid's* interstitial forests and wildernesses, intersections at the edge of social practice, hybrid individuals are able to escape the social restrictions imposed by Firstspace. However, on the field of war each individual works to erase the other: this space does not allow for cohabitation or hybridity. Instead, the battlefield exists as the violent intersection between both individuals and communities; a place where the Third Space of enunciation is

traversed with weapons instead of words. Rather than negotiating the ambiguous space-between, metal penetrates flesh, eliding the space of enunciation and absorbing all which is other into the self.

Paradoxically for such an unforgiving space, there is also a ‘softness’ and therefore a precarity in the battlefield, devoid as it is of permanent Firstspace markers, monuments and other formal geometries.<sup>271</sup> Comprising of a series of mental maps lodged in the minds of the participants, the battlefield’s existence relies on the strict adherence of its participants to codes of conduct and rules of engagement that create and maintain a fundamental distinction between ally and enemy. That is, it is the mental and emotional engagement of the participants that gives the battlefield its distinctive shape. Within the *Thebaid*, this imposition of a strict symbolic framework is demonstrated through the process by which the natural landscape is co-opted by the two opposing armies. In particular, the Argive establishment of their encampment outside Thebes demonstrates the ability of the machinery of warfare to transform the nature of a space. In times of peace the site chosen for their fortress, a hill overlooking the city (*Theb.* 7.441-3), is unremarkable and lacking in symbolic markers. However, when viewed through the lens of war it is transformed into a defensive stronghold:

placuit sedes fidiq̄ue receptus  
 colle per excelsum patulo quem subter aperto  
 arva sinu, nullique aliis a montibus instant  
 despectus; nec longa labor munimina durus  
 addidit: ipsa loco mirum natura favebat.  
 in vallum elatae rupes devexaque fossis  
 aequa et fortuito ductae quater aggere pinnae (*Thebaid.* 7.443-9)

a viable site whose shelter they felt they could trust,  
 the hill being wide at its summit, beneath which the campground  
 sloped, an open field; no other mountains stood close,  
 no overlooks. Very little work added extensive fortifications,  
 for Nature had wrought wonders there: cliffs  
 sprang up into ramparts, the ground dropped sheer to make moats,  
 and a fortuitous mound formed four merlons.

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<sup>271</sup> Cf. Dear et al. 2011:6.

The language of war mutates *rupes* into *vallum*, rocks into ramparts (7.448), preparing the ground for Polynices' and Eteocles' fratricidal conflict. Spaces that were previously awaiting signification are now co-opted into the economy of warfare.<sup>272</sup> As spatial practice alters the Secondspace so it closes it down, erasing difference as the space becomes dominated through a process of homogenisation. Hybridity is destroyed as the landscape is apportioned into territories. Defined through the ebb and flow of the armies' advance and retreat, the battlefield is a willful, somewhat abrasive use of space. It is temporary, brought into being during times of conflict and dissipating in times of peace.

The co-optation of existing spaces into the soft space of the battlefield is not only apparent in the re-signification of fields around Thebes. Immediately after Jupiter renews his campaign for the mutual destruction of Argos and Thebes (*Theb.* 7.1-63), there is a narrative transition that occurs when Bacchus leaves the epic (7.145-226) and Mars comes to Thebes (7.34-104). Each of these gods serves as a metonym for the forest and the battlefield, and as one makes way for the other so the landscape of the *Thebaid* is altered. Prior to this point, the *Thebaid* has been dominated by Bacchic wildernesses: spaces whose fluid symbolic economy, lack of monument, and interstitiality have allowed the disparate elements of the *Thebaid* to simultaneously coexist, just as multiple identities coexist within Bacchus himself. However, Mars, the God of War is the antithesis of Bacchus, the interstitial other. To him, hybridity is anathema.

We encounter Mars through the eyes of Mercury, who delivers the message of Jupiter's desire for war. Mars' shrine sits within a barren grove, '*steriles... silvas*' (*Theb.* 7.40), a monument of iron '*ferrea...ferro...ferratis...*' (7.43-4), blood and fire '*sanguis et... ignis*' (7.54). The hard edges of Mars' grove present a frightening contrast to the ephemeral and fluid boundaries of the Nemean and Arcadian forests. It sits uneasily within the wider landscape and upon the god's arrival at the shrine the woods themselves open in his wake, '*dant silvae nixque alta locum*' (7.72).<sup>273</sup> The polyrhythmia of the valley turns arrhythmic as the earth shakes (*Theb.* 7.65), Hebrus is disrupted (7.66), and horses stampede across the land (7.66-8). Discord follows

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<sup>272</sup> Here I am using Lefebvre's definition of co-optation as 'a practice intermediate between domination and appropriation, between exchange and use.' (1973:369)

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Smolenaars 1994:41, who notes that this image is an imitation of Virgil's description of the march of the Centaurs in *Aeneid*.7. 676.

the god to Nemea, where Mars works to rouse the Argive armies, and Panic makes men see signs of war where there previously were none (*Theb.* 7.116-125). Dust and dark clouds become symbols of an approaching enemy (*Theb.* 7.123-4).<sup>274</sup> Animosity and fear thus establish the battlefield, as a space that looms over and obscures all else, symbolic, delusional and real at the same time.<sup>275</sup>

Mars' ascension in power corresponds to Bacchus' diminishing status, and, as soon as the Argives have been spurred on to war, Statius describes the now forlorn state of the God of wine and ecstasy:

purpureum tristi turbatus pectore vultum:  
non crines, nonserta loco, dextramque reliquit  
thyrsus, et intactae ceciderunt cornibus uvae. (*Thebaid.* 7. 148-50)

Normally flushed, his features reflect his heart-heavy distress;  
neither garland nor curls are in place, and the thyrsus slips out of his grasp; from  
his horns, unnoticed, the bunches of grapes drop.

This change in appearance is explained by Bacchus' apparent displacement. As Mars' arrival heralds the beginning of war and, as we shall see, the establishment of the battlefield, those whose identities depend on hybridity and liminality find themselves displaced. Bacchus himself acknowledges that the war will render him stateless:

Thracen silvasque Lycurgi?  
anne triumphatos fugiam captivus ad Indos? (*Thebaid.* 7. 180-1)

Thracian Lycurgus' woods?  
or India--should I, her captor, flee there in defeat?

Though Bacchus is eventually mollified by Jupiter's promise of retribution via the Epigoni (*Theb.* 7.218-26), his subsequent exit from the narrative is a powerful metaphor for the

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<sup>274</sup> This false image of the Theban army disrupting the Nemean plain forms a repeat of the earlier, true, image of the advance of the Argive army (*Theb.* 4.664-5). See p.62.

<sup>275</sup> It is worth noting here that after the mention at *Thebaid.* 7.116, the wildernesses of Nemea are not visited again within the narrative and, after Book 6, Hypsipyle, Lycurgus, and Eurydice simply disappear.

establishment of the epic battlefield. As war is superimposed on the landscape of the *Thebaid* previously fluid spaces are polarised and hybridity destroyed.

Yet, despite its power to subsume and consume different social spaces, the soft space of the battlefield is, by its very nature, transient. It exists only in times of conflict, gradually relinquishing its grip on the symbolic economy as peace is established. Reminders may linger in the damage to the concrete landscape that can be observed long after the battlefield has dissolved but, as a space dependant on social practice, once that social practice has returned to its peacetime rhythms the battlefield ceases to exist. After the performance of war is complete the battlefield is simply a field.

But the ephemeral nature of the battlefield also allows the converse to be true as well: spaces traditionally outside the remit of warfare can abruptly become battlefield spaces as the arrhythmia of war spills out over seemingly impassable concrete boundaries. Just as we have seen the emotion of fear bringing the war into Thebes, despite the city's gates being firmly closed (*Theb.* 10.560-3), Statius' battlefield expands beyond the Theban plain. Individuals carry the soft battlefield within themselves and so the transient and social nature of the spaces of war is used by Statius to stretch the boundaries of the field of action.

However, when the boundaries of the battlefield become muddled and the field of outright conflict expands into spaces previously open to hybridity the strict polarisation of identity into the binary categories of enemy or ally comes into question. Statius' account of the battle's transgression of traditional limits challenges the expectations set by earlier epic and presents a horrifically novel and confused picture of warfare. 'Ruthlessly violating generic and moral boundaries',<sup>276</sup> the way in which Statius narrates the action on the battlefield also muddles the space between friend and foe until both are unrecognisable. The author's gaze does not linger on the glorious *aristeiae* of the Seven, but instead hovers long over the bloody mass of combatants on the blurred field of war.<sup>277</sup> Status traditionally acquired through acts of martial heroism becomes elusive, as even the physical boundaries of the individual are also simultaneously broken down. As the warriors' standing is diminished the plain becomes

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<sup>276</sup> Ash 2015:213.

<sup>277</sup> This is in stark contrast to the prominence of the main fighters in the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*. Cf. Gibson 2008:88-90.



inhabited by those who are traditionally excluded from warfare: women. Jocasta, Argia, Ismene, and Antigone are all trespassers on the field of war. Their presence further undermines and contaminates the martial symbolic framework of the battlefield with claims to familial relationship and domestic ritual.

This chapter takes three unusual aspects of Statius' battlefield, each of which appear within the *Thebaid's* first 50 lines, and explores how individuals challenge and distort the spaces of conflict. It also looks at how the battlefield, an extreme space of intersubjective dispute, is affected by and affects those who reject violence and confrontation in favour of negotiation. It is through this dilution that we shall see the disruption of those whose identities depend on the binary of war. What happens when ambiguity is reintroduced into the space of enunciation between enemies? In order to start to answer this question, this chapter begins by addressing the muddling of domestic and martial spaces and relationships by addressing Jocasta's journey onto the battlefield (7.470-624) and Ismene's perverse marital union with a dying Atys (8.636-54). Each of these instances portray the impact of death and conflict as the battlefield is brought into the intimate spaces of domestic life: war enters within Thebes' *cognata... moenia* (*Thebaid*.1.11). The second part of this chapter, *hostilem... amnem* (*Thebaid*.1.43), then moves to address the physical destruction of the Theban plain as it is subsumed under the rushing waters of a river in spate: *ingenti venientem Ismenon acervo* (*Thebaid*. 1.40). These waves erode the ground beneath soldiers' feet, bringing enemies together in new, intimate, proximities. Finally, in *aeterna... nocte* (*Thebaid*. 1.47), I turn to the way in which Statius plays with concepts of chairological time.<sup>278</sup> In the *Thebaid*, days and nights become indistinct from one another as the time-space of the battlefield is stretched beyond its normal limits under cover of darkness and conflict is no longer enclosed within the containers of dawn and dusk.<sup>279</sup> Instead, the melee spills over into darkness as Hopleur and Dymas search for their fallen kings (*Theb.* 10.347-490), and Argia battles the landscape to find the body of her husband (12.219-463).

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<sup>278</sup> Here I am using the term 'chairological' with the same sense and context as Steinby 2013:115 in her discussion of Bakhtin's chronotope. Simply put, '*kaïros* is the right point in time, the right time of action' (115).

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Gibson 2008:96-8.

### 3.ii. ‘*Cognata... moenia*’ (*Thebaid*.1.11): assaulting familial walls.

Birthing the Theban Front: Jocasta’s supplication to the Argives.

Coinciding with the sudden and chaotic commencement of war, the intervention of Jocasta is the first battlefield encounter that disrupts the expected rhythms of warfare. This episode comes halfway through Book 7, immediately after the Argives have reached Thebes and set up camp (*Theb.* 7.424-69). Prior to their arrival, Statius has narrated Jupiter’s desire for the war to begin; Mercury’s mission to the shrine of Mars (*Theb.* 7.1-63); Mars’ journey to the Argives (7.64-104); Bacchus’ supplication to Jupiter (7.145-226); Antigone’s teichoscopy (7.227-289); the catalogue of the Theban troops (7.290-373); and Eteocles’ speech to the Theban people (7.371-423). Each of these episodes further delay the onset of battle, whilst simultaneously commenting on war’s supposed immediacy.<sup>280</sup> The temporal dissonance between the anticipation of war and its frustration, that is, its simultaneous advance and deferment, blurs the boundaries of the battlefield at the moment when its borders are supposedly being established.

Jocasta appears in an unnatural lacuna in the genesis of formal hostilities, an interstice before battle, between the coming of the dawn and the commencement of fighting.<sup>281</sup> Her arrival presents yet another delay, another discordant note in the *Thebaid*’s already arrhythmic progress towards war:

Iam gelidam Phoeben et caligantia primus  
 hauserat astra dies, cum iam tumet igne futuro  
 Oceanus lateque novo Titane reclusum  
 aequor anhelantum radiis subsidit equorum:  
 ecce...

...Iocasta            (*Thebaid* 7.470-5)

By now, the cool Moon and fading stars had been sucked dry

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<sup>280</sup> Cf. Ash 2015:212

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Rossi 2004:76 & Gibson 2008:96-8.

by first light; and now the Ocean was swelling with imminent fire,  
 and now—disclosed by the new sun—was sinking back,  
 broad surface unruffled under that breathless, radiant team  
 when—!...Jocasta.

Not only is Jocasta's entrance onto the field untimely, it is also dramatic and unusual. Exiting the gates of Thebes, in all appearance as a raging fury (*'Eumenidum velut antiquissima'*, 7.477),<sup>282</sup> she descends towards the Argive camp, her frightening countenance at odds with her mission of peace.<sup>283</sup> By arriving at the dawning of battle, Jocasta creates a new precedent for female intervention on the field of action. Prior to Statius, women only enter the field as a last resort, a *'labor ultimus'*,<sup>284</sup> yet here is the intimidating figure of the Theban Queen, flanked by her two daughters (7.479-81), pressing down upon the Argives as if in the first advance of battle.<sup>285</sup>

Upon arrival at the Argive encampment, Jocasta's otherworldly femininity is immediately opposed by the martial environment. Fury and ambassador, bringer of life and death through her sons, Jocasta's composite identity presents a critical challenge to war's dichotomy of ally/enemy, self/other:

... venit ante hostes, et pectore nudo  
 claustra adversa ferit tremulisque ululatibus orat  
 admitti: "reserate viam! rogat impia belli  
 mater; in his aliquod ius execrabile castris  
 huic utero est." (Thebaid. 7. 481-485)

... she comes up to the foe and, with breasts bared,  
 knocks at the hostile barricade; in quavering wails, she pleads  
 to be let in: "Open up! War's unnatural mother  
 begs you. Your camp owes my womb *some* sort of perverse  
 justice!"

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<sup>282</sup> Here it should be noted that *antiquissima* in this instance should not be translated as 'most ancient' in terms of relative position, but rather as a term of praise. Cf. Smolenaars 1994:233.

<sup>283</sup> Jocasta's physical appearance has recently been treated in depth by Dietrich 2015:308-10.

<sup>284</sup> Rossi 2004:121 gives Camilla's intervention at *Aeneid*. 11. 475-6 as one particularly striking example.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Rossi 2004:75.



*'attonitae'* (*Theb.* 7.492). Her confusion reflects the distance that has been created between mother and son through Polynices' choice to engage in the polarising politics of warfare. The binary of the battlefield works to position Jocasta and Polynices on opposing sides of the conflict. It erodes the familial connection that links them, instead insisting on their difference as rivals in war. Despite this, Jocasta's presence alone is enough to facilitate an encounter of tremendous intimacy:

venit attonitae Cadmeius heros  
 obuius, et raptam lacrimis gaudentibus implet  
 solaturque tenens, atque inter singula, matrem,  
 matrem iterat, nunc ipsam urguens, nunc cara sororum  
 pectora, ... (*Thebaid.* 7. 492-6)

Into the stricken woman's path the Cadmeian  
 hero stepped and, clutching her, drenched her with tears of joy;  
 holding her close, he consoled her, between sobs crooning, "Mother,  
 Mother," was pressing her now to his heart, now his sisters...

The familial affection with which Polynices greets his mother and sisters is at odds with his current position as an enemy of his home-state, and in this moment the Argive encampment is seemingly transformed from a site of division to one of reunion. One word repeatedly breaks through Polynices' semiotic groans: *'matrem, matrem'* (*Theb.* 7.494-5) re-establishing the bond that was broken in exile. However, the use of *urgens* (7.495),<sup>287</sup> suggests a deep drive to almost absorb his family into himself.<sup>288</sup> Indeed, the women are rendered passive recipients of his forced affection, and this intimate encounter echoes the violent meeting of combatants as Polynices retreats from the space of enunciation unable to tolerate its uncertainty. Although this encounter reminds Polynices of his hybrid identity, his actions still deny the possibility for intersubjective negotiation. Instead, he crushes his mother and sisters as a warrior crushes an enemy with his shield and sword.

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<sup>287</sup> Lewis & Short s.v. *urgeo*: To press upon (as something burdensome or compulsory), to oppress, to beset.

<sup>288</sup> Cf. Smolenaars 1994:228: *'ipsam urgens*: not so much "entreating" (so Mozley) as "stringens complexibus" (Barth's V.S.)'.

But as the encounter progresses, though seemingly overjoyed at seeing her lost son, *lacrimis gaudentibus* (*Theb.* 7.492), Jocasta appears to recover from her earlier astonishment and does not allow herself to be absorbed into Polynices' narrative of family reunion. She instead angrily reminds him of his present position, and of the obstacles that he himself has positioned between them:

“quid molles lacrimas venerandaque nomina fingis,  
 rex Argive, mihi? quid colla amplexibus ambis  
 inuisamque teris ferrato pectore matrem?  
 tune ille exilio vagus et miserabilis hospes?  
 quem non permoveas? longae tua iussa cohortes  
 exspectant, multoque latus praefulgurat ense.” (*Thebaid.* 7. 497-502)

“Why do you fake these melting tears and reverend names for me, Argive ‘king’? why hug me and hold me close? why rub your iron-clad chest up against your detested mother? So now you are a stranger? a homeless, pitiful refugee? who wouldn’t feel sorry for *you*? with long lines of men at your command and many a sword gleaming beside you?”

By naming Polynices ‘*rex Argive*’ (*Theb.* 7.498), ‘*exilio uagus*’ (7.500) and ‘*miserabilis hospes*’ (7.500), Jocasta articulates the crisis within Polynices’ identity. Standing in the Argive camp he can only be Adrastus’ son in law, but his reaction at seeing his mother and sisters shows how he still clings to the identity of Theban exile. Jocasta exposes the deceit in Polynices’ actions by pointing to his breastplate, ‘*ferrato pectore*’ (*Theb.* 7.499), and the surrounding army (7.501-2), in order to show that Polynices currently occupies the position of enemy, not that of family. By maintaining the ambivalent Third Space between them, even within this polarised territory, Jocasta appropriates the signs that align Polynices with the Argive enemy and translates them into symbols of hybridity and dislocation.<sup>289</sup>

The conflict within Jocasta and Polynices’ interaction speaks, once again, to the way in which the battlefield is superimposed onto existing social spaces and physical landscapes. When Jocasta identifies weapons and armour as the symbolic markers that define and construct the battlefield, she simultaneously exposes the fragility of a space that is so dependent on

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<sup>289</sup> Cf. Bhabha 1994:55.

collective participation to maintain itself. Her ability to claim the war as her own domain and then use her ambiguity to undermine, change, and distort the physical space of war is displayed in the ease in which she begins to sway the Argive troops away from conflict:

“ad vestrum gemitus nunc verto pudorem,  
Inachidae, liquistis enim parvosque senesque  
et lacrimas has quisque domi: sua credite matri  
viscera! ...”

... sic flexa Pelasgum  
corda labant, ferrique avidus mansueverat ardor. (*Thebaid.* 7. 519-22, 532-3)

“Moaning I turn to you for compassion,  
sons of Inachus, for you’ve each left old folks and little ones  
at home—and such tears! Entrust to a mother her own flesh  
and blood!”...

... So the swayed hearts  
of the Pelasgians wavered, their burning greed for steel died down.

By appealing to the Argive host to see themselves in relation to their families and loved ones, Jocasta disrupts the binary distinction between ally and enemy and instead offers the soldiers the ability to be both warrior *and* father/son/husband. Her presence blends opposing identities as it reminds all of their shared bonds and grief. This blending introduces ambivalence and opens up the possibility of reconciliation, in turn eroding the soft battlefield even before conflict has begun.

Whilst Adrastus immediately acquiesces to Jocasta’s appeals,<sup>290</sup> and Polynices seems eager to go and make peace with his brother, *cupit ire* (*Theb.* 7.537), there is one who challenges Jocasta. Tydeus, Polynices’ fellow exile and new brother-in-law, outraged at Jocasta’s intervention, responds by reasserting the *nefas* of who he sees as the enemy. His wrath, at least, he feels is justified by Eteocles’ earlier betrayal and his ambush by the fifty:

ubi tunc fidei pacisque sequestra  
mater eras, pulchris cum me nox vestra morata est

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<sup>290</sup> Though he is mostly absent from this episode, we learn of mild Adrastus’ agreement at *Thebaid.* 7. 537-8: *cupit ire, et mitis Adrastus/non vetat*

hospitiis? (Thebaid. 7. 542-4)

Where were you *then*, Mother Ambassador for Peace-  
in-Good-Faith, that night your style of hospitable charm  
bore me down?

The language of blood and violence comes easily for Tydeus for, unlike the rest of the Argive host, he has already fought a battle against Eteocles and the Thebans when he was attacked in the Grove of the Sphinx (*Thebaid.* 2.496-ff).<sup>291</sup> To Tydeus, Jocasta is not an ambassador coming to prevent the start of war but an enemy arriving in the middle of ongoing hostilities. His entrance onto the field of conflict occurs not when the Argive army make camp in front of Thebes, but at the moment when his attempt at diplomacy was met with violence and treachery (*Theb.* 2.383-481). Returning from the ambush of the fifty, Tydeus carries the battlefield with him already since book three, when he brought the war inside the Argive palace:<sup>292</sup>

“bello me, credite, bello...  
... nunc o nunc tempus in hostes,  
dum trepidi exanguesque metu, dum funera portant,  
nunc, socer, haec dum non manus excidit; ipse ego fessus  
quinguaginta illis heroum inmanibus umbris  
vulneraque ista ferens putri insiccata cruore  
protinus ire peto!” (Thebaid. 3. 355-6, 360-65)

“It was war, believe me, war! ...  
... Now, *now* is the time to attack,  
while they’re alarmed, stunned with fear, while they bury their dead—  
now, Sir, while my handiwork’s fresh! Although I’m worn out  
by those fifty immense, heroic deaths, though I bear  
wounds still running with foul gore, I request, even so,  
to set out at once!”

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Smolenaars 1994:245: ‘Tydeus alone is unambivalent in his approach’

<sup>292</sup> A scene I address in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis. See pp. 221-224.



For four lengthy books Tydeus' wishes have been delayed, and now that he has succeeded in bringing the Argives to war he will not be waylaid.

It is not only Jocasta who is a target of Tydeus' censure: Polynices is also admonished for his willingness to embrace the enemy. Yet, Tydeus' choice of words undermines his attempt to reestablish the battle-lines:

tu porro sequeris,  
 heu nimium mitis nimiumque oblite tuorum?  
 scilicet infestae cum te circum undique dextrae  
 nudabunt enses, haec flebit et arma quiescent? (*Thebaid.* 7. 546-9)

Follow her that far, will you,  
 all too mild and all too forgetful of your people?  
 But, of course! when all around you show fierce right hands  
 with blades bared, *she* sheds a tear and your weapons go slack.

Tydeus seeks to draw attention to the danger of believing Jocasta and attempts to make a clear distinction between their opponents, that is, the Thebans, and Polynices' allies: the Argives that surround him. However, *tuorum* (*Theb.* 7. 547) is ambiguous: it can refer to either the Thebans, and their deceitful nature, or to Polynices' new family, the men who followed him to wage war. In seeking to delineate between friend and foe, Tydeus draws further attention to Polynices' blurred identity. Polynices may stand within the Argive camp, but he remains Theban. The ambivalent status of their leader causes the Argives' own position to come into question. This is particularly true for Tydeus, who is invested in Polynices' continued allegiance to the Argives and hostility towards his former family as it justifies his own position within the narrative. Without Polynices, Tydeus would remain a fratricidal exile; with Polynices he plays the part of glorious brother-in-arms. The ambiguity that lingers within Tydeus' words to Polynices does not only serve to undermine Jocasta's appeals by casting doubt on the trustworthiness of the Thebans, it also exposes the ephemerality of the battlefield itself. Tydeus is asking Polynices if he will remain on his side, and within that question, trying to regain a footing on the shifting field of war.

Ultimately, just as the army were receptive to Jocasta's pleas, so they are easily turned by Tydeus' words (*Theb.* 7.559-62), the fragile space of conflict once again coming to dominate

and infiltrate the Third Space of enunciation. Accordingly, the Argives respond to his battle cry with a renewed desire for warfare: *arma iterum furiaeque placent*, ‘Once again arms and madness are in favour’ (*Theb.* 7.562). It is at precisely this moment, the rise of the Argives’ collective bloodlust, that Tisiphone takes the final step to push the participants onto the battlefield (7.562-3). However, instead of depicting the armies coming out to meet one another on the plain, Statius moves the focus of the narrative away from Jocasta, Tydeus and Polynices, and onto two of Bacchus’ tigresses, who, retired from warfare, *sanguinis oblitae* (*Theb.* 7.569), now peacefully roam the countryside:

iamque ipsi colles, ipsa has (quis credat?) amabant  
 armenta, atque ausae circum mugire iuvencae  
 quippe nihil grassata fames: manus obvia pascit,  
 exceptantque cibos fusoque horrenda supinant  
 ora mero, vaga rure quies; si quando benigno  
 urbem iniere gradu, domus omnis et omnia sacris  
 templa calent, ipsumque fides intrasse Lyaeum. (*Thebaid.* 7. 572-8)

By now the very hills, and—who would believe it?—even  
 the flocks dote on them, heifers make bold to low all around them.  
 For no hunger goads them—there’s always a hand to feed them,  
 they take food freely, open their hideous jaws for jets  
 of wine. They roam the countryside, sleep where they will;  
 if padding, benign, they enter a town, each house, each shrine  
 glows with sacred fires, believing Lyaeus himself has come.

Living in harmony with their neighbours and surroundings the tigresses are, at first, a vision of peace. The way in which they move freely between the various domains of field, house and temple illustrates how, within times of peace, social boundaries are permeable. Statius’ depiction of the tigresses is laced with the imagery of eating, drinking, and comfort emphasising further their domestication and providing a rare image of Thebes as a eurhythmic community.

Yet, peace has already been shown to be vulnerable and allusive. The tigresses’ softening from creatures of war to peace is as fragile as the Argives’ brief placation at Jocasta’s words (7.532-3). Now, just as the Argive soldiers are easily swayed back towards conflict (*Theb.*

7.559-62), so the tigresses return to their martial nature as the emergence of the space of the battlefield redefines the landscape. In this instance, such a transformation is not ushered in by Tydeus' stirring words of warfare but by the lashing of Tisiphone's whip (*Theb.* 7.579-81):

erumpunt non agnoscentibus agris.  
 ceu duo diverso pariter si fulmina caelo  
 rupta cadant longumque trahant per nubila crinem (*Thebaid.* 7. 581-3)

they burst forth, turned into something the fields knew not—  
 as if two bolts of lightning had burst at once from a distant  
 point in the sky, hurtling, blazing a long trail through the clouds

So changed that they are now unrecognisable, divorced from the landscape they used to freely traverse, the tigresses lose their domestic qualities and set upon Amphiaras' charioteer and the warriors Idas and Acamas, killing all three (7.584-89). Incensed at the slaughter, Arcadian Aconteus hunts down the tigresses (7.590-2), driving them to the walls of Thebes (7.592) and repeatedly stabbing them with darts and spears (7.593-5). Though the deaths of the men are merely mentioned (7.591) Statius takes care in describing the slow death of the tigresses:

illae autem longo cum limite fusi  
 sanguinis ad portas utrimque exstantia ducunt  
 spicula semianimes, gemituque imitante querelas  
 saucia dilectis acclinant pectora muris. (*Thebaid.* 7. 595-8)

Spilling a long trail of blood, the tigers  
 dragged to the Gates the shafts that bristled from both their sides;  
 they yowled, a sound like pitiful human cries; half-dead,  
 they leant their riddled chests against the walls they loved.

More human than their attackers, the overkill combines with the tigresses' moans to build pathos and ensure the reader feels the loss of the creatures, which is then rendered fully in the grief of the Thebans (*Theb.* 7.599-603). That the tigresses are trapped outside the walls further stresses the way in which war establishes barriers between spaces: the ultimate barrier being death. Gone is blended, fluid, hybrid, landscape of peace. Consolidated and re-inforced

in the minds and hearts of those attending these rapid developments, the space of war has solidified previously porous boundaries, dividing Thebes and the surrounding landscape into inflexible territories pitted against each other.

In this moment and place, where hybridity and ambiguity are defeated, Jocasta's position within the Argive camp becomes untenable: she is forced to leave those who are now her enemies, *'hostes'* (*Theb.* 7.609). Though the transition from the Theban walls back to the Argive camp is abrupt (7.608-9), the parallel between the transformation of the tigresses and the army's sudden desire for warfare is reiterated as Statius contrasts the soldiers' previous docility, *'qui modo tam mites'*, 'who were lately so gentle' (7.611), with their now open hostility towards Jocasta and her daughters. They force the women out: *'repellunt'* (*Theb.* 7.610). Just as suddenly as the beasts set upon Amphiaraus' charioteer, the Argives break out of camp and, finally, *'nullo uenit ordine bellum'*: 'war comes in chaos' (7.616).

The beginning of battle in Book 7 is remarkable in its disorder. As Rhiannon Ash notes in her recent treatment of Statius' battle narrative: 'this is an extraordinary moment. Despite the years of preparation, the normal military hierarchy has disintegrated entirely'.<sup>293</sup> The Argives wage war chaotically, with chariots and infantry intermingled (7.618-9), all ranks together (7.617), and standards following their men (7.622-3). Alongside the chaos within the narrative, the traditional literary structure of the epic battlefield also appears to have broken down. The alacrity of the fighting means that the invocation that should have announced the outbreak of hostilities, as it does, for example, in *Iliad.* 2.484-93 and *Aeneid.* 7.641-6 and 10.163-5, is delayed until after the beginning of battle (*Theb.* 7.628-30).<sup>294</sup>

The displacement of the invocation to the muses is not the only way in which Statius muddles the limits of the conflict. As I have already noted, the battlefield is not only spatial but also intrinsically temporal: a chronotope. The coming of the dawn and the commencement of battle tend to be linked as part of the chronotope of the battlefield: the rising sun signals the chairological time for the advancement of the armies onto the field of war.<sup>295</sup> Yet, in *Thebaid.*

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<sup>293</sup> Ash 2015:212.

<sup>294</sup> For a full catalogue of invocations in epic see Juhnke 1972:88, Georgacopoulou 2005:162-70, and for the *Thebaid* in particular see Steiniger 1998: *passim*, all of whom are noted by Meyers 2015 to whom I am indebted.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. Rossi 2004:76-8, 87.

7, this advancement seems to be missing. Instead dawn shows two sides unwilling to engage in conflict,<sup>296</sup> until they are forced into a messy and confused melee (7.615-627).<sup>297</sup>

Dawn may not signal the start of battle for the Argives and the Thebans, but it has heralded the encounter of two unlikely forces. As I show in my exploration of the opening of this passage, the first advance is led by Jocasta when she goes with Ismene and Antigone to assail the Argive camp (7.470-81). This feminine, subversive march is juxtaposed with the forced counter-attack of the previously docile Bacchic tigresses. These two 'armies' traverse the battlefield and form an assault on the Argive and Theban camps, unwittingly taking their place, filling the void left by the long narrative delay, and hastening the establishment of conflict. In a perversion of the rhythms of warfare, women and domesticated beasts invade this masculine, martial space. That they are not only present, but able to participate in the formation of the battlefield exposes the fluidity and expansiveness of this space in the *Thebaid*. Within the *Thebaid*, no-one is excluded from the field of war: its paradoxical inclusivity weakening polarities at the very moment they are being enforced. Propped and dropped by emotional acts of conviction, the battlefield outside Thebes combines two seemingly paradoxical qualities: divisive alienating imperviousness and a transient fragility.

The war at home: Ismene encounters Atys.

If familial relationships blur and expand the boundaries of the battlefield, then this next encounter, the tragic meeting of Ismene and her fiancé Atys, shows how this blurred battlefield invades and destabilises the domestic realm in turn. After Jocasta and her daughters are expelled from the Argive camp they return to the Theban palace and are ostensibly separated from the chaos of the battlefield outside the walls.<sup>298</sup> Statius' narrative gaze then remains fixed on the warfare outside for 820 lines, chronicling the death of Euneus and Amphiaraus' descent to the underworld, before returning to the Theban women. The transition from the bloody battlefield is marked:<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Cf. *Thebaid*. 7. 470 where both the Argives and the Thebans remain behind their walls.

<sup>297</sup> This is contrast to the traditional flow of battle as outlined by Rossi 2014:73-83; 84-104.

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Scioli 2010:202, Augoustakis 2010:71; 2016:291-2.

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Augoustakis 2016:292 n. 607 '**interea** a forceful transition, from external to internal, from the battlefield to the oikos'

interea thalami secreta in parte sorores,  
 par aliud morum miserique innoxia proles  
 Oedipodae, varias miscent sermone querelas. (*Thebaid.* 8. 607-9)

Meanwhile, in their bedroom's quiet seclusion, the sisters—  
 two innocent offspring of the wretched Oedipus, quite unlike  
 the other pair—laced their talk with several complaints.

Whilst the Antigone and Ismene talk safely within the *thalamus*, their thoughts are not on the violence raging outside but on the abstract causes of the war itself. They replay their mother's marriage to her son (*Theb.* 8.610), their father's *nefas* (8.610), Polynices' exile (8.611) and Eteocles' rule (8.611). The sisters rehearse these events over and over until they cease to find words: '*quem uicisse uelint: tacite praeponderat exul*' (*Theb.* 8.615). In an ominous simile, Statius compares Antigone and Ismene to Philomela and Procne (8.616-20), whose violent transformation into birds renders their speech '*truncum ac flebile murmur*', 'a stream of warbling tearful, mutilated sounds' (8.619).<sup>300</sup> Though these pitiful cries foreshadow the groaning and tears shed at the epic's close, like Pandion's daughters, Ismene and Antigone are, for the moment, rendered silent.

Breaking the '*longa silentia*' (8.621) that follows the sisters' sharing of anguish, Ismene takes the opportunity to inform Antigone of her latest dreams:

"ecce ego, quae thalamos nec si pax alta maneret,  
 tractarem sensu (pudet heu!) conubia vidi  
 nocte, soror; sponsum unde mihi sopor attulit amens  
 vix notum visu? (*Thebaid.* 8. 625-8)

"Consider:

last night, Sister, I who, even if deep peace prevailed,  
 would find marriage distasteful—I saw my wedding (I'm so  
 ashamed!). How is it that mindless sleep brings me as spouse

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Augoustakis 2016:296-300. Though traditionally transformed into nightingales, here Statius' description renders Pandion's daughters as swallows.

a man I scarce know by sight?...

Within the *thalamus*, a space charged with sexual symbolism, Ismene dreams of marriage, specifically her own marriage, which has been delayed by the ongoing conflict. She is at pains to articulate the shame she feels that this virginal space could be violated, even if only in dreaming (*Theb.* 8.626). Her concern for her own virtue seems incongruous against the very present threat of her brothers' death on the battlefield, yet perhaps it is a symptom of her present isolation from the field of war. Enclosed and protected in this internal space Ismene is able to maintain hopes of reconciliation for Eteocles and Polynices (*Theb.* 8.634-5), despite the reality of the war raging outside the walls (8.634-5).

However, even as Ismene seeks to postpone thoughts regarding the conflict's likely fatal outcome, her dreams expose the war's infiltration into this previously safe domestic space:

“... turbata repente  
omnia cernebam, subitusque intercidit ignis,  
meque sequebatur rabido clamore reposcens  
mater Atyn.”                    (*Thebaid.* 8.630-3)

“Instantly, all in my dream was  
confusion—a flash fire sprang up, *she* was chasing me  
—Atys' mother—raving, shrieking, demanding her son's  
return.”

Atys' mother, Ismene's potential mother-in-law, harangues Ismene as if she is a fury swooping down in revenge. Her shrieks and the sudden flash of flames subsume the marriage dream beneath the symbolism of death, loss, and violence. Whilst neither Ismene or Antigone understand the dream at the point of its narration, the reader is fully aware of its significance, having witnessed Atys' destruction at the hands of Tydeus just moments before (*Theb.* 8.577-607).<sup>301</sup> Ismene's dream muddles the chronology of events by placing the premonition of Atys' death after Statius' depiction of the actual event. Dreaming of Atys brings his entry into the palace forward in time from the real event, thus dislocating him

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<sup>301</sup> Cf. Scioli 2010:212: 'Ismene reveals her inability to connect this dream to what is happening on the battlefield, thereby underscoring the lack of connection between the sequestered sisters and the action of the war.'

within time and space. Atys' temporal and spatial dislocation mirrors his and Ismene's social limbo in the space between husband and wife. It seems the battlefield is beginning to encroach even into this private, feminine space through Ismene's subconscious fears.

Ismene's prophecy is fulfilled when the young man is brought from the battlefield and into the palace:

talia nectebant, subito cum pigra tumultu  
expavit domus, et multo sudore receptus  
fertur Atys, servans animam iam sanguine nullo,  
cui manus in plaga, dependet languida cervix  
exterior clipeo, crinesque a fronte supini. (*Thebaid.* 8. 636-40)

These the words they were weaving, when a sudden tumult shocked  
the somnolent house, and Atys, rescued with much sweat,  
was borne in, still alive but by now drained of blood;  
one hand on his wound, his limp neck dangled, extending beyond  
his shield's rim; his hair fell back, away from his brow.

As Atys enters the palace so the battlefield expands and contorts this previously feminine and domestic space. This disruption is emphasised by the abrupt end to the sisters' weaving of conversation, weaving being a particularly feminine, domestic, act.<sup>302</sup> Ismene's denial of the war is no longer sustainable as she is forced out of the safety of the *thalamus* to confront her betrothed's death. Whereas the establishment of the battlefield on the natural landscape gave symbolic meaning to a space lacking signification, Atys' entry into the Theban palace allows the encroachment of the battlefield into a space which already functions according to specific rhythms. This results in a blurring of the martial and domestic, where rituals from both worlds collide and transform in terrible and frightening ways. Just as Jocasta's entry into the Argive camp diluted war's fixed polarities, so Atys' and Ismene's encounter creates an interstitial space where the languages of domestic and martial life become muddled and contaminated.

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<sup>302</sup> Cf. Augoustakis 2016:306.



Atys enters the palace with all the trappings of a fallen hero,<sup>303</sup> but his invasion into this domestic, feminine realm emphasises his status as Ismene's betrothed. In a corruption of the marriage ritual, Ismene is then forced to meet Atys as a bride meeting her bridegroom. Her maiden shame is visible as her mother gives her to the dying man:<sup>304</sup>

exclamant famulae, tollebat in ora  
 virgo manus, tenuit saevus pudor; attamen ire  
 cogitur, indulget summum hoc Iocasta iacenti  
 ostenditque offertque. quater iam morte sub ipsa  
 ad nomen visus defectaque fortiter ora  
 sustulit; illam unam neglecto lumine caeli  
 aspicit et uultu non exsatiatur amato. (*Thebaid.* 8. 644-50)

Servant girls shrieked, the virgin raised her hands to her face,  
 gripped by fierce shame. Still she was forced to go to him—  
 this last wish Jocasta granted the dying man (“See?  
 Here she is”). Though now on the point of death, when he heard  
 her name, he bravely raised his head and failing eyes  
 four times; at her alone he gazed, neglecting the light  
 of heaven—he could not get enough of the face he loved.

Death renders the marriage barren at the moment when it should be consummated. Just as in her dream (*Theb.* 8.630), Ismene can only gaze upon Atys whilst he calls out her name, and he, rendered impotent by Tydeus' blade, can only gaze back. Fixed by his dying gaze, and with his mother and father absent, Ismene is widowed in the act of being wed. The only time Ismene and Atys touch is when she closes his eyes after death. This intimate act dissolves any remaining border between the bedroom and the battlefield: Ismene is no longer an innocent maiden sequestered in the *thalamus*, but a grieving widow tending to the fallen. Her grief is the final act that facilitates her entrance into the war. Before Atys' entry Ismene was

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<sup>303</sup> Wounded and lying on his shield, Atys resembles previous epic heroes, notably Pallas (*Aeneid.* 10.506) and Lausus (*Aeneid.* 10.841) For parallels between Atys' dropping neck and other instances see Parkes 2012:223 and Augoustakis 2016:307.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. the marriage of Argia and Deiphyle at *Thebaid.* 2.230-4 and Lavinia blushing before Turnus at *Aeneid.* 12. 64-69

separate and in denial,<sup>305</sup> with his death she joins the ranks of women who have already had to mourn their loved ones: it is the point where she is forced to accept the reality of war.

Yet, Atys does not only expand the battlefield into the Theban palace through his death. Earlier on in the action, Atys is shown to misunderstand what it means to be a warrior in a way that dilutes the symbolism of the battlefield itself, blurring the domestic and martial realms long before his “wedding” to Ismene. To understand how Atys’ misinterpretation of the symbolic economy of warfare undermines the battlefield, it is important to go back to his entrance into the narrative and see how the young man is first described:

triplici velaverat ostro  
 surgentes etiamnum umeros et levia mater  
 pectora; tunc auro phaleras auroque sagittas  
 cingulaque et manicas, ne coniuge vilior iret,  
 presserat et mixtum cono crispaverat aurum. (*Thebaid.* 8.564-8)

Just days ago,  
 his mother had cloaked his broadening shoulders and supple chest  
 with triple-dipped crimson, and (lest his bride outshine him!)  
 she’d gold plated his harness,  
 gold plated his arrows and belt  
 —armbands too—and had scales of gold overlapped on his helm-cone.

Bedecked in gold and purple, dressed by his mother in clothes which serve poor purpose as protection in battle, Atys strides out to meet the Greeks like a bride going out to meet her groom.<sup>306</sup> This feminine appearance stands in stark contrast to Tydeus’ virility and the Ogygian mocks the youth even as he strikes him down, not deigning to take the spoils:

“...vix, si bellum comitata relictis  
 Deipyle thalamis, illi illudenda tulissem.” (*Thebaid.* 8.590-1)

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<sup>305</sup> Though she is present with Jocasta when her mother goes to the Argives, she only performs the role of daughter and sister and leaves once fighting begins.

<sup>306</sup> Indeed, as Scioli 2010:204 notes, the use of *coniunx* (*Thebaid.* 8.567) is ambiguous enough that ‘it is possible to infer from this line that Atys’s mother dresses him up as she does so that he not look less impressive than a bride, that is, so that he appear dressed like a bride on her wedding day’. Cf. Hershkowitz 1994:134-40.

“Had Deiphyle left our bed and come with me here, I’d scarce bestow this on her as a joke!”

Tydeus sees Atys as of less martial worth than his own wife. Yet, even as he mocks Atys’ incongruous femininity, his reference to Deiphyle is itself a muddling of Tydeus’ identities of husband and soldier. Atys’ appearance exposes the neat separation of peace and war to be false: even Tydeus retains his ties to his wife. Atys’ death is used by Statius to question Tydeus’ heroic status, as it comes at the end of Tydeus’ *aristeia*: by ending the sequence of deaths with Atys, the bride, Statius undermines the previous acts of glory. There is no status to be gained in defeating such a feminised figure. He then goes on to use Menoeceus, who shames his fellow Thebans for their neglect of Atys’ body, to remind the warriors of their own wives and temporarily delay the action on the battlefield:

“meliusne iacet pro sanguine nostro  
 hospes Atys? tantum hospes adhuc et coniugis ultor  
 infelix nondum iste suae; nos pignora tanta  
 prodimus?” (Thebaid.8.602-5)

“Did Atys, our guest, not die, quite nobly,  
 to save our blood? Still only a guest, poor man, avenging  
 a bride not yet his. Do *we* betray a pledge so  
 fine?”

Menoceus’ words turn the shame that Tydeus directs on Atys back onto the warriors themselves (*Theb.* 8.605-6). Each of these instances disrupt the battlefield’s economy of status and heroic glory. As the battlefield becomes less distinct from the home, acts which should bestow status, such as the killing of a foe, become inglorious.

Together, Atys and Ismene become lost in the interstices between peace and war. Their marriage dislocates them both from their native environments: Atys becomes the bride on the battlefield, Ismene the widow in the *thalamus*. This contamination of two previously separate worlds results from their mutual misappropriation of space: Ismene dreams of Atys allowing him into the bedroom, and Atys enters the battlefield dressed for a wedding. This muddles spaces and leads to fatal misunderstandings, whilst at the same time exposing the artificiality of the battlefield itself. When Ismene and Atys attempt to navigate the fluid and

hybrid battlefield according to fixed social ritual they fail to understand how the space is vulnerable to redefinition. Despite the ‘relocation of the home and the world’<sup>307</sup> that has occurred with the outbreak of conflict, Ismene and Atys fail to realise that they are now estranged from what was familiar. Their encounter exposes the interdependence of space and subject in the creation and reception of meaning: it is a forced ‘extra-territorial [...] initiation’<sup>308</sup> which confuses the borders of the battlefield and the home. Their misappropriation of space causes contamination and destruction. To paraphrase Bhabha: the recesses of the *thalamus* become the site of the most intimate of invasions.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Bhabha 1994:13.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.* This is a process Bhabha terms ‘unhomeliness’.

<sup>309</sup> Original quotation: ‘The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions’. Bhabha 1994:13.

### 3.iii. 'Hostilem... amnem' (*Thebaid.* 1.43): Battling enemy waters.

Chaos in the River Langia: entering the wet-battlefield.

The expansion and dilution of the battlefield as it transgresses and inhabits Thebes' *cognata moenia* is not limited to the interplay between the previously segregate domestic and martial realms. From the moment the Argive host arrives at the banks of the River Langia (*Theb.* 4.800),<sup>310</sup> till Hippomedon confronts the raging Ismenos (*Theb.* 9.421-520), water also blurs the boundaries between individuals, challenging categories of identity and notions of enmity. Rivers, such as the Asopos (*Theb.* 7.424-69), define the physical boundaries of the battlefield and, in doing so, become transitional: the water transforming identities as it allows passage into and out of the field of war. However, despite their position at the edge of the space of conflict, the rivers' fluidity allows the borders of the battlefield to ebb and flow, co-opting previously peaceful spaces into the chaos of warfare and dislocating individuals from the field of war. Beginning with the River Langia (4.800-*ff*), continuing with the River Asopos (7.424-69), and finishing with the River Ismenos (9.196-539), this section explores how the *Thebaid's* waterways mark a transition from peace to conflict and, at the same time, remain spaces of composite identity, whose fluidity unsettles and elides the space of enunciation.

The crossing of the Langia takes place in a time and place seemingly far removed from the beginning of hostilities on the Cadmeian Plain. However, this Nemean river begins the process of the Argive entry onto the battlefield, even if the battlefield itself is not yet fully formed. As discussed in the preceding chapter,<sup>311</sup> book four sees the Argive host lost and dehydrated, wandering the forest in search of water. They then stumble upon Hypsipyle (*Theb.* 4.739), who agrees to lead them to the River Langia as all the other rivers have been dried up at Bacchus' behest (4.649-90). The subsequent immersion foreshadows the crossing of the Asopos in book seven, when the Argives finally enter Theban territory, and establishes a pseudo-battlefield in preparation for the pseudo-battle of funeral games in book six. Just as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, *aterna nocte*, the field of war stretches back into the narrative, beginning long before camps are erected and standards raised.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Once again, I am following the bracketed line numbers from Shackleton Bailey's Loeb edition of Book 4.

<sup>311</sup> See pp. 65-69.

<sup>312</sup> See p. 180 below.

Before the soldiers see the River Langia they hear it, ‘*rauca sonat*’ (*Theb.* 4.801), as the sound of the current pounding against stones, ‘*saxosumque impulit aures/murmur*’ (4.801-2) breaks through the shadowy green. In this way, the Langia encroaches on and overlays the forest. This overlapping of spaces is something that Lefebvre posited in his analysis of social-space:

*Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have naturally limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia...*<sup>313</sup>

Though the forest and the river are spaces with concrete physical features, the sound of the river as heard by the Argives, penetrates into the forest allowing the space of the river to transgress the latter’s boundaries. The Argives’ embodied experience, that is their perception of the sound of the river, transforms the forest and the river into ‘social spaces’ dissolving the boundaries between the two. Hearing the water, the Argives begin to move into the new space of the river, simultaneously starting the process of moving out of the forest that has so far hindered their journey toward Thebes and toward war.

When they reach their destination, the army’s entrance into the water is chaotic and destructive: the soldiers discard all sense of social position and leap into the water (*Theb.* 4.809-12). Yet, within this chaos there is also intimacy, as the Langia’s waters elide the space between fellow soldiers:

hos turbo rapax, hos lubrica fallunt  
 saxa, nec implicitos fluvio reverentia reges  
 proterere aut mersisse uado clamantis amici  
 ora. fremunt undae, longusque a fontibus amnis  
 diripitur... (*Thebaid.* 4. 813-17)

Some men the swirling current deceived, others  
 the slippery rocks. No one scrupled to trample on royalty  
 floundering out in the flood or to tread a friend under, despite  
 his cries for help. Waves roared; far downstream, the water  
 levels dropped...

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<sup>313</sup> Lefebvre 1974:86-7.

Within the water men collide with each other, trampling on friends and superiors, as the river dislocates them from the ground. The symbolic and literal distance between officer, charioteer, and foot soldier is removed (4.811-13). This results in a perverse companionship which transcends military hierarchy: *'incubuere uadis passim discrimine nullo/turba simul primique'* (4.809-10).<sup>314</sup> Within the waves humble fighters come into intimate contact with their kings (4.814). Yet, this new-found closeness is shown to be perilous: individuals become lost, their voices unheard in the chaos (4.815-16). As the strict military hierarchy breaks down so do the bonds between comrades, resulting in friends trampling friends. Without the certainty of firm ground and within the ambiguity of the river the Argives are saved from dehydration, but this relief is muddled with the danger of their dislocation under the waves.

The significance of the Argive entry into the waters of the River Langia becomes fully apparent through Statius use of a simile comparing the confusion and struggle with the coming together of two armies in combat:

agmina bello  
decertare putes iustumque in gurgite Martem  
perfurere aut captam tolli victoribus urbem. (*Thebaid.* 4. 821-3)

One would think that armies were fighting it out in battle and that a regular war raged in that waters or that a captured city was being destroyed by conquerors.<sup>315</sup>

As they enter the river it is as if the Argives enter onto the battlefield. Or, perhaps it is better to suggest that the water, this interstitial transitional space, brings the Argives closer to the conflict that they desire. Nemea has been a digression from their intended journey towards Thebes, a pause in the march towards war,<sup>316</sup> yet here in the River Langia is a glimpse of that journey's conclusion.

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<sup>314</sup> 'Into the stream they plunged helter skelter, keeping no rank, a mob of men and officers mixed'

<sup>315</sup> Trans. Parkes 2012:45. In her commentary accompanying this translation, Ruth Parkes notes the incongruity between the image of a regular or just *'iustum'* war with the reality that there is only one army which has here turned against itself in 'nefarious civil war' (Parkes 2012:324).

<sup>316</sup> See p. 8 of the introduction to this thesis for an overview of Statius' use of delay.

Though the waters of the River Langia foreshadow the Argive transition out of Nemea and towards war, this is only the beginning of their move onto the battlefield; it will be another two books before they find themselves before Thebes. Yet, the River Langia does mark a transition into a space of conflict, even though it is not the entrance to the Argives' final battlefield. The violence that occurs within the water does persist after the army has slaked its thirst in the death of Opheltes, the first casualty of war (*Theb.* 5.538-40). Indeed, this death leads to the creation of a pseudo-battlefield in the form of the Nemean games (6.249-946).<sup>317</sup> The Langia not only marks the transition towards conflict, it also hints at the confusing and precarious nature of the battle to come. This battlefield will be a space where identities become muddled, relationships are broken down, and the enemy's location is elusive. On the shifting wet-battlefield it is difficult to hold your position, and as individuals become dislocated so the rhythms of war are irrevocably altered.

#### Completing the transition to conflict: Confronting *Pater Asopos*.

Spurred on by Mars after delaying in Nemea, the Argives resume their march towards Thebes, stopping for neither rest nor fear. For two days and nights they travel (*Theb.* 7.398-402), haunted by evil omens (7.402-423), unwavering in their drive towards war. Yet, when at last they reach the banks of the Asopos, the final obstacle separating them from their destination,<sup>318</sup> the Argives see the river pouring out in flood and suddenly halt, ceased by fear. In contrast to Langia's smooth green waters (4.817-18), the Asopos rages:

non ausae transmittere protinus alae  
hostilem fluvium; forte et trepidantibus ingens  
descendebat agris, animos sive imbrifer arcus,  
seu montana dedit nubes, seu fluminis illa  
mens fuit obiectusque vado pater arma vetabat. (*Thebaid.* 7.425-9)

...the squadrons lacked the nerve to cross your hostile

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<sup>317</sup> For an exhaustive treatment of how the games prefigure the events of the battlefield proper see Lovatt 2001 & 2005: *passim*.

<sup>318</sup> The Asopos is given as the limit of Argive influence as part of the description of Tydeus return to Argos at *Thebaid.* 3. 337: '*quidquid et Asopon veteresque interiacet Argos*'. As Parkes 2014:414 notes the river 'appears to act as the entrance to hostile territory'.



waters straight off—which, as it happened, were rushing in floods  
 over the terrified meadows: either a soaking rainbow  
 or mountain cloudbursts had swollen his current—or else the River  
 Father purposely blocked and forbade their weapons with waves.

Instead of allowing the Argives to transgress the borders, the river violently pushes into the spaces either side, seemingly lengthening the distance between the Argives and their goal.<sup>319</sup> The most striking difference between this encounter and the one in Nemea is the agency with which *Pater Asopos* resists the Argive intrusion. Whilst Statius makes clear that the rushing waters may be the result of natural causes (*Theb.* 7.427-8), he also infers that the river himself may have cause to hinder Argive progress. The main reason for such animosity can be found in the catalogue of Theban warriors (*Theb.* 7.244-373), where the warrior Hypseus is named as Asopos' offspring:

“Asopos genuisse datur, dignusque videri  
 tunc pater, abreptis cum torrentissimus exit  
 pontibus, aut natae tumidus cum virginis ultor  
 flumina concussit generum indignata Tonantem.” (*Thebaid.* 7. 315-8)

“Sired by Asopos, they say—a father worth watching, that time  
 when, in spectacular spate, he ripped out bridges in passing;  
 or when, as his virgin daughter's swollen avenger,  
 he lashed his waves, outraged at the Thunderer as son-in-law!”

Here, Statius is not only referring to Asopos as the father of Hypseus, but also as the father of Aegina, ‘*natae...uirginis*’ (*Theb.* 7.317), who was taken from Asopos waters and raped by Jupiter: ‘*raptam patriis Aeginan ab undis*’ (7.319). His response is to challenge the stars themselves, and despite his disadvantage, Statius shows Asopos to be a fierce and worthy opponent to the morally deficient Jupiter (*Theb.* 7.319-29). This earlier portrayal of Asopos as an avenging father, so close to the narration of the river crossing 100 lines later, forces a reading of the river as a social space, as it is not only a body of water but also the body of an individual: the Asopos is both person and place, that is, the location of conflict and an agent of war.

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<sup>319</sup> ‘*late medius timor*’ *Thebaid.* 7.438. Cf. Smolenaars 1994:194.

The depiction of a river which is both person and place, a composite social space and being, is something we shall see repeated in book nine, where Statius narrates Hippomedon's *aristeia* in the waters of River Ismenos, killing Ismenos' own grandson, Crenaeus.<sup>320</sup> Yet, before Hippomedon makes his final stand, he first wades into the raging waters of the Asopos:

tunc ferus Hippomedon magno cum fragmine ripae  
 cunctantem deiecit equum, ducibusque relictis  
 gurgite de medio frenis suspensus et armis,  
 "ite viri," clamat, "sic vos in moenia primus  
 ducere, sic clausas voveo perfringere Thebas." (*Thebaid.* 7. 430-4)

Then fierce Hippomedon forced his hesitant mount to jump down with a mighty splash and, from out in midstream, holding his reins and weapons both, he shouts at the leaders left on shore:  
 "Forward men! and I'll be first—I swear it!—to lead you onto the walls, first to smash through the Gates of Thebes!"

By entering the waters of the Asopos, Hippomedon has begun the incursion into enemy territory. However, this is not all his actions signify. Armed, he penetrates Asopos' body as if he were cutting down a foe. Hippomedon's movement into the water demonstrates the violent intimacy with which a weapon penetrates the body, as his own body becomes a weapon against the waves. With it he violently opens a wound within *Pater* Asopos, rendering the river impotent. As this is hybrid space, both body and landscape, Hippomedon's actions are akin to dealing Asopos the killing blow. The enemy has been defeated and Hippomedon can now lead the Argives to claim Asopos' territory. In defeating the river, he gains glory and status in the eyes of his comrades, despite his unusual opponent. However, Hippomedon's position within the river also mitigates the separation between victor and victim. His actions bring him into a forced intimacy with his foe. And, like the chaotic intermingling of soldiers, captains, and calvary, that occurred in the River Langia, this intimacy is fraught with peril. For Father Asopos, the battlefield becomes established within his very self.

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<sup>320</sup> An episode I treat below, pp. 139-163.

Shamed by Hippomedon's courage, the rest of the Argive host now cross the river (7.435). But the crossing itself is again a kind of battle, with Asopos' raging waters (blended with Asopos' ancestral animosity) subdued by Hippomedon's unstoppable bull:

praecipitant cuncti fluvio puduitque secutos.  
 ac velut ignotum si quando armenta per amnem  
 pastor agit, stat triste pecus, procul altera tellus  
 omnibus et late medius timor: ast ubi ductor  
 taurus init fecitque vadum, tunc mollior unda,  
 tunc faciles saltus, visaeque accedere ripae. (*Thebaid.* 7. 435-40)

All plunged headlong into the flood, ashamed they'd hung back  
 like cattle which stand in a wretched huddle, whose herdsman  
 as made them come to an unknown stream: all think the far bank's  
 too far, the fear between broad; but once the lead bull  
 wades in and breaks its force, then the current's gentler  
 the plunge is easy, the banks seem to draw together.

The way in which Hippomedon subdues the waves, interrupting and dispelling Asopos' raging waters, was foretold from the catalogue of Argive warriors, where Hippomedon is compared to the Centaur Hylas, who 'plunges into the River Peneus, breasting and damming its mighty stream' (4.143-4).<sup>321</sup> Each of these images emphasise Hippomedon's leadership and courage, once again demonstrating his high status on the field of war.

Yet, the way in which Hippomedon enables the crossing of the Asopos also shares elements of a different crossing, one which casts doubt on the glorious nature of Hippomedon's actions. This is the crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar and his army, a crossing which represents the commencement of civil war:

primus in obliquum sonipes opponitur amnem  
 excepturus aquas; molli tum cetera rumpit  
 turba uado faciles iam fracti fluminis undas. (Lucan. *De Bello Civili.* 1. 220-2)

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<sup>321</sup> *'ingenti donec Peneia saltu/stagna subit magnumque obiectus detinet amnem'*. I am indebted to Smolenaars 1994:195 for noting the cyclical pattern, and therefore significance, of these similes.

First the cavalry is drawn up aslant the stream  
 to take the water's force, then the remaining throng passes through  
 the unresisting waters of the river broken now—an easy ford.<sup>322</sup>

Just as the Asopos resists Hippomedon, so the Rubicon resists Caesar, appearing before the general to forbid this march towards war (*De Bello Civili*. 1. 183-92), a warning that Caesar ignores (1.192-212). The intertextual similarities between the crossing of the Asopos and the crossing of the Rubicon are important,<sup>323</sup> as they emphasise transition from peace to war within the *Thebaid*. However, the resulting identification of Hippomedon with Caesar throws up problematic associations with dominance and unchecked power which echoes the *nuda potestas* (*Thebaid*. 1.150) of Polynices and Eteocles. Also, by evoking Caesar's war against his own people, Statius reinforces the composite identities of friend/family/enemy which are held in unique proximity within the civil war of both epics. In crossing the Rubicon, Caesar, is simultaneously enemy and native. In this way, the wet-battlefield marks not only the transition towards war but also renders the binary framework of ally/enemy unstable, so much so that the status economy of heroism loses its potency.

Conflict sustained: battle in the Ismenos.

After the crossing of the Asopos (*Theb.* 7.424-40) it is only a short while before battle begins (7.608). With Jocasta's unsuccessful supplication and the commencement of fighting, the narrative becomes dominated by the action on the battlefield. The deaths of Amphiarus (*Theb.* 7.771-8.126) and Tydeus (8.456-766) fill the remainder of Books 7 and 8. It is in the wake of these deaths that the story returns to the deeds of Hippomedon as he drives the Thebans to the banks of the Ismenos in an attempt to recover Tydeus' corpse (*Theb.* 9.120). The temporal conjunction of Tydeus' death, the loss of his corpse, and Hippomedon's grief all suggest there should be a pause in the action; a moment's respite for the armies to recover and regroup. Yet, this is categorically not the case. Book 9 begins with Polynices' excessive grief at Tydeus' death (*Theb.* 9.36-85) but, after only a momentary pause, Eteocles' army regroup and renew their advance causing the battlefield and the aftermath of battle to

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<sup>322</sup> Braund 1992:8-9.

<sup>323</sup> For a full account of the structural similarities between the two epic scenes see Smolenaars 1994:188-9.

overlap. In this hybrid moment where concerns for the fallen compete with continuing warfare, Hippomedon takes up the defence of 'Tydeus' body (9.86-147). This prioritisation of the dead over the living is problematic and unsustainable — a fact exploited by Tisiphone when she fools Hippomedon into leaving 'Tydeus' body to save Adrastus, who is, in reality, safe (*Theb.* 9.148-79). Such muddling of the practice of warfare with the process of grief raises the question of when the conflict will end. It is in this interstitial space, between war and its aftermath, that the battle within the Ismenos takes place. However, whilst the Langia and the Asopos allowed for a transition onto the battlefield, it is unclear whether Ismenos will provide an escape from the seemingly endless war.

The events that take place within and around the River Ismenos form the most sustained treatment of the wet-battlefield within the *Thebaid*, painting a vivid portrait of the war's horrific violence. Perhaps it should be unsurprising that Hippomedon reaches the river here, in a hybrid space of conflict and lament, as the Ismenos flows throughout the narrative from the epic's beginning:

caerula cum rubuit Lernaeo sanguine Dirce  
 et Thetis arentes assuetum stringere ripas  
 horruit ingenti venientem Ismenon aceruo. (*Thebaid.*1.38-40)

...when Dirce's blue springs ran red with Lernaean blood  
 and Thetis recoiled as Ismenos—whose rivulets normally scraped  
 its dry banks—came on in spate, its waters heaped high.

Mentioned in the proem not only once, but twice,<sup>324</sup> and on each occasion depicted as a bloody scene of death, the Ismenos and the battlefield are one and the same. Hippomedon may enter the river grieving, but these waters will not offer him respite.

Hippomedon's entry into the Ismenos is marked by his overriding *furor* at the loss of 'Tydeus' corpse: a battle-rage that resembles that of Aeneas upon hearing of Pallas' death (Virg. *Aeneid.* 10. 510ff).<sup>325</sup> Blinded by emotion, barely able to distinguish between friend and foe (*Theb.*

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<sup>324</sup> Cf. *Thebaid.* 1. 44-5.

<sup>325</sup> As originally noted by Dewar 1991:91.

9.199), Hippomedon advances upon the enemy. His progress is slow, as he is hindered by injury and the detritus of war:

sed caede nova iam lubrica tellus  
 armaque seminecesque viri currusque soluti  
 impediunt laevumque femur, quod cuspidē fixum  
 regis Echionii, sed dissimulaverat ardens,  
 sive ibi nescierat. (*Thebaid.* 9.200-4).

But he *is* hampered by ground grown slick after fresh slaughter and heaped with weapons, men half-dead, shattered chariots, and by his left thigh, pierced by King Eteocles' spear which, in heat of battle, he had either ignored or not noticed till now.

At this moment, the hero who had previously stood on firm ground is beginning to lose his purchase. The fresh blood spilling over the landscape foreshadows the perilous waters that eventually unseat Hippomedon and cause his death. The weapons and machinery of war become obstacles to progress, and the previously undiscovered injury to Hippomedon's thigh exposes the warrior's fragility. Once again, the glorious path of war is shown to be inglorious.

In a bid to escape the blood and gore that hinder him, Hippomedon finds and mounts Tydeus' horse (*Theb.* 9.206), which, since its master's death, has been attended by Hoples (9.204). Pausing only a moment to inform the steed of Tydeus' death (9.211-17), Hippomedon then gallops across the battlefield, high above the mud and slaughter that had previously slowed him down, beheading Thebans as he goes (9.218-224). This relative freedom of movement is, however, short-lived, for no sooner has Hippomedon gained mastery of the landscape than he finds himself at the River Ismenos: a space he will be unable to fully master.

The way in which the battle moves into the Ismenos demonstrates once more the power of fluid spaces to extend into and overlap with the spaces around them. When the armies reach the river, the Ismenos, like the Asopos, is in spate:

ventum erat ad fluuium; solito tunc plenior alveo

(signa mali) magna se mole Ismenos agebat. (*Thebaid.* 9. 225-6)

They reach the river. Higher than normal (evil sign!).

Ismenos was driving his waters on in massive moil.

Initially the flood hinders the armies' progress. For a moment, the action seems to be suspended, the water shining with the reflection of sunlight off the armour (*Theb.* 9.229). Yet, the crumbling of the riverbank ends this moment's respite:

insiluere vadis, magnoque fragore solutus  
agger et adversae latuerunt pulvere ripae. (*Thebaid.* 9. 230-31)

Men crowded in at the ford; with a mighty roar,  
the bank gave way, and the opposite shore was shrouded in dust.

As the soldiers enter the water the banks break and the river spills over its previous boundaries, overlapping with the battlefield. The dust that clouds the far bank, dust that previously has symbolised the advance of an army across the landscape,<sup>326</sup> clothes the river and co-opts it into the symbolic economy of war. This is the moment where conflict becomes fully located within the water: the battlefield is becoming submerged.

In this new, wet, battlefield the problems encountered on the Theban plain are exacerbated. No-one is able to find purchase as the water hinders all from finding their footing:

tunc vero exanimes tradunt rapientibus ultro  
arma vadis: alii demissa casside, quantum  
tendere conatus animae valuere sub undis,  
turpe latent; multi fluvium transmittere nando  
aggressi, sed vincla tenent laterique repugnat  
balteus et madidus deducit pectora thorax. (*Thebaid.* 9. 236-41)

Thebans, scared witless, recklessly gave their weapons up  
to the clutching current. Some flung their helmets aside and

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<sup>326</sup> As it does, for example, when the Argives arrive in Nemea at *Theb.* 4.664-7, (see p.61) or Panic fools the Argives into believing the Thebans are marching to meet them at 7.116-125 (see p. 107).

covered underwater as long as they had strength to control  
 their need to breathe; others flailed at the stream, trying to swim  
 over at top speed, but their lacings bound them, swordbelts  
 fought them, and sodden corselets weighted their chests down.

Within the Ismenos, armour that was designed to protect and prolong life becomes an instrument of death, trapping the soldiers under the waves. The water strips the soldiers of their weapons, like a victor taking the spoils of battle. In this way the wet battlefield is becoming an active participant in both the on-going conflict and its aftermath. The killing blow and the taking of spoils happen instantaneously, as the Ismenos uses the soldiers' armour to bury them beneath its surface, just as the river was buried beneath the dust of war (*Theb.* 9.231).

Hippomedon alone is seemingly immune to the oncoming floodwaters, managing not only to keep himself afloat but also to stabilise his horse as it scrabbles in the sand (*Theb.* 9.248-51). This portrait of Hippomedon's mastery of the Ismenos reinforces the earlier portrayal of his stopping the floodwaters of the Asopos and fulfils the quasi-prophecy of *Thebaid.* 1.44-5. However, despite Hippomedon's strength and capability, his use of a dead man's horse, and that animal's struggle in the Ismenos' current (*Theb.* 9.250), combine to expose a new vulnerability. This wet-battlefield is different to those before it and Hippomedon's relationship to his location has changed. In the Ismenos he enters a space where the rules of warfare can bend and shift, where soldiers fight in the graves of their comrades, and the unceasing conflict is inescapable, even for those who hold the status of *heros* (*Theb.* 9.248).

The tension between the on-going conflict of the living and the growing presence of the dead is crystallised in the image of the dismembered corpses that slowly clog the river's flow:

iam laceri pronis uolvuntur cursibus artus  
 oraque et abscisae redeunt in pectora dextrae (*Thebaid.* 9. 259-60)

And now in the tumbling current mangled limbs race by,  
 heads and lopped-off right hands bump up against their torsos,

The limbs come, predominantly, from the victims of Hippomedon and Hypseus, and belong to Theban and Argive alike: '*premit agmina Thebes/Hippomedon, turbat Danaos Asopius Hypseus*'



(*Theb.* 9.255-6). Therefore, as the water elides the space between bodies and body-parts it also erases the difference between enemies: Theban and Argive individuals become composites formed of detached limbs.

The river also continues to separate man from the machinery of warfare, removing identity markers and further disguising those in the water:

spicula iam clipeosque leves arcusque remissos  
 unda vehit, galeasque vetant descendere cristae:  
 summa vagis late sternuntur flumina telis,  
 ima viris; illic luctantur corpora leto,  
 efflantesque animas retro premit obvius amnis. (*Thebaid.* 9.261-65)

lances, light bucklers, bows with their strings snapped ride the waves  
 as horsehair crests keep helmets afloat; upriver and down,  
 the water is littered with bobbing spears, the streambed with men  
 whose bodies wrestle with death; souls bubble forth and are choked  
 back by surrounding water.

Within this hybrid, wet, aftermath/battlefield, martial symbolic capital is rendered meaningless as all are equalised in death. The binary distinction between enemy and ally that is integral to the establishment of the field of war is eroded in a grotesque and chilling way. Yet, this blurring of war's fundamental polarities does not result in the collapse of the battlefield and the cessation of hostilities. Instead, combatants are trapped, drowning on the seabed where not just breath but souls, '*animas*' (*Theb.* 9.265), are thwarted by the opposing waves ('*pernit obvius amnis*' 9. 625). Conflict's continuation into the water denies the soldiers respite, even in death.

Just as the Ismenos denies the soldiers escape from the battlefield in death, so the river also denies their companions the proper rituals of grief, as individuals repeatedly disappear under the bloody waves and their bodies are never recovered. The victims of Hippomedon and those of Hypseus, son of Asopos, all become obscured as 'both cloud [Ismenos'] pools with clotted blood' (*Theb.* 9.257-8).<sup>327</sup> So Argipus, arms chopped off, slides under the waves: '*ille*

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<sup>327</sup> '*crasso uada mutat uterque/sanguine*'

*manet fundo, rediit pro corpore sanguis*' (9.271).<sup>328</sup> Argipus' brother, Aegenor, tries to rescue the body only to also be lost in the water (*Theb.* 9.272-5). Finally, Capetus' disappearance into a whirlpool is described with chilling thoroughness:

iam vultu, iam crine latet, iam dextera nusquam,  
ultimus abruptas ensis descendit in undas. (*Thebaid.* 9. 278-9)

it's up to his chin, up to his hair, now his right hand's gone!  
Last of all, his blade slides under the funnelling waves.

These deaths within the Ismenos are fundamentally different to those that take place on land. There is a certitude to each disappearance: there will be no burial, and therefore no resolution. Like Tydeus, whose stolen body drove Hippomedon to this furious slaughter, these men are denied the glory of a warrior's death and funeral. Unlike the waters of the Langia and the Asopos, the Ismenos does not function as an interstitial boundary between peace and conflict, but instead extends the battlefield till it obscures the place of mourning. Now that the conflict has become fully located within the water the battlefield has become inescapable, as all become dislocated within the fluid and destabilising river. The waves force the proximity between enemies to be sustained beyond death, a fake intimacy, all the while blurring any distinction between the dead and the living, danger and safety, conflict and resolution.

Between play and war: the death of Crenaeus.

As is evident from the moment it snatches up the Theban armour (*Theb.* 9.236), throughout the battle in its waters the Ismenos is not only the location of warfare but an active participant in the bloodshed. As introduction to the final portion of the narration of Hippomedon's slaughter, where he spares only Panemus as witness to his deeds (*Theb.* 9.293-301),<sup>329</sup> Statius takes care to narrate one death in particular:

mille modis leti miseris mors una fatigat.

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<sup>328</sup> 'the man sinks and, in place of his body, up comes blood'

<sup>329</sup> This act is a repetition of Tydeus' sparing of Maeon at the close of Book 2, linking both warriors in their cruelty and anger.

induit a tergo Mycalesia cuspis Agyrten;  
 respexit: nusquam auctor erat, sed concita tractu  
 gurgitis effugiens invenerat hasta cruorem. (*Thebaid.* 9.280-3)

Doom by the thousands, yet one death makes wretched men moan:  
 a barb (Mycalesian) lodged itself in Agyrtes' back;  
 he looked round but nowhere saw an assailant; the fast flying  
 spear that had found his blood had been shot by the current's force!

The deaths of Agyrtes and, in the same blow, of Tydeus' horse (*Theb.* 9.284-8) are via a spear thrown by the river itself. The Ismenos has now stripped the soldiers of their weapons and is using them against them: it has changed from an obstacle to an enemy-fighter.

The significance of Agyrtes' death at Ismenos' hands is revealed in the invocation that follows. The invocation to the muses, a literary device traditionally used at the commencement of the epic narration of hostilities, in this perpetual conflict signifies *Pater Ismenos*', the River-god's, proper entry onto the battlefield. The Ismenos himself is going to war:

nunc age, quis tumidis magnum expugnaverit undis  
 Hippomedonta labor, cur ipse excitus in arma  
 Ismenos, doctae nosse indulgete Sorores:  
 uestrum opus ire retro et senium depellere famaе. (*Thebaid.* 9.315-18)

Now come, what force wrestled mighty Hippomedon under  
 the swelling waves? why did River Ismenos himself  
 rise up in arms? Learned Sisters, instruct me, I beg:  
 Yours the task to reach back, to dash away dust from fame.

In asking for inspiration to narrate the encounter of Hippomedon and Ismenos, Statius is repeating the same desire from the epic's proem (*Theb.* 1.44-5). Yet, instead of a contest between Hippomedon and Ismenos, what follows this call to the muses is a contest between Hippomedon and Crenaeus, Ismenos' grandson. Even though, as we shall see, Crenaeus is strong, brave, and carries the signs of heroism, he is recognised neither here nor in the *Thebaid's* opening lines: the young warrior's part in the *Thebaid* is to be erased before it has

even begun. This ominous absence not only pre-empts the youth's swift death, but also suggests his presence on the battlefield is accidental. Yet, the unheralded encounter between Crenaeus and Hippomedon is dependant on Crenaeus' relationship to the Ismenos: it is Hippomedon who is out of place, as it were, in the water. It is Hippomedon's invasion that fundamentally alters the young soldier's position within the water, as it is what precipitates the Ismenos co-optation into the rhythms of war.

Crenaeus' arrival causes an abrupt shift in the narrative from the depiction of bloody and grotesque warfare to a description of the youth's idyllic upbringing:

gaudebat Fauno nymphaque Ismenide natus  
maternis bellare tener Crenaeus in undis,  
Crenaeus, cui prima dies in gurgite fido  
et natale vadum et virides cunabula ripae. (*Thebaid.* 9. 319-22)

Born of Faunus and the Nymph Ismenis, Crenaeus  
the tenderfoot [rejoiced]<sup>330</sup> to fight in the mothering waves—for, from  
his first day, he had lived in the trusted current, and its  
shallows had been his nursery, its green banks his cradle.

It is clear that the nurturing Ismenos of Crenaeus' childhood was an altogether different space to the wet-battlefield of the *Thebaid*. Crenaeus' experience of the river has hitherto been one of domestic intimacy and safety; an experience that stands in stark contrast with the multiple preceding images of the River Ismenos as a dangerous, bloody, and violent space. To Crenaeus, the waves are not violent but *maternis*, they have nurtured and supported the youth from birth until present day. Crenaeus enters the conflict with the belief that such support will continue, fighting in the water like a child at play:

ergo ratus nihil Elysias ibi posse Sorores,  
laetus adulantem nunc hoc, nunc margine ab illo  
transit auum, leuat unda gradus, seu defluus ille,  
siue obliquus eat; nec cum subit obuius ullas  
stagna dedere moras pariterque reuertitur amnis. (*Thebaid.* 9.323-7)

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<sup>330</sup> Here I have altered Wilson Joyce's translation to better emphasise Crenaeus' joyful innocence. Cf. Dewar 1991:119.

And so, thinking the Elysian Sisters have no power here,  
 he skipped back and forth across his dotting grandsire,  
 happy-go-lucky; the waves supported his steps, whether he went  
 with the flow or aslant; even when he charged upstream,  
 no pools opposed him—the river kept pace and reversed!

The way in which Crenaeus traverses the Ismenos reflects his belief that the space, and therefore his relationship to it, remains unchanged. Yet, soon war's ability to distort and redefine the landscape and individuals' position within it will be revealed. His hubris is evident in the way in which he expects the water to accommodate his movement: Crenaeus does not move with the natural flow of the river but instead expects his grandfather's waters to flow according to his needs (*Theb.* 9.327). Despite the horrific reality of the battle, in the moments before his encounter with Hippomedon at least, Crenaeus remains assured of his victory in this on-going childhood game.

Crenaeus' privileged and precarious relationship to his environment is further underscored through comparison to three *exempla*: Glaucus (*Theb.* 9.328), Triton (9. 329), and Palaemon (9. 330-1). Of these, most notable is the comparison to Palaemon, deified son of Ino, who rides the waves on his dolphin companion.<sup>331</sup> The youth's haste, even making the swift dolphin seem slow, emphasises Crenaeus' own exuberance, whilst reference to '*oscula matris*' (*Theb.* 9.330) reiterates the nurturing relationship between mother and son. Yet, the comparison between Crenaeus and Palaemon is also somewhat problematic. Palaemon dies in the arms of his mother who, driven mad by a snakebite, jumps from a cliff.<sup>332</sup> It is a story that has particularly tragic resonance for Crenaeus, as it is only Palaemon's death in the water that leads to his subsequent deification and mastery of the waves. The comparison therefore not only reflects Crenaeus' innocent past but also nods towards his tragic future.

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<sup>331</sup> For more on the significance of Palaemon see Dewar 1991:121.

<sup>332</sup> Ovid. *Met.* 4. 512-42. cf. Newlands 2004:147-150 for an exploration of Crenaeus' Ovidian qualities.

Immediately following these ‘three, brief learned similes’<sup>333</sup> is a final comparison: Europa navigating the sea on the bull’s back as engraved on Crenaeus’ shield (*Theb.* 9.332-8).<sup>334</sup> Just as in the preceding lines, Statius emphasises the playful relationship of the protagonist to the water, and the gentleness of the sea: ‘*secura*’ (*Theb.* 9.335), Europa releases her grip and the waves tickle, ‘*adulunt*’ (9.336),<sup>335</sup> her feet:

Sidonis hic blandi per candida terga iuveni,  
iam *secura* maris, teneris iam cornua palmis  
non tenet, extremis *adulunt* aequora plantis;  
ire putes clipeo fluctusque secare iuuenum. (*Thebaid.* 9. 334-7)

Here,  
in raised work, the Sidonian, up  
on the meek bull’s white back,  
now unafraid of the sea,  
releases his horns from her soft  
hands, as level waters  
tickle the soles of her feet.<sup>336</sup>

This journey across the water carries with it the symbolism of a transition from one identity to another. Abducted by Jupiter, himself disguised as a white bull, Europa’s crossing of the sea marks her transformation from girlhood to womanhood. She plays with the water, her lack of fear juxtaposing the danger of her position.<sup>337</sup> The ekphrasis of Europa’s ocean crossing is yet another example of how water functions as a transitional space between peace and violence: in this case facilitating Europa’s rape. In the water she is at once safe, Jupiter will not let her fall or come to harm, and un-safe: she is at the mercy of her attacker. Given the pronounced aggressiveness of Hippomedon, it is intriguing that the metaphors and images associated with Crenaeus all conjure up images of play, even safety, underscored by

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<sup>333</sup> Dewar 1991:121.

<sup>334</sup> This is the primary function of the ekphrasis, for as Dewar rightly states ‘devices on armour conventionally tell us something about the wearer’. (1991:123). In this case the ekphrasis of Europa also brings to mind Turnus’ shield (*Aeneid.* 7.789-92), an intertext more fully explored by Chinn 2010:148-69, and raises questions as to the morality of the gods, a theme treated by Faber 2006:332-8.

<sup>335</sup> Here I am following Dewar’s 1991 text rather than Shackleton Bailey, who favours *allidunt*.

<sup>336</sup> Here I follow Wilson Joyce’s striking format as well as her translation.

<sup>337</sup> Europa’s confidence betrays her naivety at the seriousness of her situation. This reflects the naivety of Crenaeus, who places his own trust in the waters of Ismenos. Cf. Faber 2006:111 and Newlands 2004:148-9.

danger. What kind of intimacy are we prompted to explore here, as we follow Crenaeus' and Hippomedon's entanglement in the fluid abyss? Identities submerge into each other in this slippery environment. For all its naivety, Crenaeus' conviction that his grandfather's waters are a safe, almost domestic, space where he expects nothing other than affection, renders Hippomedon's prowess into a kind of ugly aggression. Despite himself, Hippomedon unwittingly now doubles as a friend, taking the place of one of those who used to share the waters with Crenaeus. However, this friendship is problematic as Hippomedon will go on to betray Crenaeus, undermining the youth's trust in the waters. This is far from a traditional battlefield indeed; enemy lines cannot be traced securely, and intimacy and hostility flow together with the angry tide in a fatal embrace.

Europa's story also echoes that of Asopos' daughter, Aegina, as told in the description of Hypseus' lineage in the catalogue of the Theban warriors. Aegina and Europa both become Jupiter's victims after they leave the safety of the water, both are pursued by family members who incur divine wrath as a consequence,<sup>338</sup> and both are ultimately lost. Though each story is an alarming tale of abduction and rape, the horror of Aegina's story is heightened as there is a doubling of the invasion of intimacy: Jupiter violates the body of the father, as well as the body of the daughter, when he snatches Aegina from the water. The implications of both these women's stories for the youthful, somewhat feminine,<sup>339</sup> Crenaeus and his grandfather Ismenos is that a similarly violent and invasive crime is about to unfold.

For death is soon coming for Crenaeus. As he tip-toes across the water, with his golden shield and semi-divinity promising heroism and glory, he comes face to face with Hippomedon and challenges his desecration of the waters:

“non haec fecunda veneno  
Lerna, nec Herculeis haustae serpentibus undae:  
sacrum amnem, sacrum (et miser experiere!) deumque  
altrices irrumpis aquas.” (*Thebaid.* 9. 340-3)

“No Lernaean swamp fecund with venom

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<sup>338</sup> Asopos at the hands of Jupiter himself, and Cadmus through the Spartoi.

<sup>339</sup> Like Parthenopaeus and Atys, Crenaeus' youth, beauty and ongoing dependence on his mother means he lacks the masculinity of the other soldiers on the battlefield. Cf. Sanna 2008:208-14.

*here*, no did Hercules' snakes suck *these* waves! The waters are  
 sacred—sacred, I say! as you'll discover, poor fool!  
 The stream you defile suckles the Gods!"

Crenaeus' accusation against Hippomedon clearly demonstrates that he is aware that the slaughter has defiled the river (*Theb.* 9.343). However, this awareness fails to alter his perception of the Ismenos as a place of safety. Crenaeus holds the belief that he remains master of the waters, goading Hippomedon with the suggestion that the Argive hero will fail. What Crenaeus is unable to comprehend is that the expansion of the bloody battlefield into the previously sacred maternal waters might change the Ismenos, and that the change will diminish his ability to navigate this encounter. His taunts betray his belief that no outside power holds sway in these waters. Yet, what Hippomedon's invasion of the Ismenos and the blurring between the battlefield and the river has shown is that this fluid space is easily transgressed, and, ultimately, unreliable.

For, whilst the battle in the Ismenos will eventually lead to his doom, Hippomedon's death will not come at the hands of Crenaeus, rather the opposite takes place. Silently and swiftly Hippomedon strikes the youth down:

nihil ille, sed ibat  
 comminus; opposuit cumulo se densior amnis  
 tardavitque manum; vulnus tamen illa retentum  
 pertulit atque animae tota in penetralia sedit. (*Thebaid.* 9. 343-6)

No reply, but the man  
 advanced. Its mass near solid, the river rose and opposed  
 him, slowed his hand—yet still he delivered a crippling blow,  
 one that came to rest in the soul's innermost chambers.

Just as Crenaeus is absent from the invocation that introduces this scene (*Theb.* 9.315-18), so he is seemingly absent at the moment of death. Hippomedon does not acknowledge Crenaeus' words and his silence denies Crenaeus presence in the water. The youth's insignificance is fully realised when it is the river itself that defends against Hippomedon's attack, slowing the warrior's hand. This is, as the invocation states, a fight between Hippomedon and Ismenos. Crenaeus, for all his boasting, may as well not exist, though it is



the youth that is pierced it is the waves that shudder: *'horruit unda nefas'* (*Theb.* 9.347). As the grandfather's grief and rage rise him to battle, the memories of domestic bliss and youthful playfulness are reprised. In this fluid battlefield, a space that muddles identities and sustains unusual and contradictory intimacies, Crenaeus plays a losing game.

Conflict submerged: Ismenis' search for Crenaeus.

*"Mater!"* (*Theb.* 9.350), Crenaeus' final word, moves the narrative from the surface of the water to the depths of the Ismenos, where the nymph Ismenis, daughter of Ismenos and mother of Crenaeus, resides with her sisters in a 'glassy valley', *'vitrea de valle'* (9.352).<sup>340</sup> Despite the river's transformation into the wet-battlefield, it seems that beneath the waves it still retains vestiges of its former idyllic nature. A comparison with *Iliad*.18.50 and *Georgics*. 4.333, our two main intertexts for this passage,<sup>341</sup> reinforces the private nature of this valley, and the grouping of the *sororum* (9.351) suggests it should be viewed as similar to the *thalamus* where Antigone and Ismene were sequestered in *Thebaid*. 8.607-9. However, a comparison between the Theban *thalamus* and the depths of the Ismenos shows that the latter's boundaries are more permeable. It is inferred that Crenaeus' cries readily reach Ismenis, the sound shortening the distance between them and crossing into the private space of the valley. This awareness of the battlefield contrasts Argia and Ismene's ignorance - in the Theban *thalamus* the only sound is the sisters' conversation. Within the Ismenos, Ismenis is physically linked to her dying son through the water as it fills Crenaeus' dying mouth: *in hanc miseri ceciderunt flumina vocem*, 'into the poor boy's cry fell the flood' (*Thebaid*. 9.350). The waves foreshorten the space of enunciation between mother and son, enabling an intimate encounter despite their physical distance. It seems that on the wet-battlefield it is almost impossible to maintain separation.

Yet, whilst Ismenis' knowledge of Crenaeus' death demonstrates how the water dissolves barriers to communication, Ismenis' comparative inability to navigate the surface of the Ismenos, a space now subsumed within the framework of warfare, demonstrates how the establishment of the battlefield is disrupting her relationship to this fluid environment:

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<sup>340</sup> Trans. Dewar 1991:23.

<sup>341</sup> Dewar 1991:126.

utque erupit aquis iterumque iterumque trementi  
 ingeminat “Crenaeae” sono: nusquam ille, sed index  
 desuper (a miserae nimium noscenda parenti!)  
 parma natat (Thebaid. 9.355-8)

Out of the waters she burst, crying, calling again and again  
 in trembling tones, “Crenaeus!” He’s nowhere in sight,  
 but a sign floats by—his buckler (known to his poor parent  
 all too well!).

In this passage, Statius explores the difference between the spaces inside and outside the water in two ways. Firstly, the way in which Ismenis bursts, *erupit* (9.355), through the surface foreshadows both Argia and Antigone’s entrance onto the battlefield at the epic’s close.<sup>342</sup> This repeated image of a woman forcefully breaking onto the battlefield calls attention to their incongruity within this traditionally masculine space. Here, Ismenis’ invasion of the space of war is a mirror image of Hippomedon’s invasion of the ‘*maternis...undis*’ (*Theb.* 9.320). This suggests that although the river blurs the boundaries of fixed places, such as the battlefield or Crenaeus’ nursery, different social spaces are not rendered completely indistinguishable from one another. Yet, though the violence of Ismenis breaking the surface of the waves suggests the existence of a barrier between the surface and the depths, Hippomedon’s invasion into the water simultaneously calls attention to that barrier’s permeability. Secondly, the placement of Crenaeus’ shield, floating on the water’s surface, also establishes a boundary between the air above and the water below. In death Crenaeus’ body has become separated from his shield, a shield that signifies his status among the other epic warriors, both within the world of the *Thebaid*,<sup>343</sup> and through its many intertexts from earlier Latin epics.<sup>344</sup> As he dies and becomes submerged Crenaeus the hero disappears, just as all the soldiers who die in the Ismenos become dislocated from the symbolic framework of war, are denied the status and glory associated with a military death, and in effect disappear from the battlefield. It seems that despite the continued conflict within its waters the Ismenos erodes the traditional structures of the battlefield, transforming it as it prolongs its existence.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. *erumpit* (*Thebaid* 12.356) and *irrupit* (12.269)

<sup>343</sup> Hippomedon (*Theb.* 4.131-5), Capaneus (4.166-72) and Amphiaraus (4.222).

<sup>344</sup> For example, the shields of Turnus (*Aeneid.* 7. 783-92) and Aeneas (*Aeneid.* 8.671-ff.). For an analysis of the role these ekphrases play from Homer onwards see Kurman 1974: *passim*.

However, Crenaeus' status and identity are not derived solely from his position on the battlefield. In fact, his erasure from the narrative of Hippomedon's *aristeia* is evidence of his incongruity in the field of war. Just as Atys enters and leaves the battlefield as the bridegroom,<sup>345</sup> so Crenaeus enters, and will now escape, the Ismenos as a son and grandson. In death he travels swiftly through the waters, moving along the river's surface to where it meets the ocean:<sup>346</sup>

iacet ipse procul, qua mixta supremum  
Ismenon primi mutant confinia ponti. (*Thebaid.* 9.358-9)

*He* lies far off where incoming seas first  
meet Ismenos' outflow, where the waters mingle and change.

Though he dies in the water, Crenaeus does not immediately disappear. However, before he is able to receive proper burial, and before his death can be avenged, he must be reconciled to his family and rescued from the encroaching sea.

It is Ismenis, the grieving mother, who must find Crenaeus' body and prevent its being lost to the sea. To do so she must move out of the safety of the valley and navigate the now changed space of the riverbed:

saepe horridus amnis  
obstat, et obducto caligant sanguine visus.  
illa tamen praeceps in tela offendit et enses  
scrutaturque manu galeas et prona reclinat  
corpora (*Thebaid.* 9. 366-70)

... often the bristling river obstructs her way, and her sight is dimmed by the haze of blood before her. But still she flings herself against the weapons and

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<sup>345</sup> See p.123 of this thesis.

<sup>346</sup> Though, as Dewar 1991:128 notes, the Ismenos actually empties into Lake Hylice and not the ocean it is the idea that Crenaeus' body is leaving the river that is important.

the swords, and probes with her hands the helmets, and turns upon their backs  
the prostrate corpses...<sup>347</sup>

Corpses, weapons and blood mark the battlefield's expansion into the Ismenos and change Ismenis' ability to safely navigate a hitherto familiar space. Her probing of helmets and bodies foreshadows Argia's nighttime search for the body of Polynices (12.284-290), and this similarity emphasises the war's ability to alter place beyond recognition.<sup>348</sup> The machinery of warfare imposes new signification on the previously safe and nurturing waters, and just as Atys' death brought the war inside the *cognata moenia* of Thebes, subsuming the domestic beneath the martial, so does the conflict's relocation in the Ismenos.<sup>349</sup> As the violence is perpetuated and the war prolonged, both spaces have become merged into a fluid battlefield where traditional polarities of enemy and ally are frequently shown to be false. Unanchored within this shifting and unstable Secondspace, individuals become dislocated: freed from usual determinants each 'becomes no more than what he does or experiences'.<sup>350</sup>

The full extent of Ismenis' displacement from her native environment is apparent through her need for the Nereids' aid in finding Crenaeus' corpse (9.370-3). Once she locates her son's body, Ismenis lays him carefully on the soft riverbank:

illa manu ceu vivum amplexa reportat  
insternitque toris riparum atque umida siccatur  
mollibus ora comis (*Thebaid.* 9. 373-5)

Clasping him—as if in life—she carries him home in her arms,  
stretches him out on his riverbank bed, and dries his wet face  
with her long, soft hair.

Even when she is confronted with the dangerous reality of the conflict raging in the Ismenos in the form of her son's lifeless body, Ismenis still treats Crenaeus as a living son returning

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<sup>347</sup> Here I follow Dewar's translation (1991:23-24).

<sup>348</sup> Cf. p.183.

<sup>349</sup> Cf. pp. 128-129.

<sup>350</sup> Augé 1995:83.

to the safety of home.<sup>351</sup> Despite the changes wrought to the Ismenos in its transformation into the wet-battlefield, Ismenis, like Crenaeus, is unable to alter the way she relates to this previously familiar and peaceful space: Ismenos for her is both home *and* a field clogged with dead bodies. Once again, the domestic and the martial have become blurred, and the familiar rendered ‘unhomely’<sup>352</sup> just as it was for Ismene within the *cognata moenia* of Thebes.<sup>353</sup>

After returning Crenaeus’ body to the riverbank, the nymph proceeds to berate her father, the river-god Ismenos, for his inability to protect his own grandchild (*Theb.* 9.376-403). Sharing similarities to the speeches of the *Thebaid’s* other grieving mothers,<sup>354</sup> Ismenis’ speech is composed of two parts, both of which demonstrate the continuing familial signification of River Ismenos, despite its co-option into the rhythms of war. The first section (*Theb.* 9.376-88), emphasises the seemingly paradoxical safety of the ‘alien’ spaces of the earth, ‘*discors alienaque tellus*’ (9.378) and sea, ‘*unda maris*’ (9.379), for Crenaeus as they now contrast to the danger and death found within the maternal waters. This is an explicit recognition of the Ismenos’ ‘unhomeliness’<sup>355</sup> resulting from the relocation of the battlefield into its waters, an enforced alienation that Ismenis finds tough to cope with. The second part of Ismenis’ speech is concerned with Ismenos’ location within the river (*Theb.* 9.390), his apparent absence and ignorance at Crenaeus’ death (9.391-2), and Hippomedon’s mastery of the water (9.393-5). Thinking back to the way in which we saw the earlier river god, Asopos, as a composite person/place what we would expect would be that the waters of the Ismenos and the River-god Ismenos are deeply connected. This makes Ismenis’ incredulity at her father’s ignorance understandable: the waters in which Crenaeus dies are not just a location but form part of the body of his grandfather.<sup>356</sup> Indeed, the water’s reaction to Hippomedon’s attack and the Ismenos’ agency within the wet-battlefield combine to impress Ismenos’ personhood on the reader. In such an intimate composite space as this, it is unthinkable that Ismenos

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<sup>351</sup> ‘The nymph takes thought for her son’s comfort as if he were still alive.’ Dewar 1991:130

<sup>352</sup> Bhabha 1994:13

<sup>353</sup> See p. 131.

<sup>354</sup> ‘Ide (3. 151 *ff.*), Eurydice (6. 138 *ff.*: cf. 375 and 6. 137 ‘*longis praefata ululatibus infit*’), and the mother of Menoeceus (10. 793 *ff.*.’ Dewar 1991:131.

<sup>355</sup> Bhabha 1994:13-14.

<sup>356</sup> Here I disagree with Dewar 1991:134 when he condemns Ismenis’ accusations as ‘actually quite unjust’. The reasoning behind his defence of Ismenos is the later revelation that he is seated in his private chambers (9.404-6), too removed from the action of the battlefield to have knowledge of Crenaeus’ death. I believe that the composite person/place of Ismenos makes any sense of absolute separation problematic.

would not be aware of Crenaeus' death in the same way as Ismenis, unless the conflict has caused Ismenos to become dislocated from his very self. It may be that Ismenos' personality dominates the river; and yet, in a striking twist, the happenings in the river have been shown to have an effect on this indomitable personality too: subject and object intertwined in a continuous interaction with each other, as I explore in the subsection that follows.

### Relocating subjectivity: the encounter with Ismenos.

At the very heart of this exploration of the wet-battlefield is the question of the nature of Ismenos' embodied subjectivity. It is not that Ismenos is either place or person; to favour one over the other would negate the river-god's composite complexity. In order to preserve Ismenos' unique character we must treat his subjectivity with subtlety. As both person *and* place, subject *and* environment, Ismenos shares aspects of both, whilst remaining more than a simple composite: he/it is an entity in continuous movement between polarities and so always radically open to (an)other-ness. Ismenos presents us with an entirely alien form of embodied being, one which Statius describes differently at different times in the narrative. It is therefore paramount that we hold both Ismenos' personhood and spatiality lightly, neither privileging nor discarding either aspect in our reading of his encounters with Crenaeus, Ismenis, or Hippomedon. Endowed with agency, the torrent cannot ever guarantee to stay still, it/he denies predictability, it/he has emotional, as well as physical, limitations: a liminal place per se in our study, precariously balanced between power and ignorance all at once.

Bearing his unique subjectivity in mind, it is intriguing that when we finally come face-to-face with *Pater* Ismenos, he is presented as a human figure seated in his private chambers:

at pater arcano residens Ismenos in antro,  
unde aerae nubesque bibunt atque imbrifer arcus  
pascitur et Tyrios melior venit annus in agros (*Thebaid.* 9. 404-6)

But Father Ismenos was lolling at ease in his secret cave,  
where breezes and clouds imbibe and the storm-bringing rainbow  
feeds, the source of the harvest season in Tyrian fields.

At first glance, Ismenos resembles Adrastus, presiding over his kingdom as the Argive King at the Argive court (*Thebaid*. 3.442). Yet, Statius' use of the adjective *arcanus*, meaning hidden, secret, or private,<sup>357</sup> infuses the scene with hues of privacy and intimacy. Of the twenty-six occurrences of *arcanus* within the *Thebaid*, it is most frequently used to describe either an intimate location, such as the *thalamus* of Argia and Deiphyle (*Theb.* 1.534) or Adrastus' bedroom (3.442); or a divine mystery, like the doors of heaven (1.210) or the meaning of an augury (3.494).<sup>358</sup> However, Statius also uses *arcanus* to refer to the hidden desires of the heart, someone's innermost being, as he does when he describes Jove's desire for the destruction of Thebes and Argos (*Theb.* 1.246), Polynices' longing for home (2.332), and Eteocles' hatred for his brother (2.416).<sup>359</sup> Its use here (*Theb.* 9.404), in relation to the composite River/God Ismenos, might indicate that this cave is not only a private space distant from the ongoing conflict but can also be understood as the hidden core of Ismenos' self: the inmost location of his subjectivity. If the surface of the water is the outermost boundary of Ismenos' body, then this hidden cave represents his innermost being.

Just as Crenaeus' cries penetrate Ismenis' secluded valley, so Ismenis' lament is able to reach into her Father's core in a way that the conflict near the surface is not:

ut lamenta procul, quamquam obstrepit ipse, novosque  
 accepit natae gemitus, levat aspera musco  
 colla gravemque gelu crinem, ceciditque soluta  
 pinus adulta manu dimissaque volvitur urna. (*Thebaid*. 9. 407-10)

When, in the distance, despite his own rushing roar, he heard  
 laments (unfamiliar sounds from his daughter), he rose—neck  
 shagged with moss, hair spiky with ice; from his loosened grip fell  
 a full-grown pine tree, his pitcher dropped and went rolling.

Though he retains some aspects of a human figure: a face, *ora* (*Theb.* 9.412), a head, *spumosum... apicem* (9.414), a breast, *pectora* (9.415), and a beard, *barbae* (9.415), it is clear

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<sup>357</sup> Lewis & Short s.v. *arcanus*.

<sup>358</sup> Other instances include: *Thebaid* 1:246; 2.22, 150, 275, 332, 416, 740; 3.625; 4.32; 5.67, 313, 426; 8: 2, 279; 9: 243, 405; 10: 365, 463, 922; 12: 133, 138, 233.

<sup>359</sup> In many cases this sense of the emotional and the description of the spatial overlap.

Ismenos is not made of flesh but stone, earth and water. Despite the distance from the battlefield above, *Pater* Ismenos remains intimately connected to the entire river. There is no distinction between Ismenos' body and the landscape in which he is situated; the god does not simply get up out of a chair but has to loosen himself from the plants, ice and mud which have attached him to the surrounding space.

Draped in moss and ice, this description of the inner-Ismenos now has little in common with his bloody corpse-filled outer body. Here, at least, the River-god remains unpolluted. The battlefield has up until this point been unable to infiltrate this space. Now, however, news of Crenaeus' death brings the battlefield into Ismenos' most intimate realm:

obvia cognatos gemitus casumque nepotis  
 Nympharum docet una patrem monstratque cruentum  
 auctorem dextramque premit: stetit arduus alto  
 amne, manumque genas et nexa virentibus ulvis  
 cornua concutiens sic turbidus ore profundo  
 incipit... (Thebaid 9. 416-21)

One of the Nymphs described to Ismenos his daughter's grief and his grandson's death, pointed the bloodthirsty perpetrator out, pressing her father's hand the while. He stood straight up, tall in the deep stream and, troubled, pounding his cheeks and his horns dripping green weeds, he began like this, in sonorous tones...

One of Ismenis' sisters delivers the message of Crenaeus' death. In this moment of grief Statius draws attention to Ismenos' more human aspects by framing it as an intimate encounter between family members, allowing for greater empathy on the part of the reader. However, Ismenos' composite identity is maintained through the sustainment of his physical link to the riverbed: '*nexa virentibus ulvis cornua concutiens*' (*Theb.* 9.419-20). The affectionate image of a daughter holding a father's hand allows for comparison with another intimate meeting: that of Argia and Adrastus when Argia persuades her father to go to war (*Thebaid.* 3. 677-ff).<sup>360</sup> Both encounters take place in the most private of locations ('*celsa verendi... patris*' 3.681-2, '*arcano...antro*' 9.404), both include physical contact ('*oscula*' 3.710, '*dextram...premit*'

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<sup>360</sup> An episode I will treat at p.188.



9.418). This similarity emphasises the pivotal role that knowledge of Creneaus' death plays in provoking Ismenos' entering the battlefield and his confrontation with Hippomedon. Just as Adrastus goes to war in order to appease his daughter and avenge his son-in-law, Ismenos now goes to avenge his daughter and his grandson.<sup>361</sup>

Ismenos' composite person/place identity locates conflict within an individual in a way that is otherwise impossible to explore. Adrastus is affected by his time on the battlefield, but he is, ultimately, able to escape (*Theb.* 11.339-46). In contrast, Ismenos, whose personhood is inextricable from his spatiality, is unable to disassociate himself from the battlefield once it has been established within his waters. As the conflict subsumes the river under the non-place of war, so it subsumes Ismenos' identity. In his speech to Jupiter (*Theb.* 9.421-41), Ismenos' words state how the expansion of the battlefield alters his very nature:

aspice quas fluvio caedes, quae funera portem  
 continuus telis alioque adopertus aceruo.  
 omne vadum belli series tenet, omnis anhelat  
 unda nefas, subterque animae supraque recentes  
 errant et geminas iungunt caligine ripas. (*Thebaid.* 9. 429-33)

Observe what carnage, what dead I carry upon my flood,  
 now scummed with countless weapons and clotted with other debris.  
 All my shallows are taken up with ceaseless warfare,  
 each wave belches pollution; below and above, new-butchered  
 souls wander about and link my two banks with their darkness.

As the river becomes choked with weapons and corpses and as ghosts populate its waters and banks, the conflict becomes firmly located within Ismenos, and Ismenos ceases to locate himself within his former body. As his speech continues, Ismenos' emphatic use of *ego*, (*'ille ego clamatus sacris ululatibus amnis'*, 'I, that famed river made to resound with ritual cries' 9.434), marks the homogeneity of god and water, yet the incredulity behind Ismenos' complaints simultaneously indicates his alienation from the same waters. This alienation from its/his body accounts for Ismenos' ignorance of Crenaeus' death: the war has caused a rift between

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<sup>361</sup> As Dewar 1991:138 notes, the nymph's contact with Ismenos 'is perhaps as much an incitement to action as a gesture of sympathy.'

those parts of the river in contact with the battlefield and those not. Ismenos has become displaced from himself.

Yet, despite the disruption the battlefield has caused, Ismenos' dislocation from the larger body of the river seems to be a temporary state. Directly following on from this address to Jupiter (*Theb.* 9.421-41), the river-god's attention abruptly turns towards Hippomedon:

“at tu, qui tumidus spoliis et sanguine gaudes  
 insontis pueri, non hoc ex amne potentem  
 Inachon aut saevas victor revehere Mycenae,  
 ni mortalis ego et tibi ductus ab aethere sanguis.” (*Thebaid.* 9. 442-5)

“But you, swollen and gloating over the spoils and slaughter  
 of a blameless boy—never will you return triumphant  
 from *this* river to mighty Inachos or fierce Mycenae—  
 not unless *I*m the mortal and *your* blood is ethereal!”

With these words Ismenos sets aside his identity as the nurturing grandfather and re-situates himself within the wet-battlefield as Hippomedon's enemy. As Ismenos does this he aligns himself with the symbolic economy of warfare which now pervades this space, an act which reconciles the previously separate inner and outer identities. He is becoming the agent of death that the conflict demands. As he does so he emphasises his immortality in direct contrast with Hippomedon's mortal fragility, an indication that Hippomedon's role within the epic is soon to come to a close.

Gone is *Pater* Ismenos (*Theb.* 9.404). Now Ismenos the warrior, supported by his comrades Cithaeron and Asopos (9.449-50), marshals a watery army against Hippomedon (9.456-61).<sup>362</sup> Now that he has *become* the battlefield, Ismenos expands and co-opts spaces in the same way that the battlefield initially expanded to subsume him:

nec mole liquenti  
 contentus carpit putres servantia ripas  
 arbusta annosasque trabes eicctaque fundo

<sup>362</sup> Ismenos even grows in strength by drawing water from the earth and the air. In this way he is shown to dominate the entire landscape.

saxa rotat. (Thebaid. 9.466-9)

Not content

with liquid mass, he snaps trees that keep the crumbling  
banks in place and whirls aged boughs and boulders churned up from his bed.

Ismenos takes the natural landscape and uses it as a soldier would a spear or catapult, co-opting it into the symbolic economy of warfare. The violence of the self-destructive rendering of his own banks, changing his outer form, exposes the transformation of Ismenos' inner identity from peaceful to bellicose.

Initially Hippomedon is able to resist this onslaught, but subtle clues indicate that his resistance will not last for long. In a reversal of roles, Hippomedon makes a boast similar to the one Crenaeus made against him, by suggesting that Ismenos is an alien on the battlefield, used only to the sacred rites of the Bacchanals (*Theb.* 9.476-80). Yet, Hippomedon is the one who is out of place. Ismenos' physical response completes the reversal and Hippomedon is soon all but crushed by his oncoming force:

dixerat; atque illi sese deus obtulit ultro  
turbidus imbre genas et nube natantis harenae,  
nec saevit dictis, trunca sed pectora quercu  
ter quater oppositi, quantum ira deusque valebat (Thebaid. 9. 481-484)

He'd had his say; the God's response was a frontal assault,  
his cheeks stormy with rain and a cloud of floating sand—  
no fierce speech but, heaving upright, with an oak tree trunk  
three times, four times he clubbed his opponent's chest as hard  
as rage and divinity could

After failing to escape the water by scrambling up a nearby ash tree (*Theb.* 9.492-505), Hippomedon makes a last desperate plea to die on land (9.505-10). A glorious death cannot be found in the waters, where burial will be denied and therefore *fama* forestalled. Juno hears Hippomedon's plea and goes in supplication to Jove (*Theb.* 9.510-19), who, in turn, orders Ismenos to subside (9.519-20). As he struggles onto the bank Hippomedon gets his wish and is set upon with Theban javelins and dies (9.526-535). Ultimately, however, even

Hippomedon will be denied a honourable funeral as Creon forbids the cremation of the Argive troops (*Theb.* 12.100-1). His death, like that of Tydeus, does not usher in a period of respite from fighting. Instead the battlefield continues to become blurred with the space of grief, as Capanaeus kills Hypseus and fashions Hippomedon a pseudo-tomb out of the spoils (9.537-69).

As for Ismenos, the end of this encounter sees the river-god fade from the narrative. He appears just once more, and then only briefly, as the river in which Argia and Antigone wash Polynices' corpse in preparation for the pyre (*Theb.* 12.409-19). Yet the way in which the battlefield fundamentally changes not only the river-space but also the nature of the river-god sets a precedent for the way in which conflict infiltrates the rest of the *Thebaid*. This analysis of the *Thebaid's* fluid spaces began with the suggestion that the rivers marked the epic's transition towards conflict, and the story of Ismenos and Hippomedon certainly supports this hypothesis. However, the conflict within the Ismenos, much more so than at the Langia or the Asopos, shows that the move towards violence fundamentally alters those who find themselves on the battlefield, victors and victims alike. Dislocated from their previous social identities, individuals, like Crenaeus or Ismenis, become lost within the non-place of war. As the fluid wet-battlefield expands the conflict into new spaces and beyond its traditional borders, those who depend on the framework of warfare for status, like Hippomedon, are denied glory, ever exposed to the whims of an impermanent and, in the case of Ismenos, literally, temperamental battlefield. At the same time, on the wet-battlefields of the *Thebaid* the image of the warrior often fades, the distinction between enemies can be blurred through conflict's violent intimacy, and relationships of friendship and family bind the living and the dead.

3.iv. ‘*Aeterna... nocte*’ (*Thebaid.* 1.47): Traversing night-everlasting.

‘We shall not sleep’:<sup>363</sup> the battlefield beyond nightfall.

Obruit Hesperia Phoebum nox umida porta,  
 imperiis properata Iovis; nec castra Pelasgum  
 aut Tyrias miseratus opes, sed triste, tot extra  
 agmina et immeritas ferro decrescere gentes  
 panditur inmenso deformis sanguine campus:  
 illic arma et equos ibant quibus ante superbi,  
 funeraque orba rogis neglectaque membra relinquunt (*Thebaid.* 10.1-7.)

At the twilight gate, damp night washed over Phoebus, sent  
 speeding there by Jove’s command—not that he pitied the camp  
 of Pelasgi, or Tyrians either, but how sad to see forces  
 from elsewhere, tribes without blame cut down by blade.  
 The plain stretched out, a broad appalling sea of blood;  
 there men abandoned gear, steeds they had with such dash spurred  
 into the fray, corpses deprived of pyres, a litter of limbs.

Nightfall marks the beginning of Statius’ tenth book. This description is the first description of nightfall within the *Thebaid*<sup>364</sup> and its placement here at the book’s opening is unusual, as within the epic narrative nightfall has long been the signifier of the cessation of battle and, by extension, of action.<sup>365</sup> The chronotope of the battlefield, lit. “time-space”, is traditionally enclosed within the boundaries of dawn and dusk.<sup>366</sup> And yet, as we have seen with the delayed commencement of war at *Thebaid.* 7, throughout Statius’ epic the battlefield often expands beyond its expected temporal boundaries. However, despite nightfall’s unusual

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<sup>363</sup> All titles throughout this subsection are quoted or adapted from John McCrae’s 1915 poem ‘In Flanders fields’.

<sup>364</sup> Gibson 2008:97.

<sup>365</sup> Gibson 2008:97 citing Liv. 7.33. 15.

<sup>366</sup> Here I am using the term chronotope as originally posited by Bakhtin 2008:84, and interpreted by Steinby 2013:122 as ‘a certain time-space of possible action, which is conditioned by a locality or a social situation’

placement within book ten's narrative structure, it initially appears as though it will be followed by a cessation of hostilities, as the Thebans retire within Amphion's walls and both sides mourn the fallen (10.8-10). In a scene resonant of the Trojans in *Iliad* 8.485ff, as soon as the Thebans re-enter the city their recent triumph and deaths of four of the Argive seven (Amphiaraus, Tydeus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus) emboldens the weary troops and Eteocles' immediately orders them to stand watch (10.15-36). But this reprieve is short lived. Long before the arrival of dawn,<sup>367</sup> the two armies will engage in another round of combat as the Argives raid Thebes after Sleep, at Juno's command, comes and interrupts the Theban watch (10.84-346). The night will also see the deaths of Hopleur and Dymas, as they are discovered by Amphion in the process of recovering the bodies of Tydeus and Parthenopaeus (10.347-448).

This continuation of the conflict under the cover of darkness once again muddles the boundaries of the field of war, altering the symbolic framework of this mental space and creating ambiguity where meaning should be absolute. This allows those who normally reside outside the battlefield to enter onto it, as do Argia and Antigone in their attempted recovery of Polynices' corpse (12.219-463). In the same way as the waters that flow through the *Thebaid* extend the conflict's reach beyond the battle on the Theban plain, so from the moment Oedipus rages against his eternal night (1.47), till Argia's impassioned supplication to her father (3.678ff), the darkness facilitates war's infiltration of previously disassociated spaces.

This, the final part of this chapter's exploration of the interstitial and hybrid Stasian battlefield, focusses on two particularly unusual episodes which take place under cover of darkness. The first is the journey of Hopleur and Dymas (10.347-448) and the second is the encounter between Argia and Antigone (12.219-463). Both were chosen as they reflect the perpetual nature of the conflict raging outside Thebes alongside the battlefield's transience and vulnerability. These are encounters that can only take place under cover of darkness, yet the muddled temporal boundaries of the conflict mean that the shadows present a danger even as they provide a refuge.

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<sup>367</sup> Statius does not explicitly note the dawn of the new day's fighting, but it begins at 10.381.

### In dark Theban fields: Hoplaus and Dymas

As the Argives leave Thebes, bloody from the night-time slaughter (*Thebaid.* 10.346), Statius directs our gaze toward two of the party, Hoplaus and Dymas, who are mulling the loss of their leaders, Tydeus and Parthenopaeus (*Thebaid.* 10.347-63).<sup>368</sup> Taking courage from one another, Hoplaus and Dymas journey onto the still-dark battlefield to search for the two corpses, in order that they might give them proper burial. Guided by the heavenly light of Cynthia (10.365-75), the pair manage to locate their leaders and begin to drag them back to safety (10.367-83). However, nightfall does not provide the pair with the break in hostilities needed to carry out their rescue mission. Alongside the resumption of the Theban watch, Amphion and his men continue to patrol the battlefield. The soldiers' presence constitutes a continuation of martial action and denies Hoplaus and Dymas the break in hostilities they depend on for safety. They are discovered by Amphion and his troops (10.384-97) and Hoplaus is immediately felled by the spear of Aepytus and pinned to Tydeus' corpse in death (10.399-404). Dymas survives long enough to plead for Parthenopaeus' burial, and, when denied, commits suicide in order to cover the Arcadian's corpse with his own (10.405-41). Statius then completes this episode with a direct comparison between Hoplaus and Dymas and their Aeneidic predecessors, Nisus and Euryalus (10.445-8).<sup>369</sup>

Sitting in the space between Thiodamus' night time raid on the Theban City (10.262-346) and the resumption of battle proper the following morning,<sup>370</sup> Hoplaus and Dymas' journey occupies a pause in the conflict, a rare moment when the battlefield exists but is not in use. In contrast to previous depictions of the darkened battlefield, such as *Aeneid.* 9.176-445 and *Iliad* 8.485ff, this part of the battlefield at least is not strewn with sleeping enemies, but is instead only littered with the corpses of the dead.<sup>371</sup> Hoplaus and Dymas are currently alone on the plain, the raid of Thebes complete and their comrades returning to the Argive camp.

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<sup>368</sup> Tydeus' death and disgrace is narrated in full at *Thebaid.* 8.716-66. Parthenopaeus' death at 9.877-907.

<sup>369</sup> The story of Nisus and Euryalus is narrated by Virgil. *Aeneid.* 9.176-445.

<sup>370</sup> The transition from night to day is not explicit, as Gibson 2008:97 notes 'there is no direct depiction of dawn, whose arrival has to be inferred from Amphion's detection of the slaughter of Thebans at 10.467-73'.

<sup>371</sup> Though it seems as though the Theban watch does initially extend a little way out from the Theban walls (cf. *Theb.* 10.40-42 and 146-55) the majority of the troops remain inside the walls as this is where they are slaughtered by Thiodamus and the other Argives (10.261-346). Those who succumb to Sleep remain near Thebes and are not found on this part of the plain.

Yet, they choose to linger. Just as it is in the waters of the Ismenos, the space of martial action is becoming muddled with the rituals of war's aftermath: Hopleus and Dymas seek the dead whilst they are still at war.

The two warriors do not only find themselves in the pause between battles but, like Hippomedon in the Ismenos,<sup>372</sup> are caught in a space that straddles life and death. Introduced as those whose grief leads them to scorn life, '*vitam indignatur*' (10.350),<sup>373</sup> Hopleus and Dymas recklessly desire war above their own selves. Hopleus draws on this destructive drive as he persuades Dymas to prolong their stay on the battlefield:

“nullane post manes regis tibi cura perempti,  
care Dyma, teneant quem iam fortasse volucres  
Thebanique canes? patriae quid deinde feretis,  
Arcades? en reduces contra venit aspera mater:  
funus ubi? at nostro semper sub pectore Tydeus  
saevit inops tumuli...” (*Thebaid.* 10. 351-6)

“No thought, good Dymas, none for your slain regent's abrupt removal, though vultures and Theban curs may, even now, have their hooks in him? Arcadians! what will you have to take home? Picture it — you return, meet his stern mother: 'Where's my son's body?' Now in *my* heart, there always, Tydeus rages tombless...”

When Hopleus speaks his grief is palpable. Showing no concern for his living comrades, who, even now, return victorious to the Argive camp, he remains fixated with the dead. Paradoxically, death has given new life to Tydeus, who now lives within Hopleus, still raging as if he had not been cut down (10.355-6).<sup>374</sup> Whilst Tydeus lies on the battlefield Hopleus remains unable to rest, instead his grief sustains the battle and he cannot return to camp with the army. Though he has just slaughtered many Thebans within the walls of their own city,

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<sup>372</sup> And, like Hippomedon, Hopleus at least is driven by his grief for Tydeus.

<sup>373</sup> A phrase which evokes Capanaeus' earlier scorn for peace: *indignatia pacem/corda* (*Thebiad.* 3. 599) cf. Williams 1972:77.

<sup>374</sup> 'Statius does not say that the thought of the unburied Tydeus tortures Hopleus' heart, but that Tydeus unburied rages in his heart, like a god or a fury in possession of him': Williams 1972:77.



to Hoplaus it is as if the night raid has not taken place. He ponders a plan of attack even as the rest of the Argives exit Thebes:

“ire tamen saevumque libet nullo ordine passim  
scrutari campum, mediasve inrumpere Thebas.” (*Thebaid.* 10. 358-9)

“I’m still determined to go and turn that ruthless field  
upside down or break my way into the heart of Thebes”

Alongside his desire to find Tydeus, Hoplaus is ready to wage war on the battlefield itself, to ransack the plain and, in the process, alter it to encompass his urge for continuing hostility. This striking and unusually explicit expression of discontent about the battlefield reflects Hoplaus’ own incongruity as a soldier who stands outside the traditional and more firmly hedged chronotope of the battlefield. Within the “normal” rules of engagement, nightfall demands either a change in position, a return to camp,<sup>375</sup> or a change in function, fighting giving way to sleeping and eating,<sup>376</sup> but Hoplaus, raging with Tydeus’ *ira*, can neither retreat nor rest.

Dymas’ own grief resonates with Hoplaus’, as he himself longs to be with Parthenopaeus, and so he responds, tearing off onto the dark battlefield (*Theb.* 10.363-5). Like Tydeus, Parthenopaeus is unnaturally sustained by Dymas’ love. Instead of taking on his king’s anger, Dymas worships Parthenopaeus as a divinity, calling him ‘*numinis umbras*’: divine shade (10.360-1). This reframes Dymas’ relationship to Parthenopaeus from that of comrades-in-arms to supplicant and divinity. This is a relationship that mirrors that between Parthenopaeus and his beloved Diana. In taking the role of supplicant it is as if Dymas takes on the identity of his Arcadian patron.

Dymas’ quasi-transformation into Parthenopaeus is completed through his supplication to Cynthia, one of the three forms of Diana Trivia,<sup>377</sup> an act previously fulfilled by Parthenopaeus himself:

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<sup>375</sup> As the rest of the Argives do (cf. *Theb.* 10.346)

<sup>376</sup> Cf. *Aeneid.* 9. 164-7, 188-90, 236-7.

<sup>377</sup> Diana’s presence here also emphasises the liminality of identities within the battlefield as she herself readily transitions and maintains her triple form of huntress (Diana)/chthonic deity (Hecate)/celestial body (Cynthia).

“arcanæ moderatrix Cynthia noctis,  
 si te tergemini perhibent variare figuris  
 numen et in silvas alio descendere uultu,  
 ille comes nuper nemorumque insignis alumnus,  
 ille tuus, Diana, puer (nunc respice saltem)  
 quaeritur.” (Thebaid. 10.365-70)

“Cynthia, guiding force of secretive night:  
 if, as men hold, You ring the three changes on Your divine  
 shape and descend into the forest with aspect altered, know  
 it’s Your comrade of late, the well-known child of the glens!  
 Your boy, Diana!—look down *now* at least!—it’s him  
 we seek.”

This call for aid is full of the same reproach that Parthenopæus himself had for Diana when, with his dying breath, he asked for his arms to be displayed as a condemnation of the goddess for her failure to give him victory: “...*vel ingratae crimen suspende Dianae*” (9.907). “*Nunc respice saltem*” (10.369), Dymas implores, his words resonant with the distrust his king had also felt in his last moments. As Dymas mirrors Parthenopæus’ actions and attitude towards his divine patron, their identities become blurred, obscuring the former under the guise of the latter. On this dark field Dymas is able to become his fallen friend, and Cynthia responds as promptly as Diana the huntress had rallied, unseen, to Parthenopæus’ aid (10.370-5). In this moment, the space between battles, between days, is elided as Hopfeus and Dymas prolong the life of their leaders by taking on the identities of the two fallen men: Hopfeus rages with the unbound desire for destruction that characterises Tydeus throughout the *Thebaid*, and Dymas, *Maenalius* (10.348),<sup>378</sup> calls upon Parthenopæus’ second mother and protector, Diana. In the dark, both men are able to set aside their own selves and become someone else. Yet, in taking on the identities of the fallen they themselves are giving up their own lives, a transaction that will ultimately be completed through their own deaths.

Diana responds to Dymas’ pleas by shining light onto the battlefield, illuminating the bodies of Parthenopæus and Tydeus. The act is sudden, and the moonlight is compared to a bolt of

<sup>378</sup> An epithet used of Parthenopæus himself. Cf. *Thebaid*.4.256 & 6.603; Williams 1972:77.

lightning from Jupiter, violently splitting the sky (10.373-5). Abruptly Dymas finds the Arcadian, and this discovery is followed almost instantaneously by Hopleus' discovery of Tydeus.<sup>379</sup> Then, as swiftly as the moonlight came, the two warriors find themselves again in darkness:

longe dant signa per umbras  
 mutua laetantes, et amicum pondus uterque,  
 ceu reduces vitae saeva a morte remissos,  
 subiecta cervice levant (*Thebaid.* 10. 377-80)

Parted by distance and dark, the two exchanged  
 joyous signals and, on bent necks, each hoisted his dear  
 burden, as though they had been brought back to life, men rescued  
 from cruel death.<sup>380</sup>

The darkness envelops the warriors, making vague their position on the field. The distance and darkness (10.377) work together to obscure any identifiable physical landmarks, leaving the warriors, if only momentarily, without a temporal or spatial anchor. Hopleus and Dymas are adrift in the void. This dislocation enables an escape from the present and, in the suspension of space and time, it is again as if Tydeus and Parthenopaeus still live (10.380).

Not wanting to break this tentative, transient setting, Hopleus and Dymas only communicate through the briefest, almost semiotic, indication of their joy: '*signa...laetantes*' (10.377-8). They then both continue to journey across the battlefield in silence:

... nec verba, nec ausi  
 flere diu: prope saeva dies indexque minatur  
 ortus. eunt taciti per maesta silentia magnis  
 passibus exhaustasque dolent pallere tenebras. (*Thebaid.* 10. 380-83)

No words, nor did they dare let tears flow  
 for long: cruel day was near, menacing fingers of light

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<sup>379</sup> The transition from the light shining upon the field to the discovery of the bodies takes less than two lines, even taking into account the potential lacuna at 10.376. cf. Williams 1972:79.

<sup>380</sup> emphasis own

had risen. They walked in silence through the somber hush,  
striding along, grimly watching the languishing gloom grow pale.

Hopleus and Dymas' silence might be taken as an attempt to preserve the pause where Tydeus and Parthenopaeus remain alive and they, themselves, remain hidden. Within the darkness they are without place, and therefore freed from its demand for fixed social identities. This dark field has given Hopleus and Dymas a refuge: it is a 'non-place', that is, 'a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical or concerned with identity'.<sup>381</sup> Night has rendered the battlefield unrecognisable, and has freed Hopleus and Dymas from the relational frameworks enforced within warfare, allowing them both to trespass on what is essentially the domain of the dead. The darkness provides a shelter from the polarising drive of conflict and in the same way silences any attempt to fix their position with language. 'Place is completed through the word',<sup>382</sup> or, to put it another way, it is through shared communication that we situate ourselves and others within our environment. Silence negates language's ability to solidify and categorise, leaving Hopleus and Dymas' hybridity and Tydeus and Parthenopaeus' ambiguity uncontested. It sustains their suspension in the space-between, the 'inter' where meaning can be redefined.<sup>383</sup>

However, in the same way that this interstitial space lacking signification is vulnerable to the imposition of meaning through language, it is also threatened by the coming dawn. Whereas Cynthia's guiding moonlight enabled Hopleus and Dymas to enter into this non-place and be reunited with their friends, the harsh light of day is now threatening to force Hopleus' and Dymas' exit (10.383). Once again, the Statian battlefield is shown to be elusive and changeable: it presents the reader with ambiguity in contrast to its polarising nature. Though the dark battlefield provided a refuge for these two grieving warriors, allowing them to be reunited with their fallen comrades, cruelly,<sup>384</sup> the day will expose the reality of Tydeus and Parthenopaeus' deaths: no wonder Hopleus and Dymas watch the coming dawn with a sense of foreboding (10.383).<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Augé 1995:63. Augé also makes clear that non-place is not totalising as 'It never exists in pure form; places reconstitute themselves in it; relations are restored and resumed in it...' (64)

<sup>382</sup> Augé 1995:63.

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Bhabha 1994:38-9.

<sup>384</sup> The cruel, '*saena*' (*Thebaid.*10.381), day threatens, '*indexque minatur ortus*' (10.382-3). Cf. Williams 1972:80.

<sup>385</sup> *exhaustasque*. see Williams 1972:80.

‘We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow’: Amphion discovers Hopleus and Dymas.

No sooner has the darkness begun to fade and the warriors draw near their goal (*Theb.* 10.385-6), then Hopleus and Dymas are discovered. Amphion, son of the Amphion whose music built the walls of Thebes,<sup>386</sup> sees their movement as he patrols the field:

monitu ducis acer agebat  
 Amphion equites, noctem vigilataque castra  
 explorare datus, primusque per avia campi  
 usque procul (necdum totas lux soluerat umbras)  
 nescio quid visu dubium incertumque moveri  
 corporaque ire videt      (*Thebaid.* 10. 387-92)

Warned by his leader Amphion was out  
 with troops on patrol, keeping a sharp eye on the night, assigned  
 to watch the camp. He was the first on that desolate field  
 to see, even at that distance (dawn had not yet made  
 all shadows melt)—*what was it?*—a vague, indistinct stirring,  
 bodies in motion.

In the twilight that precedes the dawn (10.390) Amphion’s presence transforms the empty non-place of Hopleus’ and Dymas’ journey into the space of the battlefield. The act of patrol establishes the borders of each army’s territory and re-polarises identities into enemy or ally. Upon spying Hopleus and Dymas, though too far off to identify the pair, Amphion’s shout provides the words that give definition to the battlefield:

subitus mox fraude reperta  
 exclamat, “cohibete gradum quicumque!” sed hostes<sup>387</sup>  
 esse patet... (*Thebaid.* 10.392-4)

At once, deducing a sneak attack, he shouted:

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<sup>386</sup> Williams 1972:80

<sup>387</sup> the term *hostis* does not denote a personal enmity, but a shared enemy/other. Its original meaning of foreigner/stranger underscores its intrinsically spatial meaning.

“Stop right there, whoever you are!” (Though plainly they were enemies.)

This act of definition immediately restarts the conflict, ending the pause which allowed Hoplaus and Dymas to safely traverse the plain. However, the day has not yet fully arrived: darkness, and ambiguity, linger. Amphion launches a spear at the pair, closing the distance between them and only just missing Dymas (*Theb.* 10.394-8), but the twilight hinders his attack. This attempt is closely followed by that of Aepytus, who succeeds where his leader had failed, killing Hoplaus and, in the same blow, pinning him to Tydeus’ corpse (10.399-404). This blurs their identities just as they had been intertwined within the shadows, undermining the battlefield’s traditional function of keeping identities, and thus polarities and conflict, distinct. Hoplaus dies a happy man, *felix* (10.403), ignorant of the fate of his leader’s body (10.404-5) and forever united with Tydeus in death (10. 402).

Whilst Hoplaus’ death is quick, Dymas’ indecision, which mirrors the entire scene’s spatial and temporal interstitiality, leaves him suspended between the role of supplicant and that of soldier (*Theb.* 10.405-408). Initially, anger wins out:<sup>388</sup> Dymas makes a stand over Parthenopaeus’ body, bearing his sword with the desperation of a lioness protecting her cubs (10. 409-19). His attempt to protect the body is short lived: Dymas’ hand is cut off (10.420-1) and Parthenopaeus is dragged on his back through the dirt by his hair (10.421-2). It is after this defeat that Dymas wavers, resuming the role of supplicant, and pleads with Amphion to bury the Arcadian’s corpse (10.422-30). In this supplication, Dymas once again becomes a substitute for Parthenopaeus claiming his own words are those of the corpse he defends:

‘rogat, en rogat ipse tacentis  
uultus: ego infandas potior satiare volucres,  
me praebete feris, ego bella audere coegi.’ (*Thebaid.* 10. 428-30)

“He’s pleading—yes, *he* with his silent lips  
pleads. I—not he—should gorge the filthy carrion birds,  
feed me to the beasts—I compelled him to risk this war.”

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<sup>388</sup> Statius mentions Dymas’ *ira* three times within these 15 lines (*Thebaid.* 10.407, 409, 419.) using it to frame his description of Dymas’ last stand.

At this moment Dymas places himself in the space of enunciation between Parthenopaeus and Amphion and translates Parthenopaeus' silence into his own message of guilt and regret. On this still shadowy field Dymas appeals to the Thebans' familial and ancestral ties, invoking the bonds between father and son in an attempt to bridge the chasm between enemies (*Theb.* 10. 423-8). Just as Jocasta appealed to the Argives' domestic identity in order to blur the distinction between the opposing armies,<sup>389</sup> here Dymas tries to dislocate Amphion and his companions from the battlefield by dismantling the arbitrary polarity of war.

Amphion's response, however, does not allow Dymas to continue, and instead strengthens the divide between the Thebans and the Argives by exposing the limits of Dymas' claim of common ground. Amphion challenges Dymas with a choice: he can continue to live if he gives up his role as soldier:

“immo,” ait Amphion, “regem si tanta cupido  
condere, quae timidis belli mens, ede, Pelasgis,  
quid fracti exanguesque parent; cuncta ocius effer,  
et vita tumuloque ducis donatus abito.” (*Thebaid.* 10. 431-4)

“Denied!” said Amphion. “If you're so eager to bury  
your king, disclose the craven Pelasgians' war strategy,  
what they—crippled and spineless—intend. Tell all—right now!—and  
you may depart with your life and a tomb for your leader.

By making Dymas' actions a choice between neglecting Parthenopaeus or betraying his allies, Amphion once again re-situates Dymas back into the place of war and the polarity of the battlefield. He enforces the divide between enemies rendering Dymas' composite identity of soldier/friend untenable. Yet, at the same time that he refuses Dymas' plea, Amphion does not simply cut him down. He engages his enemy in conversation and this encounter allows the possibility of negotiation to flicker. It seems that the lingering darkness destabilises the battlefield enough to slow down the removal of ambiguity.

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<sup>389</sup> See p.114.

What we witness next is a violent refusal to make a choice between individual and shared loyalty. Dymas impales himself on his sword, not just up to but including its hilt ‘*toto... capulo*’ (*Theb.* 10.435-6),<sup>390</sup> proclaiming his loyalty to both Argos and Parthenopaeus:

“summumne hoc cladibus,” inquit,  
 “deerat ut afflictos turparem ego proditor Argos?  
 nil emimus tanti, nec sic uelit ipse cremari.” (*Thebaid.* 10. 436-8)

“Is this the climax disaster required?  
 that I should betray and sully afflicted Argos? We buy  
 nothing at that price—*he* would not want such costly cremation!”

The use of the first-person plural, *emimus*, unites Dymas and Parthenopaeus once more and blurs the boundaries between the two individuals by suggesting that they are of one mind. This unity points to the artificiality of Amphion’s distinction between private and public loyalties: to Dymas, who thinks of Parthenopaeus as he thinks of his own self, loyalty to Argos is congruent to his own loyalty to his friend.

Having made the claim that Parthenopaeus’ burial is not worth the betrayal of the Argives, Dymas then proceeds to use his own body to cover the boy’s:

sic ait, et magno proscissum vulnere pectus  
 iniecit puero, supremaque murmura volvens:  
 ‘hoc tamen interea certe potiare sepulcro.’ (*Thebaid.* 10. 439-41)

This said, his chest gashed with a great furrowed wound, he flung  
 himself onto the boy, releasing his last words with a gasp:  
 “This, at least for the meantime, you may use for your tomb.”

Dymas’ body becomes the earth, his wound a substitute for tilled soil,<sup>391</sup> and as he dies his own identity is finally lost. Dymas is no longer a soldier or a supplicant: in his desire for companionship with the dead he metamorphoses into a grave.

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<sup>390</sup> Here I am following Williams 1972:84-85.

<sup>391</sup> As Williams’s (1972:85) notes *proscindo* is ‘rarely used with an object other than soil, except (metaphorically) the sea.’



Statius ends this episode with Amphion's desire to return to Thebes and report Hopleus' and Dymas' "raid", ignorant of the fact that the raid had actually occurred before he met the two soldiers on the battlefield and that he will return to a massacre (10.449-52). Amphion's ignorance and the dramatic irony it presents adds another layer to Statius' persistent employment of liminality by emphasising Amphion's separation from the rest of the war, whilst he lingers on the darkened field.

However, before he closes the scene and moves to the Argives' discovery of Hopleus' and Dymas' deaths, Statius employs the voice of the omniscient narrator to make a comparison between this story and the heroic deeds of Nisus and Euryalus:

vos quoque sacrati, quamvis mea carmina surgant  
 inferiore lyra, memores superabitis annos.  
 forsitan et comites non aspernabitur umbras  
 Euryalus Phrygiique admittet gloria Nisi. (*Thebaid.* 10. 445-8)

Though my song soars from a lowlier lyre, the two of you,  
 like others, will—immortalized—cheat memorial Time.  
 And perhaps, Euryalus shall not spurn your shades as his  
 comrades, and you shall bask in Phrygian Nisus' glory!

Such a comparison is unsurprising, given the various similarities between *Thebaid.* 10. 347-52 and Virgil's *Aeneid.* 9. 168-459.<sup>392</sup> Indeed it is clear that Statius' used Virgil's account of Nisus and Euryalus as a foundation for his treatment of Hopleus and Dymas, therefore this explicit reference might be no more than an acknowledgement of his source.<sup>393</sup>

Yet, Statius' acknowledgement of a competing narrative also serves a different purpose alongside tacit praise of the *Aeneid*: it implicitly invites the reader to encounter Hopleus and

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<sup>392</sup> For an in-depth treatment of the various intertextual links between the two stories see William's 1972 commentary on *Thebaid* 10, specifically xvii- xix and 76-86, who cites Krumbholz G. 1995 'Der Erzählungsstil in der Thebais des Statius: I: Vergleiche' *Glotta* 34: 93-138. Cf. Vessey 1970:321-9; Hardie 2008 and Lovatt 2010:72-81. D. Markus 1997 article has the potential to be a subtle analysis but is fundamentally flawed as it labours under the misconception that both Hopleus and Dymas work to protect Tydeus' corpse, conflating Statius' description of Parthenopaeus with that of Dymas.

<sup>393</sup> This is not the only incident where Statius explicitly acknowledges his debt to his predecessors: most notable is his specific reference to Virgil's *Aeneid* at the close of his epic *Thebaid.* 12. 816-7.

Dymas through the lens of Nisus and Euryalus, despite the differences between the two epics.<sup>394</sup> If, for example, we view Hopleus and Dymas through the lens of Virgilian *pietas* then it is tempting to see the two soldiers' actions as essentially heroic.<sup>395</sup> However, Hopleus' and Dymas' choice of the dead over the living unsettles and draws the reader away from such a reading. How then could we reconcile Statius' assertion of Hopleus' and Dymas' glory with their inglorious deaths outside the proper place of battle? Their deaths on the darkened, opaque, non-place of the quasi-battlefield of the night, deprives their death of heroic value and recognition. My suggestion is this: that *Thebaid.* 10. 347-52 is predominantly a story of the loss of identity, and that the imposition of Nisus and Euryalus serves to further diminish the images of Hopleus and Dymas, an image which has already been hidden beneath the identity of their kings. On the darkened battlefield, heroic virtue is worthless. Yet so is the distinction between enemies. The battlefield at night is both a refuge and a hazard.

#### A torch held high: Argia's journey to Thebes.

As the war rages on throughout the remainder of the tenth and eleventh books, Amphiaraus, Tydeus, Hippomedon, and Parthenopaeus are joined in death by Capaneus (10.927-11.17) and Polynices (11.560-73). This leaves Adrastus as the only survivor of the Seven, and he exits the battlefield when he cannot dissuade Polynices from committing fratricide (11.439-46). After the deaths of both brothers, Creon, Thebes' new king, declares that the fallen enemy soldiers should remain unburied (11.661-4). The surviving Argives then head towards home in disgrace as night falls (11. 756-61). It is into this strange pause, where the conflict is ostensibly over but its aftermath is unnaturally prolonged, that our next dark journey onto the battlefield occurs. Four days later, after the Thebans have buried their dead (12.1-103), Argia makes the decision to part ways with the rest of the Argive women and travel to Thebes to bury her husband (12.176-204). She will be the first to reach Polynices' corpse, before being joined by her sister-in-law Antigone. The encounter between these two women as they trespass onto the dark, decaying battlefield contains all the elements of the *Thebaid's* story of

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<sup>394</sup> Unlike that of Hopleus and Dymas, Nisus and Euryalus' mission is to find Aeneas, not recover bodies. Their quest is sanctioned by the rest of the war council, not secret, and they meet their death away from the battlefield in the forest.

<sup>395</sup> As does Vessey 1970:329: 'The two youths [Hopleus and Dymas] clearly represent the purifying force of *pietas*, useless in the face of violence but nonetheless worthy of highest renown.'

conflict and preoccupation with interstitial space. As each of the women journey to find Polynices' corpse, they engage in a process of negotiation with their surroundings: Argia as an invading lover, Antigone as a native to the field of war. Becoming dislocated within the chaotic darkness, Argia and Antigone reposition themselves through their relationship to Polynices and to one another, but their intimacy is challenged within this hostile environment.

Argia's journey to find her beloved's corpse starts well before she reaches the battlefield when, upon hearing that Creon has forbidden burial of the Argive warriors (12.149-66), she distances herself from the rest of the grieving women and agonises over Polynices' fate (12.183-208). It is a moment where Argia consciously breaks ties to her community, freeing herself from the social constrictions of her gender, '*sexu [...] relicto*' (12.178), in order to be reunited with her husband.<sup>396</sup> Within the empty landscape of exile, Argia's fear and longing transport her on a journey through her memories of her relationship with Polynices, which become muddled with horrifying images of his current fate:

ipse etiam ante oculos omni manifestus in actu,  
 nunc hospes miserae, primas nunc sponsus ad aras,  
 nunc mitis coniunx, nunc iam sub casside torva  
 maestus in amplexu multumque a limine summo  
 respiciens: sed nulla animo uersatur imago  
 crebrior Aonii quam quae de sanguine campi  
 nuda uenit poscitque rogos.      (*Thebaid.* 12. 187-93)

But he's there himself—before her eyes!—revealed in tableaux:  
 now (poor girl!) as her guest, now plighting his troth in first rites,  
 now her mild spouse, now—but lately!—in his grim helmet,  
 grieved as she holds him close, then looking back at her often  
 from the farthest gate. But no image haunts her mind more  
 than that which comes, a ghost from Aonia's blood-soaked field,  
 naked and crying out for interment.

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<sup>396</sup> Cf Alston & Spentzou 2011:84: 'she has escaped'.

The mixing of intimate memories with visions of Polynices' distant plight suggest that Argia herself is tossed about in her frantic thoughts from the marital bed to the gates of Argos and then on to the Cadmeian plain. At once Polynices is both ghost and spouse, an ephemeral and also the most intimate physical presence. That Argia envisions him naked reflects his current vulnerability and echoes their marital union.<sup>397</sup> In this way Argia is haunted by her dead husband, just as Hopleus and Dymas were haunted by Tydeus and Parthenopaeus. However, Polynices' spirit does not rage, like that of angry Tydeus (*Theb.* 10.355-6), but comes as a mild husband,<sup>398</sup> exposed and abandoned, seeking the intimacy lost through death. Instead of reflecting the enmity of the battlefield, Polynices represents the incursion of the domestic into the realm of war. Argia's fierce desire to find and bury Polynices' body causes her to take on the characteristics of a soldier at war, one who will hammer on the gates of Thebes like an attacking army (*Theb.* 12.200-1). Even at this distance Argia and Polynices' relationship is causing the domestic and martial realms to become elided, and as a consequence they themselves are being transformed.

The psychological separation of Argia from her companions, triggered by her memories and fears for her husband, now becomes physical, and she sets off towards Thebes.<sup>399</sup> Alone, with her childhood guardian, Menoetes, as her sole companion, Argia wonders aloud as to Polynices' fate as she races through the nondescript countryside,<sup>400</sup> fearing vultures defiling the corpse (*Theb.* 12.213).<sup>401</sup> Argia's isolation and feelings of loss contribute to her interstitiality. As if chased from these lands, Argia moves unnaturally fast through the landscape, ignorant of and disengaged from her surroundings, '*ignara locorum*' (12.206), despite her claims to Thebes through her marriage (12.198-202). The shapeless backdrop muffles her identity too, and conversely, her precarious figure traverses an ever-shifting landscape deprived of (her) recognition. As night falls Argia's desperation causes her to morph into a Cybelene acolyte, journeying through the increasingly dark and dangerous

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<sup>397</sup> Cf. Pollman 2004:136, who suggests that *nuda* (12.193) should be taken to mean unburied rather than de-robed, but this potential sexual connotation is too in-keeping with the muddling of intimacy and warfare within Argia's memories to be ignored.

<sup>398</sup> The epithet *mitis* is more usually ascribed to Argia's father, Adrastus.

<sup>399</sup> Again, just as Hopleus and Dymas separate themselves from the rest of the Argive host.

<sup>400</sup> The only clues to her path are found at 12.207 '*qua venerat Ornytus*', and 12.219-20: '*magno Megareia praeceps/ arva rapit passu*'

<sup>401</sup> c.f. Hopleus' words at 10.352-3.

landscape until at last the wilderness on the outskirts of Thebes replaces the amorphous space of exile she has just crossed in something of a daze. (12.228-44).<sup>402</sup>

This, the first part of Argia's journey, forms a narrative counterpart to Polynices' journey to Argos at the epic's beginning (*Theb.* 1.312-89).<sup>403</sup> In the same way as her husband's journey reflects his own dislocation and loss of identity, so does Argia's.<sup>404</sup> She traverses a treacherous wilderness, overcoming the opposition of uneven ground and wild beasts and single-mindedly pressing on towards her goal (12.231-7). Despite her continued progress, as the night grows darker and they draw nearer to Thebes, Argia becomes even more disoriented, unable to partake of any shared mode of communication, and regressing to semiotic cries:

quas non illa domos pecudumque hominumque modesto  
pulsavit gemitu? quotiens amissus eunti  
limes, et errantem comitis solacia flammae  
destituunt gelidaeque facem vicere tenebrae! (*Thebaid.* 12. 239-42)

What abode of beast or man did she not assail  
with her noisy sobs! How often this wayfarer lost  
her way, how often the torch which lit her straying steps  
went out, as chilly shadows defeated her companion's brand!<sup>405</sup>

Argia's cries are so desperate and incomprehensible, that they are an assault, disturbing the modest abodes of both beasts and men. In this way, as she steps ever closer to the place of war, Argia morphs more and more into an advancing soldier. Like an invading enemy, Argia's cries are weapons turned on those who block her way (12.239-40), her torch a sword with which she attempts to pierce the night. However, the darkened field counters her attacks, and it seems that the darkness is stronger: she is repeatedly overpowered and her advance thwarted.

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<sup>402</sup> Pentheus' ridge, *Pentheu denexa* (*Thebaid.* 12. 244), becomes noticeable.

<sup>403</sup> Cf. Pollman 2004:144-5; Alston & Spentzou 2011:179-81.

<sup>404</sup> Both journey in search of identity and belonging. They seek to assert their 'rights as guest, wife[/husband], and family member': Alston & Spentzou 2011:84-5.

<sup>405</sup> Here I have altered Wilson Joyce's translation to better reflect the fact that the torch is carried by Menoetes.

When at last they arrive outside Thebes, Menoetes is able to enlighten Argia, translating the landscape from a series of smells and sounds until the battlefield comes into view:

“haud procul, exacti si spes non blanda laboris,  
 Ogygias, Argia, domos et egena sepulcri  
 busta iacere reor: grave comminus aestuat aer  
 sordidus, et magnae redeunt per inane volucres.  
 haec illa est crudelis humus, nec moenia longe.” (*Thebaid.* 12. 246-50)

“Not far (if this punishing effort has bred no false hope!) lie  
 —Argia!—Ogygian dwellings and, I think, dead men  
 in need of burial for, from close at hand, come waves  
 of air thick with stench, and great birds are wheeling aloft.  
 Here’s the infamous field—no doubt the walls are nearby.”

Signs of death assault the senses, the smell of decay and sound of carrion birds stretch the battlefield and it is as if Argia has already entered onto the plain. Nearby, the Theban walls loom in the darkness and the flickering of dying watch fires signal that the night is drawing to a close (12.250-2). Once again, as it was for Hopleus and Dymas, the dark battlefield is encountered not only in darkness, but in the fragile shadows that immediately precede the emerging dawn. In this interstitial moment and place Menoetes’ words bring clarity and Argia first encounters Thebes.

Argia’s response to finding herself in front of the city that was once her potential home is primarily one of longing, despite Polynices’ death. Her self-understanding shifts again: she reaches out towards the walls and pleads for recognition as a wife and daughter rather than an assailing enemy:

“urbs optata prius, nunc tecta hostilia, Thebae,  
 et tamen, illaesas si reddis coniugis umbras,  
 sic quoque dulce solum, cernis quo praedita cultu,  
 qua stipata manu, iuxta tua limina primum  
 Oedipodis magni venio nurus?...? (*Thebaid.* 12. 256-60)

“City of Thebes! once longed for, now our enemies’ haven,

but still, if you return my husband's body unharmed,  
ground I'll yet find sweet: you see in what garb arrayed,  
by what train attended I, daughter-in-law of great  
Oedipus, now for the first time approach your gates?

This supplication exposes the fragility of Argia's current position, and the complexity of her relationship to the place where she now stands.<sup>406</sup> Her statement of her long held desire for Thebes and the notion that, if Polynices' body is found, she may yet still find this land 'dulce', 'sweet' (*Theb.* 12. 258), are not just the words of a supplicant but also those of a lover. Indeed, Argia claims her right to approach through marriage as she is daughter-in-law, 'nurus' (12.260), trying to cross the *limen* to claim her husband.<sup>407</sup> Once again, just as her memories and visions of Polynices blended the martial and the domestic into a new composite space, as we saw above, so in front of Thebes Argia muddles the territories of family and enemy, lover and acolyte. Occupying her unique position as both friend and foe, Argia does not come as a queen seeking power,<sup>408</sup> but instead claims only the exile whom she married:

illum, oro, extorrem regni belloque fugatum,  
illum, quem solio non es dignata paterno,  
redde mihi. (*Thebaid.* 12. 262-4.)

Him, I beg, exiled from his realm and routed in war,  
him whom you did not judge worthy of his father's throne,  
give him back to me.<sup>409</sup>

Argia seeks to return to the beginning of the epic, before the creation of the battlefield on which she now stands. She does not only desire Polynices' return, but a return of the peace and celebration that her short marriage promised. Memories of a husband compete with the reality of Polynices' corpse, and the battlefield is contaminated by Argia's continued

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<sup>406</sup> Helen Lovatt notes Argia is a 'matrix of alternatives' (1999:136) presenting relational possibilities which defies the *Thebaid's* wholesale destructive drive.

<sup>407</sup> Williams 1958 cf. Catullus 61.159-61.

<sup>408</sup> Cf. Lovatt 1999:139: 'she substitutes female concerns about family and relationships for male concerns about power and glory'.

<sup>409</sup> Here I prefer Shackleton Bailey's translation (2003b:269) to Wilson Joyce's (2008) as it retains the anaphora of *illum* at the beginning of 12.262 & 3.

insistence on an unbroken marital bond. Her connection to her husband is so strong that Argia completes her supplication with a plea to Polynices himself: “*tu mihi pande vias*”, “spread out the road before me” (*Theb.* 12.266).<sup>410</sup>

Having finished her supplication, Argia briefly pauses at a shepherd’s hut in order to rekindle her torch (*Theb.* 12.267-9). Weapon renewed, she then bursts onto the *horrendos...campos* (12.269), the dreadful field, beginning her second assault on the darkness. Routing among the dead and hindered by shadows, Argia is buffeted by lingering ghosts and exposed steel (12.282-7). Despite nightfall and the end of the war, the battlefield remains in a state of perpetual conflict and resists the young queen's incursion. As she stumbles through the gore, Argia is then seen by Juno who takes it upon herself to entreat Cynthia to light Argia’s way (12.291-311). Just as the moonlight revealed Tydeus and Parthenopaeus (*Theb.* 10.370-5),<sup>411</sup> so it now exposes Polynices, and Argia rushes to the body to be reunited with her husband (12.312-48).

However, though they are both aided by Cynthia's light, whereas the Ogygian and Arcadian travelled through a non-place characterised by silence Argia becomes disorientated by battle's noisy, intrusive, aftermath:

... per offensus armorum et lubrica tabo  
 gramina, non tenebras, non circumfusa tremescens  
 concilia umbrarum atque animas sua membra gementes,  
 saepe gradu caeco ferrum calcataque tela  
 dissimulat... (*Thebaid.* 12.283-7)

... over heaped arms and grass  
 slick with gore, trembling neither at shadows nor at shades  
 who cluster and swirl about her, ghosts mourning lost limbs;  
 walking blind, though she often treads upon steel and spear...

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<sup>410</sup> own translation.

<sup>411</sup> See p.169.



Instead of navigating a void of distance, *longe*, and dark, *umbras*,<sup>412</sup> the Argive queen is assaulted and overwhelmed by the remnants of battle. War, in the form of blood, steel, and death, overwhelms the landscape. Argia's journey is not merely unpleasant: it is painful and difficult. The battlefield she crosses does not so much represent a pause in conflict, but the perpetuation of violence. The dark that provided Hopleus and Dymas with temporary refuge from their military responsibilities forces Argia to adopt the position of an opposing army. Yet, despite encountering hostility, Argia does not succumb to violence. She retains the compassion that first impelled her to march on Thebes, treating each of the fallen with the tenderness she intends for Polynices (*Theb.* 12.287-90). Instead of transforming her into an enemy fighter, the dark-battlefield renders her a wife to all.

'[They]Loved and were loved': Argia and Polynices are reunited.

Whilst it is not until the final book of the epic that Argia steps out onto the battlefield, it is possible to see the violence that visits Thebes stretching back throughout the narrative to the earliest moments of her marriage. Indeed, there has already been a night where Argia has contended with Thebes for her husband, one that fell only 12 days after she and Polynices were wed (*Thebaid.* 2. 306-63). That night Argia confronts Polynices, demanding to know the cause of his continuing grief and rage (2.335-9):

tua me, properabo fateri,  
angit, amate, salus. tune incomitatus, inermis  
regna petes? poterisque tuis decedere Thebis,  
si neget? (*Thebaid.* 2. 342-5)

no, my love—I'm quick to admit—it's  
your safety alarms me. Will you, without friends, without arms  
seek your kingdom? Should she deny you, will you be *able*  
to leave your dear Thebes?

In this moment, Argia fears Thebes as if the city were a rival lover, pre-empting the intimacy of her eventual address to the Theban walls (12.256-64). Indeed, although she states that her

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<sup>412</sup> Cf. *Thebaid.* 10. 377

concern is for Polynices' safety, she ultimately reveals her insecurity when she asks if he is leaving for another woman: some secret love, '*consciens ardor*' (*Theb.* 2.351). As she questions Polynices, Argia lists the source of her own fears: dark omens gleaned from entrails (2.348) and swooping birds (2.349), and a vision of Juno coming to her in the dark (2.350-51).<sup>413</sup> Each of these auguries prophesy the events that take place on her journey across the Theban plain. As we have seen, this is a journey that sees her battle through blood and gore (*Theb.* 12.283-4), beneath the sound of carrion birds (12.249) and aided by Juno (12.291-311).<sup>414</sup> Polynices' desire to confront his brother has brought the battlefield into the bridal chamber, unsettling his marriage and displacing Argia from their shared bed to the dark and terrifying field of war.<sup>415</sup> Just as the battlefield remains an actively hostile space after the battle is over, here its polarising potential is shown to exist even before the battle-lines are drawn. Polynices carries violence and conflict within himself, drawing those around him onto the field of war.

However, within the apparent safety of the marital chamber, Polynices dismisses his wife's foresight with miscomprehended insight:

fors aderit lux illa tibi, qua moenia cernes  
coniugis et geminas ibis regina per urbes. (*Thebaid.* 2. 361-2)

then perhaps that light will rise for you when you'll behold  
your husband's walls and proceed, a queen, through two cities.

Now, indeed, at the epic's close, Argia stands before those walls (12.255). However, she does not arrive as the city's queen and the only light to guide her will be the light of Cynthia's moon (12.309-11). Thebes should have provided Argia with love and security, yet, like the elegiac lover, she is locked outside the door.<sup>416</sup> Her continuing bond with Polynices means that the space of love remains inextricably intertwined with the space of war. From the

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<sup>413</sup> It is unclear whether Argia actually experiences these portents or if they are a series of dreams. The reference to swooping birds foreshadows the Argive augury at *Thebaid.* 3.449-51. For an overview of the role of augury throughout the *Thebaid* and its position in relation to other Latin epics see Tuttle 2013: *passim*.

<sup>414</sup> It is fitting that Juno should be the one to aid Argia, as she pleads for Argos to be spared (1.259-60) and sees Jupiter's vengeance primarily in relation to their marriage: '*si tanta est thalami discordia sancti*' (1.260).

<sup>415</sup> In a way, this scene foreshadows the meeting of Ismene and Atys.

<sup>416</sup> Cf Ovid *Amores*.1.6. and Propertius 1.16.17-28 as cited pp. 204-205 of this thesis.

moment Polynices brought the conflict into their marital bed, Argia has been pursuing her lover on the dark battlefield.

As Argia herself foretold, it is Juno who eventually comes to her aid, causing Cynthia to shine her moonlight on Polynices' body and Sleep to blind the Theban watchmen (*Theb.* 12.291-311). The goddess' intervention is also interwoven with images of marital intimacy. Firstly, she sees Argia after stealing from the embrace of her husband, Jupiter, '*sinu magni semet furata mariti*' (12.292), a detail that shifts the scene away from the battlefield and back to the marriage bed. Secondly, when Juno encounters Cynthia she reminds the moon goddess of her part in Jupiter's indiscretions: lengthening the night to conceive Hercules with Alcmena (12.299-301). Finally, she describes Polynices by his relationship to Argia, rather than his status as exile or as Oedipus' son (12.304). These small choices add together to reinforce the intimacy of Argia's quest. On the Theban battlefield, where the brothers' conflict has worked to polarise and divide, Juno sees Argia through the intimacy the latter seeks to maintain with Polynices. Argia's connection to both Thebes and Argos through her marriage means that she maintains a composite identity of lover *and* family *and* enemy. Her presence on the field of war, therefore, muddles and dilutes the martial realm with the symbolic economy of marriage.

With the intervention of Juno,<sup>417</sup> Argia does find her husband: first seeing the cloak she herself had woven (312-14), then finding his body, '*in pulvere paene/calcatum*' (316-17): trampled into the ground. The physicality of her reaction to his corpse is heart-rending:

fugere animus visusque sonusque,  
 inclusitque dolor lacrimas; tum corpore toto  
 sternitur in vultus animamque per oscula quaerit  
 absentem, pressumque comis ac veste cruorem  
 seruatura legit.                    (*Thebaid.* 12. 317-21)

Thought, sight, hearing at once deserted her, grief  
 stopped her tears. She flung herself on him—full length, face  
 to face—and with her kisses sought his final breath:

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<sup>417</sup> The intervention of this divine *matrona* here is fitting, as Henderson reflects in his description of Juno as 'Argos' Wife of Wives' (1993:186).

*gone!* From his hair and raiment she pressed some drops of blood,  
a relic to treasure.

The carnal intimacy with which Argia falls upon Polynices' body echoes and perverts their sexual relationship, as their proximity and position mirrors the conjugal act. She re-enacts the kisses and caresses Polynices had previously bestowed on her to calm her fears of a rival suitor (*Theb.* 2.352-5), once again treating this darkened field as she would the marital bed. Their intimacy is not only sexual as, in grief, Argia presses herself to Polynices in a way not unlike Polynices' tearful embrace of his mother and sisters at the start of the war (*Theb.* 7.492-6).<sup>418</sup> Like Polynices in that encounter, so here Argia's actions suggest a need to absorb her husband within herself as she bears down on his lifeless body, '*pressum*' (12.220), and searches his mouth for breath, '*animamque per oscula quaerit/absentem*' (12.219). However, just as Polynices' breastplate, a symbol of the ongoing conflict, prevented him from reforging the bond between himself and his mother and sisters, so Argia is unable to form a connection with Polynices, this time not hindered by armour but by death. He remains a passive recipient of her affection.

When she regains her speech, Argia addresses Polynices from this new place of intimacy. Once again re-visiting the conversation held in their marital bed (2.332-62), Argia asks to be brought into the city, for the hospitality that was promised (12.325-8). Questioning his family's absence, she draws a contrast between the welcome given to Polynices in Argos and the violence visited upon the couple at Thebes (12.328-32). In the void left by the lack of Polynices' family Argia re-frames the conflict to fit with her own identity as Polynices' wife. She now narrates the reasons Polynices had to stay in Argos: family (12.334), honour (12.335), and '*indivisa potestas*': undivided power (12.335). Finally, she places the blame for the conflict solely on her shoulders:

“quid queror? ipsa dedi bellum maestumque rogavi  
ipsa patrem ut talem nunc te complexa tenerem.” (*Thebaid.* 12.336-7)

“Why complain? I gave you war, I begged my sorrowful  
father that I might now hold you thus in my arms.”

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<sup>418</sup> See p. 116

At this moment Argia not only recalls the night shared between herself and Polynices, but another night: the one where she goes in supplication to her father (*Thebaid.* 3.677-721).<sup>419</sup> She was the one who implored Adrastus to give her war (“*da bella pater*” 3.696), whose unhappiness in marriage led her to beg for a conflict that would separate her from her spouse (3.701-10). Widowed long before Polynices’ literal death, Argia went to Adrastus in a state of grief, with hair torn and tears scarring her face: ‘*laceris pridem turpata capillis, / et fletu signata genas*’ (3. 680-1). Argia’s claim of responsibility condenses the entire conflict of the *Thebaid* into the space between herself and Polynices.<sup>420</sup> The battlefield is located not only on the Cadmeian plain: it also exists in the interstitial space between husband and wife. To Argia, the war is expressed and experienced in the same dark battlefields where she conducts her marriage. In the darkness, she caresses her husband’s body as she did in nights following her wedding. In the blood-drenched Theban soil, Argia and Polynices are reunited and their love distorts the battlefield of the *Thebaid* into a composite space of love and war.

‘Take up our quarrel’: becoming sisters-in-war.

While Argia seeks to assert her position as Polynices’ bride within a hostile battlefield where she is a foreign invader, Antigone, by contrast, travels across the darkened field as a native. Taking advantage of the sleeping guards, Antigone escapes from the city, bursting forth just as Argia had erupted onto the field (*Thebaid.* 12. 349-58).<sup>421</sup> Her journey across the battlefield is over in a moment, for as Statius explains:

nec longa morata,  
 quippe trucem campum et positus quo pulvere frater  
 nouerat. (*Thebaid.* 12. 358-60)

Antigone did not pause,  
 for she knew the grim field and where in the dust her brother  
 lay.

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<sup>419</sup> This nighttime meeting between father and daughter occurs after Tydeus’ bloody return from the ambush of the fifty (*Thebaid.* 3.345-406) and before the catalogue of the Argive troops (*Thebaid.* 4.1-344)

<sup>420</sup> The ramifications of Argia’s guilt make this more than a simple revival of ‘the Virgilian motif of a wife who destines her husband for war’: Keith 2000:96.

<sup>421</sup> Cf. *erumpit* (*Theb.* 12.356) and *irrupit* (*Theb.* 12.269)

The contrast between Antigone's swift passage through the battlefield and Argia's arduous journey can be attributed to the knowledge gained by Antigone through her teichoscopy in books 7 (243-373) and 11 (354-82).<sup>422</sup> Yet, I want to suggest that Antigone's speed is symptomatic of a much deeper connection to her environment: she knows the place where her brother lies, not just because she recognises where he fought but because she is intimately familiar with darkness, violence, and death. Antigone's knowledge of darkness and war is an inheritance from her parents: Oedipus, '*aeterna damnatum nocte*' (1.47), and Jocasta, '*belli mater*' (7.483-4).<sup>423</sup> Heir of her parents' curse, Antigone is able to navigate the dark and empty battlefield as it is a place which resonates with her own identity. The Theban princess, if only by virtue of birth, is the *nefas* that Oedipus attempts to hide and Jupiter seeks to destroy (1.227-31).<sup>424</sup> If Argia experiences the battlefield through her marriage then Antigone is a native inhabitant of the places of war, having been born out of discord and darkness.<sup>425</sup> Arriving at her brother's corpse, Antigone's response to Argia's presence demonstrates her affiliation with this time and place:

“cuius” ait “manes, aut quae temeraria quaeris  
nocte mea?” (Thebaid. 12. 366-7)

“Reckless woman! whose soul, what limbs do you seek?  
This night is mine!”

“*Nocte mea*”, “my night”: Antigone immediately establishes her ownership of this dark and desolate place. The battlefield is hers and Argia is a foreigner.<sup>426</sup>

Though Antigone heard Argia's cries, their meaning is still allusive and her identity remains in doubt (12.366). Upon Antigone's arrival Argia becomes silent, as if in a bid to remain hidden (12.367-9). The dark battlefield that holds all the intimate and private significance of the marital chamber is changing into a social space, and it seems Argia is unwilling to commit

<sup>422</sup> *Thebaid.* 12. 354-60 and *Thebaid.* 12. 283-7. Cf. Manioti 2016:131; Pollmann 2004:173 and Lovatt 2005:60-5.

<sup>423</sup> As discussed on p. 114

<sup>424</sup> Within the *Thebaid* the motifs of darkness, blindness, and ancestral sin are deeply intertwined. Cf. Bernstein 2004 *passim*; Bonds 1985:232; Hill 2008a:140; Moreland 1975 *passim*; Pagan 2000:438.

<sup>425</sup> See Moreland 1975:31: ‘Jupiter gave [the Thebans and the Argives] darkness and they became lost.’

<sup>426</sup> For a comparison between this initially hostile reaction and the bitterness between Hypsipyle and Eurydice see Augoustakis 2010:83. cf. Manioti 2016:134 for a list of Argia and Antigone's competing claims of ownership.

to a public role. Her silence is a repeat of the *'longa silentia'* (*Theb.* 8.621) shared between Antigone and Ismene within the Theban *thalamus*, and, in this way, suggests similarities between the two women and their potential interchangeability as Polynices' rightful mourners.<sup>427</sup> Antigone's arrival questions Argia's legitimacy within this now communal space and the latter's initial reaction is to withdraw.

At first the silence is maintained, even in the face of Antigone's persistence (12.370-2). However, Argia eventually responds to Antigone's hostility with an offer of partnership:

“si quid in hoc veteri bellorum sanguine mecum  
 quaesitura uenis, si tu quoque dura Creontis  
 iussa times, possum tibi me confisa fateri.  
 si misera es (certe lacrimas lamentaque cerno),  
 iunge, age, iunge fidem: proles ego regis Adrasti  
 (ei mihi! num quis adest?) cari Polynicis ad ignes,  
 etsi regna vetant” (*Thebaid.* 12.374-380)

“If, with me, you come looking for... something here in the stale  
 blood of battle; if you too are afraid of Creon's  
 rough justice, then I can trust you and tell you who I am.  
 If you are wretched—and the signs of sorrow and tears are clear—  
 then join me, join forces with me! Adrastus' royal scion,  
 I—there's no one near?—at beloved Polynices' pyre  
 though royalty stands opposed—”

*“Iunge, age, iunge fidem”*: “Join, come join with me in faith” (*Theb.* 12.378). This simple invitation to alliance creates an opportunity for reconciliation that runs counter to the *Thebaid's* divisive conflict. These words of trust and shared purpose intrude onto the battlefield defying the space's drive towards enmity. In this moment Argia makes the choice to share her space, a choice that is strikingly different to the brothers' inability to cohabit Thebes. She treats the field of war as if it were the wedding *thalamus*, where one can build intimate relationships, as to Argia they are one and the same.

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<sup>427</sup> Cf. Maniotti 2016:130.

In the face of this invitation Antigone's response is to acknowledge Argia's claim to Polynices, but her words betray a lingering reluctance to share this space of grief:

stupuit Cadmeia virgo  
intremuitque simul dicentemque occupat ultro:  
“mene igitur sociam (pro fors ignara!) malorum,  
mene times? mea membra tenes, mea funera plangis.  
cedo, tene, pudet heu! pietas ignava sororis!  
haec prior” (*Thebaid.* 12.380-5)

The Cadmeian virgin stared  
and trembled in wonder, then broke in on the other's speech:  
“Do you fear *me*? I'm your ally in these troubles—by blind  
chance! That's my flesh you hold, my limbs you lament. I yield,  
keep him! The shame—oh! a sister's paltry devotion!  
*She*, before I—”

The double anaphora, |*mene...* |*mene...* *mea...* *mea* (*Theb.* 12.382-3), of the personal and possessive pronoun emphasises Antigone's feelings of ownership over her brother; whilst she is willing to concede Polynices to Argia, her words evoke the sense of defeat: “*cedo, tene, pudet...*”, “I yield my place, you hold, I am ashamed” (12.384):<sup>428</sup> Antigone, the Cadmeian, is unable to share her brother with even her ally, ‘*sociam*’ (*Theb.* 12.382), and maintains the separation between them, lamenting her tardiness: ‘*haec prior*’ (12.385).<sup>429</sup> She reflects Argia's desire for Polynices but Antigone's affiliation to the space of conflict means that she inhabits the darkened field as a soldier defending territory. In a way, despite its location outside of the city walls, the battlefield is being inhabited by both Argia and Antigone as though it is the thalamus: their own private space. Each is a reflection of the other, however a certain hostility remains. They are allied towards the same goal, but take up positions as enemies competing for the territory of Polynices' body, reflecting the polarising drive of the battlefield on which he lies.<sup>430</sup>

<sup>428</sup> This reading of *Thebaid.* 12. 384 is subject to some debate but I have chosen to follow Pollmann 2004:177.

<sup>429</sup> See Lovatt 1999:138 for the Sophoclean undertones of Statius' Antigone.

<sup>430</sup> As Pollmann 2004:177-8 wryly notes ‘Even piety can be cause for rivalry and strife in the *Thebaid.*’



Yet, though Antigone's words betray a lingering desire for separation and ownership, the darkness allows for a momentary suspension of difference as both women embrace Polynices and each other:

hic pariter lapsae iunctoque per ipsum  
 amplexu miscent avidae lacrimasque comasque,  
 partitaeque artus redeunt alterna gementes  
 ad vultum et cara vicibus ceruice fruuntur.  
 dumque modo haec fratrem memorat, nunc illa maritum (*Thebaid.* 12. 385-9)

Here both fell and together embraced  
 the same body, eagerly mingling their tears and tresses;  
 they shared his limbs between them, looked back at his face  
 with a groan, then each took her turn to nuzzle his sweet neck,  
 while they recalled this one her brother, that one her spouse

As they fall upon their brother and husband, Argia and Antigone close the space between them, becoming each other in their grief. The verb *miscere*, to mix or mingle, is also used to describe intercourse<sup>431</sup> and inflicting wounds on each other in battle.<sup>432</sup> Here it emphasises the physicality of Argia and Antigone's encounter: in the supposedly polarising space of war they are joined together and transform the battlefield into a space of shared grief.<sup>433</sup> The darkness obscures their bodies rendering individuals indistinct and forming composite identities, just as the wet battlefield enabled the muddling of enemies within the Ismenos' waves.<sup>434</sup> The corruption of the battlefield, that is, its sustainment past its usual temporal boundaries, once again allows for hybridity and ambiguity.

This moment of semiotic unity, of deep communication via groaning, embraces and tears, makes way for the symbolic reframing of their encounter and the conflict through language as each of the women begins to weave her own narrative. It is as if they are attempting to escape the discomfort of the liberating but isolating non-place of the darkened field by

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<sup>431</sup> E.g. Ov. *Met.* 13. 866.

<sup>432</sup> E.g. Virgil. *Aeneid.* 12. 720.

<sup>433</sup> Both Lovatt 1999:138 and Maniotti 2016:133 note the concentration of terms denoting togetherness and equity in *Thebaid.* 12. 385-9.

<sup>434</sup> See p.143-144.

rebuilding connections to their wider communities, without falling back into the traps of inflexible polarity. Firstly, Argia regales Antigone with evidence of Polynices' continued loyalty to and love for his family (12.391-404), establishing an unbroken connection between the two women.<sup>435</sup> However, Antigone's attempt at her own telling of events is cut short by Menoetes (12.404-5), who reminds them of the need to burn the body before the on-coming dawn (12.405-8). This leaves her unable to reciprocate, and with no way of repositioning herself within the narrative in relation to Argia, who therefore remains her enemy. It also transforms Argia's earlier protestations of inferiority, "*ego cura minor facilisque relinqui*", "I was a lesser care, and easy to leave behind" (12.397),<sup>436</sup> from words of affectionate regard to jealous complaints of neglect.<sup>437</sup> Though momentarily united within the semiotic *chôra*,<sup>438</sup> reconciliation proves ephemeral on the darkened plain, and language ultimately fails to successfully cross a Third space of enunciation that is overshadowed by conflict and war.

The 'clear dichotomy'<sup>439</sup> between Argia and Antigone only widens as they attempt to establish resolution through Polynices' burial.<sup>440</sup> Working together, the two women and Menoetes carry Polynices' corpse to the Ismenos to cleanse the body for burning (12. 409-15). This is in itself a futile act, as the waters of the River are now so polluted that it is questionable whether they can still be used for purification.<sup>441</sup> Also, as we saw in our exploration of the wet battlefield, the Ismenos has suspended those who die in its waves in the space between life and death, as soldiers disappear forever under the water, ultimately denied proper ritual. Having washed Polynices' body, the two sisters-in-law then look around for a pyre that still burns (12. 416-19). Only one pyre remains:

stabat adhuc, seu forte, rogi, seu numine divum,  
 cui torrere datum saevos Eteocleos artus,  
 sive locum monstris iterum Fortuna parabat,  
 seu dissensuros seruauerat Eumenis ignes. (*Thebaid.* 12. 420-3)

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<sup>435</sup> In this way Argia and Antigone become sisters as they 'become storytellers': Maniotti 2016:132.

<sup>436</sup> Translation own.

<sup>437</sup> Maniotti 2016:135.

<sup>438</sup> Cf. Augoustakis 2010:14-21.

<sup>439</sup> Augoustakis 2010:33.

<sup>440</sup> An act that, as Lovatt 1999:136 notes, leads to 'only further and different types of conflict'.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. Dee 2013:187.

Was it chance? or divine will? A pyre was still standing—the one  
 raised to roast Eteocles' savage carcass: either  
 Fortune was setting the scene once more for monstrosities, or  
 a Fury had kept these flames safe to further the conflict.

Unaware of the disturbing associations of this particular pyre (*Theb.* 12.426), Argia and Antigone pray for Polynices' safe admittance to the flames (12.427-8). Of course, Eteocles' shade is far from willing to allow his brother peace just as Polynices resists sharing with him. As soon as Polynices is placed on his brother there is an earthquake and the pyre erupts: shaking and spitting, the pyre pushes the corpses apart, even splitting the flames themselves (*Theb.* 12.429-37). The act that Antigone and Argia intended to be an act of closure has only served to prolong the conflict between the Theban brothers.<sup>442</sup>

This continuation of conflict re-situates Argia and Antigone, taking them out of the shared space of grief and positioning them as others on the field of war. Just as the coming dawn revealed Hopleus and Dymas (*Theb.* 10.390), the moment the pyre erupts lighting up the plain is the moment the Theban watchmen start to wake from their slumber (*Theb.* 12.449). They pour out onto the battlefield as if they were an army advancing to meet an enemy and scour the plain until they find the two women and the old man (12. 450-52). They are met immediately by defiance and rage:

at ipsae  
 ante rogam saeuique palam spreuisse Creontis  
 imperia et furtum claro plangore fatentur  
 securae, quippe omne vident fluxisse cadaver. (*Thebaid.* 12. 452-5)

the women stood in plain view before the pyre, shouting they'd flouted  
 savage Creon's commands; defiant, they clamoured their theft  
 aloud seeing the whole corpse had, by now, been consumed.

Gone are the words of reconciliation, the alliance formed in the dark. With the coming of day and resumption of the brothers' conflict, Argia and Antigone have been co-opted back

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<sup>442</sup> The episode is thus a powerful example of the *Thebaid's* 'assimilation of lament to war' as noted by Lovatt 1999:136.

into the space of war and take the brothers' wrath into themselves. Now that their shared purpose is ended, Argia and Antigone vie for recognition demanding that their love be recognised as superior to the other's. The animosity that they had so far elluded now fuels a desire for conflict and death. The act which should have brought an end to the conflict, an end to the battlefield allowing Argia and Antigone to '*iunge fidem*' (12.738), instead has reignited the anger and hatred that caused the feud. Attempts to unravel the symbolic framework of enmity through hybridity and intimacy have failed. Darkness and ambiguity are overcome by the harsh illumination of the pyre. The aftermath of battle and rituals of grief give way once more to the advance of the Theban army as the battlefield continues to impose itself on the landscape, forcing all to become enemies on the stage of war.

### 3.v. Conclusions from the field of war

What has become apparent in this chapter is that the *Thebaid* takes a space where identities should be polarised and communities divided and forces allies and enemies into uncomfortable proximity. In particular, Statius utilises Polynices' and Eteocles' muddled familial relationships to undermine and expose the arbitrary nature of their hostility. From the moment Jocasta enters the Argive encampment (*Thebaid.* 7.470-88), till Argia and Antigone unwittingly throw Polynices on his brother's pyre (12.429-46), individuals are shown to hold complex, composite identities which defy the battlefield's binarisms and, in doing so, present opportunities for reconcillation. That this reconcillation is often fleeting and almost always immediately overcome does not negate its lingering, ephemeral presence on the bleak field of war.

As the *Thebaid's* composite subjects-in-becoming disrupt the battlefield, so the space itself becomes blurred. It spills out over its traditional boundaries, like a river breaking its banks. Those dependent on the symbolic framework of warfare for status, like Hippomendon and the rest of the Argive Seven, are thwarted and denied a glorious death. They slide, unanchored and vulnerable, over the wet ground; colliding with friend and foe in visceral intimacy. As the battlefield's spatial boundaries blur, so the battlefield-chronotope's traditional temporal limits are transgressed. Hostilities seep over into nighttime and the chairological time for respite and grief. We have seen how this allows those, such as Hoplaus and Dymas, to seek temporary refuge within the darkness, only to be reminded of the unnceasing nature of the conflict as they encounter an active and hostile enemy in the form of Amphion, and are killed.

On this blurred field, where enemies are indistinct from family and friend; where the landscape threatens to unseat even the most accomplished of warriors, suspending them within a perpetual state of dying; where the darkness that once provided a refuge now harbours dangerous enemies, the Thebans and Argives come together in bloody disunity. Yet, the field of war is not limited to the Cadmeian plain. It is carried by individuals into the most intimate recesses of domestic life: Ismenis and Antigone's thalamus, Polynices' and Argia's marital bed. The arrhythmia of the brothers' discord spreads from Thebes to Argos and back, bringing with it all the horrors and hostilities of Thebes' killing field and establishing the battlefield throughout the *Thebaid*.

## 4. Thresholds and gatekeepers: moments of liminality and becoming.

Then, on the surface of being, in that region where being *wants* to be both visible and hidden, the movements of opening and closing are so numerous, so frequently inverted, and so charged with hesitation, that we could conclude on the following formula: **man is a half-open being.**<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Bachelard 1958:222.

#### 4.i. Standing in the threshold.

Doorways as sites of encounter and transformation.

... tandemque reclusis  
 infertur portis. actutum regia cernit  
 vestibula; hic artus imbri ventoque rigentes  
 proicit ignotaeque acclinis postibus aulae  
 invitat tenues ad dura cubilia somnos (*Thebaid.* 1.385-9)

At last, town gates swung wide,  
 and in he went. Straightaway he picked out a porch where,  
 limbs aching with wind and rain, he threw himself down, leaning  
 back on the doors, little knowing that this was the royal hall,  
 he invited elusive sleep to share his hard bed.

Early on in Book 1, and after travelling through the storms of exile, Polynices finds shelter in the doorway of the Argive palace. Just as this moment represents the young Theban's temporary escape from the *Thebaid's* vast hybrid wildernesses and expansive composite battlefields, so the final chapter of this thesis presents a change in perspective, focussing on the condensed, momentary, space of the threshold. Whether a doorway, gateway or opening, the space between doorstep and the lintel is one of transition;<sup>444</sup> a transition that is not just the physical movement from one place to another but potentially also a change in the state of one's being.<sup>445</sup> Doors mark the entrance to a home, and the exit of a dungeon, they can keep secrets in or information out. They can signify freedom, opportunity, escape, or they can be symbols of imprisonment or death. The threshold is a 'resonant space',<sup>446</sup> it spills out meanings, it progresses and it hinders, and gives form to the space between the past and the future:

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<sup>444</sup> Cf. Lefebvre 1974:209-10.

<sup>445</sup> In his work *Les Rites de Passage* (1908), as cited by Mukherji 2013:xix, Arnold Van Gennep made the link between liminal space and ritual explicit by dividing all rites of passage into the categories of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal.

<sup>446</sup> Mukherji 2013: xvii.

If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, all of the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.<sup>447</sup>

In the story of the *Thebaid*, doors, gateways and thresholds are frequently the site of encounter. Just as they demarcate the interstice between the polarities of inside and out, so they provide the literal and metaphorical (third)space between subjects.<sup>448</sup> In this way, the epic's doorways are the location of specific instances of becoming, whether it is becoming-family, becoming-lovers, becoming-animal, or becoming-enemies.<sup>449</sup> From the perspective of the threshold the reader is presented with a synoptic view of the greater and lesser movements of the *Thebaid*. Like Borges' Aleph, 'one of the points in space which contains all other points', which provides inspiration for Soja's vision of Thirdspace conveying 'the infinite complexities of space and time', the Thirdspace of the threshold aids us in approaching the epic environment in its totality.<sup>450</sup> It is:

... the space where all places are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely understood<sup>451</sup>

Starting with the encounter between Polynices, Tydeus, and Adrastus within the Argive threshold (*Theb.* 1.385-481), this chapter seeks to bring together a selection of the *Thebaid's* liminal spaces as they present the most concentrated moments of interstitial encounter within the narrative. From the Argive gates, we follow Tydeus to the doorway of the Theban palace, where he arrives as a diplomat and leaves as an enemy, carrying war with him on his return through the Argive threshold. Next, I consider the death of Maeon, lone survivor of the ambush of the 50, who commits suicide in the entryway of the Theban palace. Maeon's suicide, in turn, prefigures the fatal combat between Polynices and Eteocles at the Ogygian

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<sup>447</sup> Bachelard 1958:224

<sup>448</sup> Cf. Bhabha 1994:54-56 and Mukherji 2013:xix. See introduction p.18.

<sup>449</sup> This is the process of 'nomadic becoming' as 'emphatic proximity, intensive interconnectedness', outlined by Braidotti 1994:27 & 2011:14-15.

<sup>450</sup> Soja 1996:55-56 citing Borges 1971:3-17.

<sup>451</sup> Soja 1996:56



gate. The way the brothers communicate, first through the closed door and then face to face, presents a complex image of life's final transition: death.

#### 4.ii. Moving inside: exiles are accepted within in the Argive Threshold.

On the doorstep: Lovers in arms.

The *postes* that provide Polynices with a hard bed for the night yield our first notable threshold encounter (*Theb.* 1.388), yet they are actually the fourth threshold to be crossed in the *Thebaid*. Beginning with Tisiphone's entrance into the world of the living through Taenarus' *inremeabile portae* (1.96), and swiftly followed by a description of the doors of heaven (1.210) and the bolted gates of Aoelus' cave (1.346), the opening book of the *Thebaid* accommodates a series of crossings between the realms of hell, heaven, and earth. Polynices' arrival at Argos, therefore, is the latest in a series of transitions and transgressions that expose the permeability and fragility of the *Thebaid*. Oedipus' curse has opened the doorways to each dominion of the epic in preparation for fratricidal war (1.94-9).

As noted in the initial chapter of this thesis, the closed door of the Argive palace stands in stark contrast to the broken and traversable thresholds which proceed it, indicating the city's segregation from the chaotic wilderness outside.<sup>452</sup> Yet, even though the palace doors are shut, its gateway still provides a crude form of shelter, 'it heralds the reception to be expected in the neighbouring room',<sup>453</sup> in this case, the safety and security that awaits beyond. Polynices falls asleep against the doors, *adclinis postibus* (1.389), as if seeking comfort from the wood, a turn of words that eloquently shows the young man's need for respite. And the Argive threshold fulfils this role not just once but twice, providing refuge for another young exile, Olenian Tydeus:

... eadem sub nocte sopora  
 lustra terit, similisque Notos dequestus et imbres,  
 infusam tergo glaciem et liquentia nimbis  
 ora comasque gerens subit uno tegmine, cuius

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<sup>452</sup> The wilderness that provides the focus for the first chapter of this thesis.

<sup>453</sup> Lefebvre 1974:209-10.

fusus homo gelida partem prior hospes habebat. (*Thebaid.* 1. 403-7)

He traces the same roundabout route  
 through the drowsy night, complains of similar gales and rains;  
 with his back sheathed in ice, with face and hair streaming wet,  
 he finds the self-same sheltering doorway—the one where the first  
 stranger, stretched out on the ground, had staked his own cold claim.

Having travelled the same arduous path as the Theban (*Theb.* 1.312-89), Tydeus is similarly cold, wet and exhausted.<sup>454</sup> For both men, Argos is a place of safety and of refuge, found in the centre of a frightening, empty world of exile and rejection.

Both Polynices' and Tydeus' arrival at Argos is the direct result of a violent breakdown of family bonds. Tydeus has murdered his brother, *fraterni sanguinis* (1.402), and presents Polynices with a mirror of his own fraternal hatred and forthcoming fratricide (11.540-73). Polynices, in turn, has been cursed by his father, Oedipus, and usurped by his brother, Eteocles (1.312-35). Each reflects the other's inability to coexist peacefully within society. Tydeus and Polynices are both *outsiders*, emotionally and physically: in exile they are set adrift in a sea of unfamiliar landmarks, with no anchor for their identity.<sup>455</sup> Deprived of community, dislocated from the familiarity and certainty of place, Polynices and Tydeus struggle for survival. Unlike the protagonists of previous epics, for whom exile functioned as a catalyst towards heroism,<sup>456</sup> the young exiles of the *Thebaid* flounder rather than thrive.

The polarity of “inside” and “outside” denotes more than a physical boundary: it exposes a fundamental association between position, social status, and difference:

It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything.  
 Unless one is careful, it is made into the basis of images that govern all thoughts  
 of positive and negative.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Cf. *Thebaid.* 1. 386-90; 401-7.

<sup>455</sup> For discussion of the role of memory and space in Polynices' exilic journey see Alston & Spentzou 2011:183-92.

<sup>456</sup> Cf. Harrison 2007:129 and *passim*.

<sup>457</sup> Bachelard 1958:211

“Inside” is how we construct the language of acceptance: “inclusion”, “intimate”, or even “innards”. In contrast, “outside” is our word for otherness, rejection and difference. Polynices and Tydeus are attempting to make the transition from outside to inside, from ‘non-being’ to ‘being’,<sup>458</sup> and so will need to relocate themselves within a community in order to gain access to the security of social space. This is an incredibly difficult task as Tydeus and Polynices, despite their exile, still remain bound to Calydon and Thebes, respectively. Fratricide and alternate rule have banished them from their home cities but, as they refuse to let go of their guilt and anger, they are also unable to find belonging anywhere else. Argos will provide these exiles with an opportunity to discard this hatred and anger in order to re-situate themselves “inside”. This transition will give immediate shelter from the elements, but more importantly, will also provide acceptance and *inclusion* within a new family, the family of Adrastus.

The exiles’ arrival at the door does not only signify their escape from the stormy wilderness, it also resonates with an ostensibly different form of night-time vigil: that of the *amator* at the door of the *puella*. Before the gates are unlocked and he can enter the palace, Polynices throws himself at the unopened doors, ‘*proicit*’ (*Theb.* 1.388), taking up a position that is striking in its similarity to the elegiac lover:

turpis et in tepido limine somnus erit?  
 me mediae noctes, me sidera prona iacentem,  
 frigidaque Eoo me dolet aura gelu.  
 o utinam traiecta cava mea vocula rima  
 percussas dominae vertat in auriculas! (Propertius. 1. 16. 22-26)

Shall even unsightly sleep lie here on your tepid step?  
 Midnight, full stars, and the icy breezes  
 Of dawn’s frost pinch me lying here:  
 You only never compassionate man’s aches,  
 Your silent hinges not reciprocate my prayers.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Bachelard 1958:212.

<sup>459</sup> Shepherd 2004:51

Calling out to an unrelenting doorway, Propertius' interlocutor makes camp at the foot of the threshold. Turning back now to the *Thebaid*. 1. 386-90 and 403-7, we can see that the similarity is not limited to the position of each of the men, but can also be found in the timing of the exiles' arrival: the middle of the night. This, combined with the repeated references to the cold,<sup>460</sup> juxtaposes the warmth and safety of the space beyond. Even though Polynices and Tydeus are no longer in the vast outside space of the wilderness, they are still not in the inside space of the Argive palace. In fact, their increased proximity to the inside space only emphasises their current status as outsiders.

Propertius' interlocutor stands before a door that bars his entrance to his lover, signifying both the *amator's* physical isolation and his emotional loneliness. The transition from outside to within cannot be completed: the exile cannot become the lover he wishes to be. Another particularly apt example of this common elegiac trope can be found in Ovid's *Amores*:

Ianitor—indignum!—dura religate catena  
difficilem moto cardine pande forem! (Ovid. *Amores* .1.6. 1-2)

Porter!—too bad you're chained by your hard shackle—  
Open this tiresome door, undo the bar!<sup>461</sup>

Just as before, Ovid's *amator* remains outside, thwarted in his attempt to gain entry. In both poems, the door forms a literal barrier to the beloved but is also a symbol of the social and relational barriers that exist between the *amator* and *puella*. This image of the thwarted *amator* is particularly resonant for our reading of Polynices and Tydeus, as the door of Argos presents an obstacle between the exiles and their future lovers: the Argive princesses, Argia and Deiphyle.<sup>462</sup>

However, there is one crucial difference between the *amator* of elegy and the exiles at the threshold of Argos. For Ovid and Propertius the door symbolises a barrier to a forbidden relationship, and so enables them to draw a picture of pain and suffering of the elegiac lover,

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<sup>460</sup> Cf. Propertius 1.16.24: *frigida*, and *Thebaid*. 1.405,7: *glacies, gelida*.

<sup>461</sup> Melville 1990:10.

<sup>462</sup> Polynices and Tydeus meet the princesses for the first time shortly after this threshold encounter (*Theb.* 1.529-38) and are married soon after (2.134-264).

longing for the ever unobtainable mistress. This fits with the *amator's* role as a lover of all women, not just one: he is a slave to cupid and a lover for love's sake.<sup>463</sup> However, in the *Thebaid*, the door to Argos stands between the exiles and a future relationship which has been prophesied to Adrastus and will culminate in marriage:

cui Phoebus generos (monstrum exitiabile dictu!  
 mox adaperta fides) fato ducente canebat  
 saetigerumque suem et fuluum aduentare leonem. (*Thebaid.* 1. 395-7)

Phoebus kept promising sons-in-law: "Fate will lead them  
 here—bristling boar and tawny lion make their approach!"

Polynices the lion (*Theb.* 1.483-7) and Tydeus the boar (1.487-90) will be accepted by Adrastus as his sons-in-law and their romantic love will also be officially sanctified by the community. In this way, they differ from the renegade *amator*, but the continued emphasis on their bestial garb is problematic, as it suggests that the exiles remain untamed. This early indication of Polynices' and Tydeus' composite identities, and the emphasis on their physical prowess as warriors and hunters, at the same time hints towards their future failure to integrate into the peaceful civic-life of Argos. The Lion and the Boar will bring the animalistic passion of the *amator* into a space that has, until now, been emblematic of stability: the marital bed.<sup>464</sup>

The *amator* of love elegy traditionally exists within an unfulfilled, or frustrated, relationship. However, Polynices' and Tydeus' position in the doorway also holds another connotation, one more fitting to their status as suitors, and one that emphasises their blended identities. In his marriage hymn, Catullus warned a young bride to:

transfer omine cum bono  
 limen aureolos pedes,  
 rasilemque subi forem (*Cat.* 61.159-61)

Lift your little golden feet

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<sup>463</sup> Cf. Ovid *Ars Amatoria*. 1. 1.

<sup>464</sup> See e.g. the tender scene between Polynices and Argia in *Theb.* 2. 306-62

With good omen over the  
 Threshold, past the polished door.<sup>465</sup>

The act of crossing the threshold was a particular feature of a Roman wedding ceremony,<sup>466</sup> something which Propertius and Ovid would have been aware of, and which lends added significance to the *amator's* failure to cross over into the house. But the door of Argos shall be opened for Polynices and Tydeus, and they shall be successfully married and take on the role of husband. Therefore, this Argive threshold represents the possibility of relationship, rather than its interruption, reiterating the seemingly contradictory aspects of Tydeus' and Polynices' identity as composite *amator/suitor*. This hybridity hints towards the calamity their future marriage will bring to Argos, as these powerful, passionate, *amators* will not remain peacefully within the confines of the marital bedroom. Like the *amator*, and like the lion and the boar, they will instead bring violence into this previously secure home.<sup>467</sup>

Yet, despite its currently closed gates, the doorway of Argos should not be understood simply as a linear boundary: a line on a map to be instantaneously crossed. On the contrary, the threshold is a transformative space which will require time and energy to traverse. If these exiles are going to be part of the royal family of Argos, they are going to have to let go of their identities as exiles in order to be able to establish new relational bonds. The act of forging a relational identity will not be simple, and the first step will be the establishment of a bond with one another. In order to enter the communal space of the palace within, the exiles must successfully negotiate the intersubjective space of their threshold encounter. The process of becoming (an on-going, ever evolving process) will be painful, and begins with a vicious wrestling match between Polynices and Tydeus within the doorway itself:

haud passi sociis defendere noctem  
 culminibus; paulum alternis in uerba minasque  
 cunctantur, mox ut iactis sermonibus irae  
 intumuere satis, tum uero erectus uterque  
 exertare umeros nudamque lacesere pugnam. (*Thebaid.* 1. 408-13)

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<sup>465</sup> Trans. Lee 1990:67

<sup>466</sup> On the key features of a Roman wedding see Williams 1958 *passim*.

<sup>467</sup> The catastrophic potential of the marriages of Polynices and Argia and Tydeus and Deiphyle is most clearly manifested in the dark omens that mar the ceremony itself (*Thebaid.* 2.134-305). Cf. Newlands 2016:151-4 and Keith 2000:96, who sees in Argia a repeat of the 'Virgillian motif of the wife who destines her husband to war'.

Neither could stand to shelter, that night,  
 under a shared roof. Briefly, they held off, sparring with words  
 and threats; but soon, when they had traded insults enough  
 to rouse their wrath to fever pitch, each man sprang up,  
 stripped to the waist, and crouched, ready to fight it out.

The exiles' refusal to share shelter echoes the refusal of each to share their home cities with their brothers. Their first reaction is to defend what each see as his own territory. Though it begins with *nerba* (*Theb.* 1.409), the tension between the exiles quickly escalates and the conflict progresses from verbal sparring to *nudam pugnam* (*Theb.* 1.413), demonstrating their inability to use shared language to bridge the intersubjective gap.<sup>468</sup> The act of stripping down to bare skin marks the final discarding of their previous social identities. They are, presumably, both experienced warriors but, instead of fighting clothed in fine armour, they grapple, naked as if on a training ground.<sup>469</sup> No longer the princes of Thebes and Calydon, Polynices and Tydeus fight as simple youths, *ephebi*, in a wrestling match:

non aliter quam Pisaeo sua lustra Tonanti  
 cum redeunt crudisque virum sudoribus ardet  
 pulvis; at hinc teneros caveae dissensus ephebos  
 concitat, exclusaeque exspectant praemia matres (*Thebaid.*1.421-4)

Their fight recalls the games of Pisa's Thunderer, when the fifth  
 year comes around and dust burns with the rank sweat of men;  
 there, the bleacher's cheers and jeers urge novice fighters  
 on as the mothers, excluded, anticipate their sons' prizes

The image of the mothers, waiting at home for news of their sons' victory, undermines any semblance of military glory and renders both exiles naive and even effeminate. This is a fight

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<sup>468</sup> Though language can be a bridge between subjects, it is also in itself is a frontier to be crossed, an obstacle to understanding. cf. Augé 1995:xvi.

<sup>469</sup> Though nudity was part of the Hellenistic ideal of a heroic warrior, the focus on physical perfection had waned under the military sophistication of the Roman Empire, and those who fought naked were more likely to be barbaric Gauls than Roman. For the link between the depiction of nudity in hellenistic and Roman art and the practice of warfare see Hölscher (2003: *passim*). Livy speaks of the foolishness of the Gauls fighting naked in *The History of Rome*. 38. 21. 9.



which is neither impressive, nor to be imitated: it is not the *aristeia* expected of epic, but instead a boys' squabble with no chance of spoils and little *virtus*.<sup>470</sup> Each is utterly divested of identity in their struggle as they burn indiscriminately with hatred: neither seeking praise or status (*Theb.* 1.426).

Yet, despite the violence of this brawl, remnants of familial ties remain. Though the blind king remains sequestered in the darkest recesses of Thebes (*Theb.* 1.49-50), Oedipus' legacy follows Polynices as the exiles tear viciously at each other's eyes:

scrutatur et intima vultus  
unca manus penitusque oculis cedentibus intrat. (*Thebaid.* 1. 426-7)

Crooked fingers poked faces, jabbing at sensitive areas, stabbing deep into  
wincing eyes.

Oedipus' infamous self-blinding is an image that resonates throughout the *Thebaid*.<sup>471</sup> Here Polynices' repetition of his father's act of penitence and, of course, shame, underscores the inescapability of his legacy. The young man may have been exiled from Thebes and broken ties with his family, he may also go on to try and erase his identity through his assimilation into his wife's home, but this act of violence reminds the reader that he remains a product of the incestuous union between his father and grandmother. Thus, the brutal attack on the eyes of another comes to signify the passing on of the Theban curse throughout the generations.<sup>472</sup>

As the Polynices and Tydeus continue to struggle together they attempt to claw out their own space within the world, and their own home. The presence of the other in this space of transformation becomes a threatening invasion, an attempt to permanently erase an already fragile and tenuous position. Within this battle there is no glory: it is an expression of a primal, fundamental, need to resist another's influence on one's self. Polynices and Tydeus do not fight out of honour, or for some glorious, just, cause, they fight for their very

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<sup>470</sup> Cf. Bonds 1985:226.

<sup>471</sup> It would take too long to list all the allusions to blinding within the *Thebaid*, but notable are those describing the blinding of monsters (1.617; 2.505-517), and death (2.638-9; 4. 471-2).

<sup>472</sup> This attempted blinding forms another example of the 'non-verbal behaviour' that betrays Polynices' link to his father. cf. Bernstein 2003:363.

existence. As neither has experienced peaceful co-existence they believe their survival can only be assured through the other's destruction. Ironically, their attempts to erase each other succeed primarily in emphasising their similarities. Without symbols of heritage or rank, Polynices and Tydeus become mirrors of each other's unbridled rage. This is as much a battle with their own selves as it is with one another. The threshold provides a liminal space within which Polynices and Tydeus can begin to escape the tyranny of their chaotic past; but without aid they will be unable to move from the doorway. Now they have been fully divested of any markers of identity, they require a symbolic reclothing in order to progress inside.

Opening the threshold: Adrastus the gatekeeper.

So intense is the fighting between the pair, that they are not even aware of the doors opening behind them, and they are startled by the Argive king and their soon-to-be father-in-law, Adrastus (1.431-8). The unbarring of the palace gates opens up new possibilities of self transformation for Polynices and Tydeus, hitherto trapped in a seemingly closed space of conflict. The king's arrival heralds Polynices' and Tydeus' relocation into the space of community, firstly through reconciliation to each other and secondly through their eventual marriage into the Argive royal household.

However, the exiles' incursion into the palace does not begin with Adrastus' unbolting of the gates. Even before the doors open, the sound of Polynices' and Tydeus' struggle invades the intimate recesses of Argos. The fate of Polynices was about to be sealed with death, had the king not been woken by the exiles' deep primitive groans, '*pectore ab alto/stridentes gemitus*' (*Theb.* 1.431-3), and wandered to the limit of his palace. The ability of sound to travel through the closed door stresses its permeability, and suggests that the conflict taking place is not only breaking down the bonds between the exiles and their previous social positions, but is also forcing a path into their future home. The violence is spilling over from the liminal space to the space beyond, and affecting those who dwell inside, who in turn affect the fate of those who jostle for position just outside. The two exiles' semiotic cries bridge the space of enunciation succeeding where language has failed: Polynices and Tydeus are unwittingly calling out to Adrastus in their distress, and the old king is driven to answer.

However, the sounds passing through into the palace have not prepared Adrastus for the sight he encounters upon opening the doors:

isque ubi progrediens numerosa luce per alta  
 atria dimotis aduerso limine claustris  
 terribilem dictu faciem, lacera ora putresque  
 sanguineo videt imbre genas... (*Thebaid.* 1. 435-8)

Proceeding through his high halls with many a torch,  
 once the bolts had been shot back, he saw across the sill  
 a scene terrible to tell of—faces cut and cheeks  
 streaming with storms of blood.

The creatures Adrastus encounters have moved beyond discarding their clothing and social indicators: they are discarding their very skins. This co-mutilation destroys any last vestige of identity that may have remained, and Polynices and Tydeus have now been transformed into something inhuman. What is Adrastus' response to the monsters on his doorstep? Instead of turning back and re-barring the gates, the gentle king steps between the young men and speaks to them, bringing about three important outcomes: first, the reconciliation of each with the past they had rejected; second, their reconciliation to each other; and third, the adoption of Polynices and Tydeus into his own family. The threshold space in which they fight is by its nature momentary; Tydeus and Polynices cannot remain there and survive. In order to escape the non-place of exile and pass through this threshold, re-anchoring themselves within the world, both young men are dependant on Adrastus: he is their gatekeeper.

Adrastus' role as gatekeeper is not limited to opening the door to his future sons-in-law. Opening the door to them is no small act, though not enough to open the path for Polynices and Tydeus: Adrastus must also equip them with skills to survive the journey. The speech between king and exiles stretches for forty-three lines before the three cross into the palace itself (1.438-81). In that time Adrastus must restore Polynices and Tydeus from naked, bloody beasts to suitable suitors for his daughters. To achieve this the king first reasserts the royal heritage of both young men:

“sed prodite tandem

unde orti, quo fertis iter, quae iurgia? nam vos  
 haud humiles tanta ira docet, generisque superbi  
 magna per effusum clarescunt signa cruorem.” (*Thebaid.* 1.443-6)

“But come, say where you  
 have sprung from, where you’re headed, what’s your quarrel? For you  
 two are no commoners—such rage proves that! Even through  
 spilled blood, the signs of your noble birth are manifest.”

Within these four short lines Adrastus manages to re-align Tydeus and Polynices with their illustrious heritage, whilst at the same time dismissing the baseness of their wrestling match. This clever change of perspective causes the exiles to alter how they see themselves, by reminding them that their lineage does not only place restrictions on them but also bestows upon them power and favour.<sup>473</sup> Adrastus gently admonishes Polynices and Tydeus just as a father might chastise his grown sons, and taking on the role of father is significant in light of the exiles’ fatherless state.<sup>474</sup> This is crucial as it begins to resituate the exiles within the framework of society and is integral to their successful passage through the threshold to the other side.

In response to Adrastus’ question as to their heritage, *unde orti* (1.444), Polynices and Tydeus give quite different replies. Tydeus is quick to reassure the king by weaving a narrative worthy of an epic hero, referencing the mythical creatures such as the Cyclops, and taking on an air of moral superiority.<sup>475</sup> In contrast, Polynices can only muster a single line: ‘*nec nos animi nec stirpis egentis*’ (1.465). Polynices’ reluctance and Tydeus’ over-eagerness to assert their selfhood here will go on to influence their respective paths throughout the remainder of the *Thebaid*, perhaps because they are allowed to carry each of these features with them over the threshold into the Argive palace. Adrastus certainly does not challenge the attitudes of the pair, only reassures and welcomes them. His response upon hearing their story is immediately to bring

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<sup>473</sup> That a tendency towards violence is linked with high status might also be a comment on the danger of power that is unrestrained, which is particularly relevant in the case of high-born youths. This is particularly significant within the *Thebaid* as it is a lust for power, *nuda potestas*, which drives the epic towards its fatal conclusion.

<sup>474</sup> For background on the significance of the father in the life of a young Roman man, and the increase in ‘fatherlessness’ in the first century A.D. see Hübner & Ratzan 2009 cf. Imber 2008; Dixon 1988: 168-209.

<sup>475</sup> *Theb.* 1.452-65, in particular 457-9: ‘*pariter stabulare bimembres/ Centauros unaque ferunt Cyclopas in Aetna/ compositos.*’

the two together, establishing a bond of friendship in a way which can only be described as ritualistic:

“immo agite, et positis, quas nox inopinaque suasit  
aut virtus aut ira, minis succedite tecto.  
iam pariter coeant animorum in pignora dextrae.  
non haec incassum divisque absentibus acta;  
forsan et has venturus amor praemiserit iras,  
ut meminisse iuuet.” (*Thebaid.* 1.468-73)

“Come, come! lay aside the threats which night or ill-judged  
rage or valour prompted, and come in under my roof.  
Now both of you, please, pledge your lasting amity, clasp hands.  
Nothing has happened in vain or without the god’s assent.  
Perhaps, even from rage like yours, friendship will come—and  
soon— so you’ll smile at this memory.”

The clasping of hands and the vows before the gods solemnise the act of passing over the threshold and we are back again with the two men poised as suitors/lovers for a ceremonial crossing into the wedding thalamus.<sup>476</sup> This of course hints towards the soon-to-be-formed familial bond created by the marriage to Argia and Deiphyle, but I would also like to suggest that this image of ritual partnership also underscores the intimate companionship between Polynices and Tydeus that will go on to be a driving force in the war against Thebes. It will be Tydeus’ rage upon being ambushed by the fifty (2.481ff) that will overcome Polynices’ reluctance, and give a vehicle to the Theban’s desire to reclaim his throne. Indeed, as the epic continues it seems as if their original violent encounter has linked the two inextricably. Family bonds become an integral force on the battlefield: a brotherly bond always present in the heat (and heart) of the battle leading to Tydeus becoming Polynices’ voice and rage.

The third and final step in Adrastus’ rehabilitation of the two young princes is their adoption into the Argive household, which completes their transformation from wild exile to legitimate son. This is accomplished through the act of crossing into the palace, for as soon as Tydeus and Polynices step through the doorway and enter Argos, Adrastus notices that

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<sup>476</sup> See *Thebaid.* 1. 385-9 and comparison with Catullus 61. above (p. 205).

they wear the cloak of the boar and the lion, respectively, and is overcome by joy for the fulfilment of the Apolline prophecy (*Theb.* 1.493-7). These are the ‘*saetiger sus*’ and ‘*fulvus leo*’ that are to be husbands to his daughters (1.397). Yet, the recognition of Tydeus and Polynices as the boar and lion forms part of the paradoxical nature of this scene. In order to enter the palace and be recognised as sons-in-law, the exiles must transform from the monstrous, bloody figures that Adrastus finds on his doorstep and reclothe themselves in the symbols of civilised humanity. However, the very cloaks that allude to an honourable position within Argive society, also transform the young men back into beasts. The subtlety of the interplay between the features of man and animal blur the lines between the expected behaviour of the two. Like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, the destructive nature of Polynices’ and Tydeus’ human pride, the pride that caused the violence in the entry way, is cloaked with the prophecy of Apollo. Just as the *Thebaid* questions the role of divine agency, so it uses the idea of prophecy to question ideas surrounding fate and human agency.<sup>477</sup> In Apollo’s prophecy we see how epic destiny and epic failure can become two sides of the same coin: in the *Thebaid*, Polynices’ destiny is ultimately to fail.

The placement of the two-faced forms of Polynices/Lion and Tydeus/boar within an open door is highly significant. A threshold is a place that allows for multiple perspectives and so standing within it provides a panoramic vision of both the place being left behind and the place being travelled to. If the metaphor is extended beyond the language of spatial representation to that of the temporal, we can see that thresholds also allow for a view on both the past and the future. The notion that a doorway faces in two directions, and is simultaneously both the near-past and the “not-yet” is not a modern invention. It was personified within Roman culture as the two-faced god Janus, who presided over beginnings and endings and kept the keys to the gates of war:<sup>478</sup>

“at cur pace lates, motisque recluderis armis?”  
nec mora, quaesiti reddita causa mihi est:

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<sup>477</sup> Cf. Tuttle 2013:74

<sup>478</sup> In the *Fasts*, the god Janus is given voice and shares the story of Tarpeia’s betrayal as part of his explanation for his gates remaining open in times of war and closed in times of peace. The gates of the temple of Janus were, when Ovid was writing, located in the centre of Rome between the Forum Romanum and Forum Julium. Though the temple was moved during the reign of Domitian, and rebuilt in front of the Curia Julia, it was still a visual reminder of the god within the very fabric of the Roman city (Richardson 1992: 207-8). Other sources include Virgil. *Aeneid*. 1. 272; 7. 170, Livy. *History of Rome*. 1. 19; 32, and Horace. *Poems*. 2. 3.

“ut populo reditus pateant ad bella profecto,  
 tota patet dempta ianua nostra sera.  
 pace fores obdo, ne qua discedere possit” (Ovid. *Fasti*. 1. 277-82)

“Why do you hide during peace and open when arms stir?”  
 No delay, he gives me the reason I sought:  
 “My doorway remains clear and is unbolted  
 So warring people have a clear way back.  
 In peacetime I lock the doors so peace must stay.”<sup>479</sup>

As the gatekeeper of the *Thebaid*, Adrastus takes on the role of Janus: the holder of both war and peace. As Adrastus opens the Argive gates to Polynices and Tydeus he allows peace to depart from his city. However, the opening of the Janus’ gates does not only signify the absence of peace and presence of war; it also explicitly allows for a return from battle to safety. As Adrastus takes the exiles in and makes them his own sons he is also providing a place for them to return, a possibility which he will leave open to the pair throughout the entire *Thebaid*, until his departure from the battlefield in the face of Polynices’ unquenchable rage (11.439-43). Up to that point, Tydeus and Polynices could be, if they choose, both formidable warriors and beloved sons in need of solace.

The encounter within the Argive threshold presents the reader with an alternative epic, one that ends in reconciliation rather than death. Within the doorway Tydeus and Polynices become brothers, restoring the lost brotherhood which made them both exiles. They also gain a father, Adrastus, who rehabilitates these social outcasts and reintegrates them into society. Yet, ultimately, Polynices and Tydeus are not content to stay inside the walls of Argos. In the next section of this chapter I address the confrontation between Tydeus and Eteocles and the exiles’ transition back into the space of outside. Tydeus’ journey across the Theban threshold reverses his integration into the space of community. Changed, he will return to Argos to find the doors open, and he will not return as a lover but as a herald of war.

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<sup>479</sup> Trans. Boyle & Woodard 2004:11.

#### 4.iii. Rejection and death in the gateways of Thebes.

Becoming enemies: Tydeus enters the Theban threshold.

Having played the role of husband to Deiphyle for a mere twelve days, Tydeus makes the reverse journey through the Argive threshold, leaving the city as Polynices' envoy to Thebes (*Theb.* 2.306-7). His exit from the city, and, therefore, the space of community, is matched by Polynices' departure from the marital chamber: '*caro raptim se limine profert*', 'he crossed the now-cherished threshold at a run' (2.363). This sudden move out of bedroom, away from a space of inclusion and intimacy, is the first hint of Polynices' rejection of his new identity as part of Adrastus' family. Leaving Argia and the promise of peace and security behind him, Polynices goes straight to Tydeus, with whom he is now the closest of friends:

Tydea iam socium coeptis, iam pectore fido  
aequantem curas (tantus post iurgia mentes  
vinxit amor)                      (*Thebaid.* 2. 364-6)

Tydeus—proven friend in adventure, proven partner  
(such love bound these soulmates after their brawl!)

The bond between Polynices and Tydeus is so strong that the two men become almost interchangeable.<sup>480</sup> Polynices' grievance has become Tydeus' to the extent that the latter is willing to take Polynices' place and journey out of the space of community and back across the marital threshold towards the chaotic wilderness of exile and warfare. Volunteering to go to petition Eteocles, and forsaking his own wife, Tydeus makes his exit from Argos (*Theb.* 2.370-4).

In a number of ways Tydeus' travel towards Thebes is quite different to his initial exilic journey to Argos. Although, as we have seen, Tydeus' journey from Calydon is not described in detail in Book 1, it is nonetheless presented as parallel to the journey of Polynices, which, we are told, is a bleak trek through a barren and hostile landscape (*Theb.* 1.345-89). As an

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<sup>480</sup> Cf. Parkes 2014:407. Tydeus is Polynices' 'alter-ego'.



exile, Tydeus travelled through an alien and disorienting landscape. His precarious identity made it hard for him to connect with his surroundings, and this is reflected in the reticence of the text at this point. In comparison, the short depiction of Tydeus' travelling by road to Thebes takes Tydeus past many familiar, if foreboding, landmarks (2.375-89). The choice to name specific spatial markers is not arbitrary, as Parkes notes: 'the characterisation of routes is exploited to reflect upon the particular journeys being undertaken'.<sup>481</sup> Instead of seeing shepherds' huts destroyed by a raging storm, '*raptas/pastorum pecorumque domos*' (1.366-7), Tydeus experiences a more tranquil journey to Thebes: now flocks of Nemea are well guarded by present, if fearful, shepherds (2.378).

As a result of Adrastus' welcome, and his subsequent rehabilitation into the realm of society, Tydeus has regained his sense of self and is no longer in conflict with his environment. The relative ease of his journey is reflected in the speed with which he reaches Thebes.<sup>482</sup> Consequently, when Tydeus arrives at his destination he is no longer the desperate, exhausted figure that fought his way into Argos (1.401-7), but easily crosses the threshold and immediately stands in the midst of the Theban people, confident of the legitimacy of his position:

Constitit in mediis (ramus manifestat olivae  
legatum) causaque viae nomenque rogatus  
edidit; utque rudis fandi pronusque calori  
semper erat, iustis miscens tamen aspera (*Thebaid.* 2. 389-92)

Tydeus stood in [the Thebans'] midst—an olive branch proclaimed him  
an envoy—and, when asked, stated his name and why he'd  
come, blunt of tongue as he always was, and hot tempered;  
but though his manner was rough his message was just.

However, despite carrying the olive branch of an envoy and the just nature of his cause, Tydeus' re-assimilation into the symbolic framework of community is shown to be tentative and somewhat superficial. He may carry the trappings of a diplomat, but Tydeus is unable to

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<sup>481</sup> 2014:423.

<sup>482</sup> Cf. Parkes 2014:416.

fully disguise his bellicose nature, answering Eteocles' enquiries as to his name and purpose with poorly hidden disdain.

This is a risky strategy as Eteocles, king and, in this instance, gatekeeper of Thebes, displays none of the gentleness of his counterpart at Argos. Where Adrastus is *mitissim[us]* (1.448), most gentle, Eteocles is *duru[s]* (2.384), hard. Perhaps, as Vessey suggests, the hardness of Eteocles and the gentleness of Adrastus reflect their relative wealth: Adrastus can afford to be gentle, whereas Eteocles' harshness stems from necessity.<sup>483</sup> The adjectives *mitis* and *durus*, when taken together, have elegiac overtones and are often used by Ovid to describe the *domina*.<sup>484</sup> *Durus* is also used to describe epic poetry and to place it in contrast to elegy. Just as Statius blurs the lines between epic hero and elegiac lover, so he draws attention to the links between epic and elegiac power. The elegiac lover is a slave to the hard, *dura*, mistress. This inversion of traditional gender norms within the context of elegy questions the traditional female roles of softness, or *mollis*, as weakness, and in doing so also allows a questioning of the link between masculine "hardness" and virtue.<sup>485</sup> Its use here associates Eteocles with the feminine and so questions the traditionally epic, masculine, virtue of *durus* through its application to an undesirable and tyrannical ruler. Now in the entrance to Thebes, just as the hard (*dura*) chain was fastened against the Ovidian lover (*Amores*.1.6.1), Eteocles' hardness has barred the way for Tydeus, and, consequently, thwarted Polynices' return.

This contrast between gatekeepers is not only seen in the description of their respective natures, but is also shown through their position relative to their guests. Adrastus comes down alone to the doorway and guides Tydeus and Polynices into Argos by the hand (1.510-12). In sharp contrast Eteocles remains high, guarded and apart from the Argive envoy, the spears that surround him bristling with animosity: *ibi durum Eteoclea cernit sublimem solio saeptumque horrentibus armis* (2.384-5). The way each of the kings position their "selves" in relation to Tydeus reflects the relative level of security each holds in their identity. Tydeus is an other, one who presents as challenge to the authority and identity of both kings. Yet, whilst Eteocles must guard his royal self as Tydeus is a threat waiting to strip this self away,

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<sup>483</sup> Vessey 1970:320-1

<sup>484</sup> Davisson 1984:333 highlights their use in discussion of Ovid's *Ex Ponto*. 3.1. and goes on to cite *Ov. Am.* 1.9.19; *Arv* 2.178, 462 & 527 as further examples.

<sup>485</sup> For the full implications of the gender play between *mitis* and *durus* in love elegy, particularly in the poetry of Propertius, see Greene 2000: *passim*.

Adrastus remains Adrastus, however close he allows the “other” to come, and shows no fear of losing himself through intersubjective interaction.

Inverting Adrastus’ acceptance of the unacceptable, Eteocles rejects Tydeus’ diplomatic mission, even though the young man bears all the marks required for safe passage (*Theb.* 2.389-90). In a strange twist, the city which remains a separate space is available to the exile, whereas the repeatedly violated space of Thebes is hostile to strangers. The encounter between king and ambassador in the doorway of the Theban palace will, through rejection, undo the transformation of Tydeus that Adrastus wrought through acceptance. Argos’ peace and relative invulnerability gives Adrastus control over those who enter; Thebes’ permeability and instability render any visitor an unwelcome invader. That which is repeatedly violated becomes hostile to any potential threat, as Tydeus’ and Polynices’ fight in the Argive threshold attests.

#### Becoming-animal: Tydeus’ exit from Thebes

The hostility encountered by Tydeus and the trauma of rejection begins a reversal of the transformation that occurred upon the threshold of Argos. This second change is an indication of a personality that is always in the process of formation. Tydeus is perpetually *becoming* through each new encounter:

In Germany there once lived twins, one of who opened doors by touching them with his right arm, and the other who closed them by touching them with his left arm.<sup>486</sup>

These enigmatic lines hint at the process of becoming as an act of crossing over thresholds: the man who opens the door is not the same as the one who closes it. Tydeus’ first transformation is at Argos, but his second crossing of the threshold at Thebes will change him further still. This second change, the one wrought via rejection, facilitates a reawakening of the violent anger that Adrastus sought to subdue.

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<sup>486</sup> Bachelard 1958:224

However, before moving on to Tydeus' reaction to the Eteocles' hostility I wish to turn to the Theban king's speech (*Theb.* 2.415-51). The way in which Eteocles repudiates Tydeus', admittedly flawed, attempt to enforce the agreed upon alternate rule further reflects Tydeus' and Polynices' equivalence and directly counters Adrastus' restoration of Polynices' shameful lineage. After silently listening to Tydeus' undiplomatic and unfavourable account of his extended reign, Eteocles rage builds until, like a snake spitting venom (*Theb.* 2.410-14), he vehemently counters Tydeus' claims of greed (2.406-8). Eteocles, distancing himself from Polynices with the impersonal '*regi Argolico*' (*Theb.* 2.426-7), Argive king, draws attention to Argia's large dowry and Argos' prosperity (2.430-1): why should he envy his brother's good fortune? (*quid enim/maioribus actis invidiam?* 2.431-2). Juxtaposing the wealth of Argos with the comparative poverty of Thebes' rough fields (*Theb.* 2.433), Eteocles addresses Polynices through Tydeus, and reframes the prosperity and security of Adrastus as weakness. He focuses on the newly formed marriage bonds between Argia and Polynices as a way of denying his brother's claim to rule. Eteocles, unlike Polynices, is not ashamed of his father (*Theb.* 2.435-6), and so rejects Polynices' claim to a composite Theban/Argive identity insisting only a Theban can rule.

Tydeus' response is swift and cutting (2.451-67). Standing in the doorway, '*in limine*' (2.467), he reiterates Eteocles' own distinction between himself and Polynices; but Tydeus means this as a slur: Eteocles is the sole heir of Oedipus' crimes. (2.465).<sup>487</sup> Though meant to differentiate between a good and a bad sibling, Tydeus' denial of Polynices' composite identity reflects and reinforces Eteocles' insistence on difference and inability to co-exist. But, more than this, it is also a rejection of the humanity bestowed on the exiles through their adoption into the Argive household. Upon exiting Thebes, Tydeus the *amator* becomes Tydeus the boar:<sup>488</sup>

Oeneae vindex sic ille Dianae  
 erectus saetis et aduncae fulmine malae...  
 ... talis adhuc trepidum linquit Calydonius heros  
 concilium infrendens, ipsi ceu regna negentur,  
 festinatque vias ramumque precantis olivae

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<sup>487</sup> Cf. Bernstein 2003:373

<sup>488</sup> Cf. Gervais 2015:74

abicit. (*Thebaid.* 2. 469-70, 476-9)

Likewise Oenean Diana's avenging

boar: with bristles erect, tusks like lightning...

...So too, this hero of Calydon: leaving the still shaken

council, he gnashed his teeth—as though *he* were denied the realm—

and charged down the road, hurling his suppliant's olive branch

aside.

The comparison between Tydeus and the Calydonian boar,<sup>489</sup> is doubly apt as the young prince is a descendant of the King Oeneus, the very king who commanded the boar be hunted, and he wears a cloak which may be the actual skin of the animal itself.<sup>490</sup> Diana's boar was sent to avenge the goddess when her altar alone is passed by for libation. In Ovid's account, just as in Statius', the boar is noteworthy for its large size and ability to shoot lightning from its mouth (*Met.* 8.281-6).

The similarity between Statius' depiction of Tydeus and Ovid's depiction of the Calydonian boar has been noted by Alison Keith, in her exploration of Ovidian personae within the *Thebaid*.<sup>491</sup> Keith rightly recognises a link between both the boar's and Tydeus' role as an avenger: the boar on behalf of Diana, Tydeus on behalf of Polynices. However, I wish to go one step further by saying that Tydeus does not simply play the role of the Calydonian boar: this portion of book two sees Tydeus transform fully into the monstrous beast. Just as, in the *Thebaid*, Tydeus the boar casts aside his olive branch, in the *Metamorphoses* the Calydonian boar tramples the olives underfoot: '*sternuntur...ramis semper frondentis olivae*' (*Met.* 8.294-5). But the olive branch signifies peace and allows for safe passage; by discarding it Tydeus is rejecting peace in favour of war, just as Diana's boar waged war on the people of Calydon. This reflects the nature of war in the *Thebaid* as a bruising, isolating force, rather than a national calling or display of heroic virtue.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> For the most extant treatment of the hunt see Ovid. *Metamorphoses* 8. 260-450

<sup>490</sup> Tydeus claims this ancestry for himself in 1. 463-65 and again at 2.686-90.

<sup>491</sup> 2002, in particular pp. 389-92.

<sup>492</sup> Cf. Gervais 2015:74-77.

Tydeus' transformation into the boar also affects a transformation of the Theban warriors set to ambush him: they become Meleager's hunting party. Statius makes the link between the two stories explicit right down to the tiniest details.<sup>493</sup> They both hunt and ambush their quarry from the cover of trees. In both instances the boar/Tydeus, cries out and declares himself before his attackers.<sup>494</sup> The spear thrown by Chthonius strikes but does no damage: '*uiduo ingulum ferit inrita ligno*' ('mere stubby wood!—thud against his jugular' 2.543), just as Diana removes the tip from Mopsus' weapon: '*ferrum Diana volanti abstulerat iaculo; lignum sine acumine venit*' (*Met.* 8.354-5). By drawing a parallel with Ovid's portrayal of the disorderly and rather unheroic hunt, Statius here emphasises the ethical shortcomings of the Thebans' cowardly ambush. Tydeus' victory over his "hunters" is the reversal of Meleager's victory over the boar and so passes comment on the death of heroism in Statius' epic. All trace of valour is gone from the Thebans, and as such they will be defeated by the monster they seek to kill.

The violence of the Theban ambush echoes the violence of Tydeus' and Polynices' fight within the Argive threshold. But here there is no gentle king available to intervene — Adrastus cannot stand in the way of death. Death is obviously present within this scene in the form of the dead Theban warriors, but I can't help but think that the ambush also signifies the death of Tydeus, not a literal, bodily, death but a killing of the human aspects of his character. After the ambush Tydeus is reduced to anger, and is unable to relate to others except through violence. The complexity of his humanity is reduced to one role: the man who stepped into Thebes is not the same one who leaves it.

Two men return: Tydeus at Argos and Maeon at Thebes.

Tydeus may have survived the attack outside Thebes, but he returns to Argos a changed man:

utque introgressus portas (et forte verendos  
 concilio pater ipse duces cogebat Adrastus)  
 improvisus adest, iam illinc a postibus aulae

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<sup>493</sup> Linguistic similarities other to those I mention below can be found in Keith 2002:390-2.

<sup>494</sup> For their positions in the forest cf. *Thebaid.* 2. 497-502 with *Metamorphoses.* 8. 329-30.

vociferans: “arma, arma viri...” (3. 345-8)

He passed through the gates just as, by chance, Father Adrastus was calling the Council of venerable elders to order. There he appeared, unannounced; standing inside the chamber doors, he bellowed: “To arms, to arms, men! ...”

This time, when Tydeus crosses the threshold, Adrastus is not there to greet him: the gatekeeper is busy in his role as king. As a result, Tydeus the boar bursts into the palace unchecked. Bleeding and injured, Tydeus’ appearance is frighteningly wild:

terribilis visu: stant fulti pulvere crines,  
squalidus ex umeris cadit alta in vulnera sudor,  
insomnsque oculos rubor excitat, oraque retro  
sorbet anhela sitis (*Thebaid.* 3. 326-9)

He’s a fearful sight: his hair stands on end, stiff with dust, sweat runs in dark streaks from his shoulders into deep wounds, his sleepless eyes start forth, bloodshot, and gasping thirst sucks in his cheeks.

In re-becoming the boar, Tydeus has also become a spectre of death. Like the ghost of Laius, whose wide wound, *vulnere*, drenched Eteocles in gore (*Theb.* 2.122-4),<sup>495</sup> Tydeus invades Argos. In the process of becoming-animal Tydeus has taken on more of Polynices’ Theban nature. His journey as envoy has further linked him to his new friend, inducting him into the cycle of destruction that characterises the Cadmeian line. He has taken on Polynices’ inheritance of conflict and death.

Without Adrastus’ aid Tydeus is unable to leave his rage outside. Anger is brought through the gateway into Argos. This is the moment war enters the city:

... viduare penates,  
finitimas adhibere manus, iamque ire. (3.385-6)

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<sup>495</sup> See p. 51.

—one purpose springs up: to desert their hearths,  
enlist neighbouring troops, and march—*now*.

Tydeus' urge to avenge Polynices radiates and enters into the minds of the Argive people, aided by Polynices who tests the loyalty of the Argives by placing the blame on himself (*Theb.* 3.365-81). This is a process that begins even before he enters the palace. Journeying towards Argos Tydeus is stirring conflict in the hearts of the people, inflaming them with hatred: '*inflammare odiis*' (3.338). Travelling like a fury alongside his companion, Rumor, he spreads his anger out across the countryside before carrying it over the threshold of the palace (3.336-44).

The first time Tydeus approached the gates of Argos the doors were bolted shut: '*limine claustris*' (*Theb.* 1.436). Now he burst through the doors, '*introgressus portas*' (3.345), his arrival unexpected and immediate, '*improvisus adest*' (3.347). Tydeus has, in a sense, bypassed the threshold and denied Adrastus his role as gatekeeper to the city. Adrastus' absence from the threshold suggests the king's loss of agency in this move towards conflict. As gatekeeper, he has failed to guard the doors, and the threshold is breached by Tydeus without his permission. War is coming whether or not the doors of Argos are willingly opened.

Adrastus may not have been able to control Tydeus' entry, but once his son-in-law is inside the palace he does attempt to contain his bloodlust:

“ista quidem superis curaque medenda  
linquite, quaeso, meae, nec te germanus inulto  
sceptra geret, neque nos avidi promittere bellum.  
at nunc egregium tantoque in sanguine ovantem  
excipite Oeniden...” (*Thebaid.* 3. 388-92)

“A sorry business—leave it, I pray:  
Gods and my care will find remedy. Your brother wrongs you:  
he'll not rule long. But neither do we welcome war. For now,  
receive this gallant man, come from such bloodshed  
— the triumphant son of Oeneus!...”



Once again the king works to reclothe Tydeus, and by extension Polynices, in the civilising symbolism of a non-Theban heritage. In referring to Tydeus as the son of Oeneus, Adrastus is attempting to sever the newly reformed ties between his sons-in-law and the perverted line of Cadmus, just as he did when he adopted the exiles into his own family. This time, however, outside the transitional, resonant, space of the threshold, Adrastus is unsuccessful. Ultimately, Tydeus will die feasting on the brains of his killer in a cannibalistic act that repeats the *nefas* of both Argive and Theban houses (8.751-62),<sup>496</sup> and, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, Polynices will reject Adrastus as a stranger (11.424-9).

Of course, Tydeus isn't the only survivor of the Theban ambush: he makes a point of leaving Maeon alive in order that he might return to Thebes and tell of the death of the other forty-nine (*Thebaid.* 2.690-6). Maeon's return to Thebes (3.33-57), his reprimand of Eteocles (3.58-87), and his subsequent suicide (3.87-113), form the counterpart to Tydeus' journey to the Cadmean city, replaying the Oenean's defiance of the Theban king.<sup>497</sup> Although Maeon's precise location is unclear, his journey from outside to inside and the parallel with Tydeus' threshold speech grants his suicide inclusion into our exploration of liminal encounter.

Just as it was for Polynices and Tydeus approaching Argos, Maeon's transition into Thebes begins long before he crosses through the city gates:

gelido remeabat Eoo  
 iratus Fatis et tristis morte negata  
 Haemonides; necdum ora patent, dubiusque notari  
 signa dabat magnae longe manifesta ruinae  
 planctuque et gemitu (*Thebaid.* 3.40-4)

... retracing his steps in the ice-cold dawn,  
 angry at Destiny, gloomy that death had been denied him,  
 comes Haemon's son. Features as yet indistinct, face blurred,  
 while still at some distance, he clearly signalled calamity  
 by pounding his chest and groaning.

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<sup>496</sup> Cf. Gervais 2015:75-6; Hershkowitz 1995:58; Hubert 2013:119; Davis 1994:470.

<sup>497</sup> For parallels between the two scenes see Gervais 2013: xxiii.

Like the ghost of Laius crossing the threshold of death in order to bring war (*Theb.* 2.14-119), Maeon's return to the city is unnatural, a fact of which he is aware (*Theb.* 3.67): the young man should be dead at the hands of Tydeus like his fellow soldiers. Instead, like a shadow from beyond the grave he assaults the gates with semiotic cries of grief (3.43-4). Maeon's cries cross into the city and are returned to him through the wails of Thebes' grieving mothers, whose howls become the signal of war:

nil ausae quaerere tollunt  
 clamorem, qualis bello supremus apertis  
 urbibus (*Thebaid.* 3. 55-7)

...not daring to ask, they raised a wail  
 like the final cry heard when cities are thrown open in war

It seems Eteocles' role as gatekeeper has been usurped: the mothers crowd the gates and welcome Maeon and his message of death before he is even granted audience with his king (3.53-8).

After delivering a speech admonishing Eteocles for his cowardly attack on Tydeus and placing responsibility for the deaths of the fifty at the feet of the king (3.58-87), Maeon commits suicide.<sup>498</sup> There by the threshold, denying the king any form of victory and taking his rightful place in Hades alongside the others:

“numquam tibi sanguinis huius  
 ius erit aut magno feries imperdita Tydeo  
 pectora; vado equidem exsultans ereptaque fata  
 insequor et comites feror exspectatus ad umbras” (*Thebaid.* 3. 83-7)

“Never shall my lifeblood be shed  
 by the likes of you! *you*'ll not stab the heart great Tydeus  
 left unharmed! I depart rejoicing, pursuing the doom  
 snatched from my grasp—carried away by my welcoming comrade shades”

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<sup>498</sup> Maeon's suicide has been the topic of much scholarship. Vessey 1973:108 sees Maeon's fate as a 'glorious' example. For Bernstein 2013:234 it is one of only four positive examples of ritual violence. Dominik 1994:154 sees him as an idealised stoic figure, and Pagan 2000: *passim* and Alston & Spentzou 2011:76 see Maeon's suicide primarily as a condemnation of Eteocles tyranny.

By dying within the palace Maeon thwarts the attempt by the king to have him removed from the city (*Theb.* 3.67-83). Eteocles cannot drive out this “other” from his space, and, as Maeon serves as a reminder of Tydeus, he is unsuccessful in expelling the Calydonian too. Maeon manages to imbue the palace with a foreign body, the palace will forever hold the other within itself. The view from the Theban threshold, and therefore Eteocles’ perspective on the conflict with Polynices will always be overshadowed by Maeon’s censure:

tu tamen egregius fati mentisque nec umquam  
 (sic dignum est) passure situm, qui comminus ausus  
 vadere contemptum reges, quaque ampla veniret  
 libertas, sancire viam (*Thebaid.* 3. 99-102)

Maeon: you outdid us all in death and resolve!  
 never—and this is your due—will you suffer decay, for you  
 dared scorn kings outright and make sacred a way, whereby  
 Freedom might come in full.

As Tydeus is opening the gates of Argos in preparation for war, so Maeon is forging a path with his own blood through the walls of Thebes. Eteocles’ commands that he lie un-cremated (3.97-8), but the natural landscape revolts against the king’s commands: carrion birds spare his body, and he is buried beneath laurel leaves (*Theb.* 3.111-13).<sup>499</sup> Eteocles’ walls, flimsy as they are, have been permanently breached. He will not be able to keep a royal distance and will be forced into a muddled interaction with others intent on challenging his rule. Neither Eteocles nor Adrastus are able to keep their city, their own territory intact. They will both be dragged out of the palace, the place that safeguards their royal authority, forced to traverse the space of enunciation that contaminates identities and challenges any fixed self-perceptions and roles.

Both Tydeus’ and Maeon’s crossings of the Argian and the Theban threshold, respectively, provide a contrast to the exiles’ successful, if short-lived, integration into the social space of Argos. The rejection of each of these warriors results in their becoming-other: Tydeus becoming-animal, Maeon becoming-death. Each aggressive eruption into the city strains

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<sup>499</sup> Cf. Bernstein 2013:235-7.

civic ties as they introduce hybridity and difference inside the walls. And yet, instead of leading to perpetrators sent to exile, this dislocation from the community is instead brought into and sustained within the cities of Argos and Thebes. With the gatekeepers' failure to safeguard the threshold, Tydeus and Maeon manage to bring conflict, anger, and ultimately, war over the *limen* and inside the porous city walls, that cannot withhold the tide. Their forceful intervention heralds the breakdown of civic life and precipitates the citizens' exit from the cities of Argos and Thebes into the chaotic and hostile world outside.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Cf. Alston & Spentzou 2011:76.

#### 4.iv. The way is shut: death at the Ogygian Gate.

The way is shut. It was made by those who are Dead, and the Dead keep it,  
until the time comes. The way is shut.<sup>501</sup>

These words, spoken by the king of the dead men at Dunharrow in Tolkien's epic *Lord of the Rings*, are a fitting way to introduce the final threshold of this chapter: the Ogygian gate of Thebes. This is the place where Polynices and Eteocles fight, die, and are almost buried, bringing about an end to the curse of their father. With the opening of the Ogygian gate, the way to reconciliation is indeed shut, and the memories of the dead of Thebes and Argos are the ones who will keep it closed.

The opening of this final door and the close of the brothers' fratricidal discord occurs within the penultimate book of Statius' epic. However, before addressing the final battle of Oedipus' sons, I wish to turn to an earlier series of deaths within the Ogygian threshold. Last closed in response to the Argive offensive immediately following the deaths of Hopleus and Dymas (*Theb.* 10.493-514), the Ogygian gate is remarkable as a concentrated location of death.<sup>502</sup> Overall, the closure of the seven gates of Thebes is a frantic and messy affair: Theban strength is adequate to shut six of the seven, but the Ogygian gate remains open, admitting the enemy and adding to the dead:

... ocuis omnis

porta coit; solas dum tardius artat Echion  
Ogygias, audax animis Spartana iuventus  
irrupit, caesique ruunt in limine primo  
incola Taygeti Panopeus rigidique natator  
Oebalus Eurotae (*Thebaid.* 10. 493-8)

Quick as a flash, every gate  
swung shut: only one exception—the Ogygian where,  
while Echion lagged a little, bold-hearted Spartan youths

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<sup>501</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R. 2002:798.

<sup>502</sup> The closing of the gates to stall an advancing enemy is not unique to the *Thebaid*. Cf. Rossi 2004:112-4 for an account of the closure of the gates in *Aeneid* following Camilla's death.

broke in. Cut down right at the threshold sprawled Panopeus,  
 who hailed from Targetus and from icy Eurotas, one  
 Oebalus, a swimmer...

Once again, the boundaries of Thebes are shown to be permeable, and its gatekeeper, Eteocles, is proven weak. It is no coincidence that the only gate the Thebans struggle to close, the Ogygian gate, is the gate where Polynices and Eteocles will make their final battle, as this is the gate that is most easily transgressed.

The deaths of Panopeus and Oebalus, as narrated above, are not the only killings to prefigure the fratricidal battle at the threshold. In a particularly gory scene the Theban Amyntor is beheaded in the rush to halt Capaneus' advance:

par operis iactura lucro; quippe hoste retento  
 exclusere suos cadit intra moenia Graius  
 Ormenus, et pronas tendentis Amyntoris ulnas  
 fundentisque preces penitus cervice recisa  
 verba solo vultusque cadunt, colloque decorus  
 torquis in hostiles cecidit per vulnus harenas. (Thebaid. 10. 513-18)

Loss matched gain in this effort: they'd penned the foe in, yes—  
 but they'd shut out their own men! Inside the walls, Greek  
 Ormenus falls; while Amyntor holds out imploring arms  
 and pours forth prayers, his neck is cut clean through and,  
 still entreating, his head falls on deaf ground as the splendid torque  
 fell through his wounded throat and onto "enemy" sands.

This vivid image of Amyntor's liminal decapitation points directly to the significance of the threshold in the transition from earth to the afterlife. The closure of the gates also provides a neat metaphor for the closure of possibility: Amyntor's life, and therefore his potential for an escape from conflict, is at an end. That his severed head continues praying after death is not unique to the *Thebaid*,<sup>503</sup> but it nonetheless suggests an unsettling blurring of the boundary between death and life. His words linger after his body has ostensibly failed, *'verba solo*

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<sup>503</sup> It also occurs in Seneca's *Thyestes*. 727f. and Lucan's *De Bello Civili* 8.682f. cf. Williams 1972:94.

*vultusque cadunt*' (10.517), yet they are ultimately unheard.<sup>504</sup> It is as if, by dying in the doorway, Amyntor remains suspended in an interstitial limbo. That his head remains on native soil as his body falls on enemy ground reflects the arbitrary violence of the polarisation of space. Caught inbetween, Amyntor is denied a composite locality and severed in two. His fragmented and extended death resonates with Hippomedon's victims, floating within the Ismenos.<sup>505</sup> The Ogygian threshold is a space that sits on the very border of life and death, and within it those realms become intertwined.

The Ogygian gate's permeability and prominence as a site of death is of paramount importance to understanding the duel between Eteocles and Polynices (11.403-579). It functions as a conduit for miscommunication from the moment Polynices arrives at the threshold. However, even before the Theban exile begins his wait at the Ogygian gate, Statius notices him keeping vigil at the entrance to the Theban camp, and allows us a glimpse into his state of mind, a state that enforces the liminality of both the setting and the scene as a whole:

iamque per Argolicas Erebo sata virgo cohortes  
 vestigat Polynicis iter portisque sub ipsis  
 invenit, incertum leto tot iniqua fugane  
 exeat.                    (*Thebaid.* 11. 136-9)

Through the Argive encampment, the virgin sired by Erebus  
 tracks Polynices' trail and now, hard by the gate, she  
 finds him debating: "Death? or flight? which exit from all  
 these evils?"

At this point in the narrative, four of the seven Argive warriors have been killed: Tydeus (*Theb.* 8.456-766), Hippomedon (9.476-535), Capaneus (10.738-939), and Parthenopaeus (9.832-977). One has been swallowed by the earth, Amphiaraus (7.771-8.126), and only two remain: Polynices and Adrastus.<sup>506</sup> Defeat seems almost certain, but it is not yet guaranteed.

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<sup>504</sup> This is an intriguing and unusual line. Wilson Joyce's (2008) translation emphasises the potential play on words noted by Williams 1972:94 that occurs with *verba cadunt*: 'his words are unsuccessful'.

<sup>505</sup> Cf. p. 143-144

<sup>506</sup> Soon Adrastus will leave the epic and return home to Argos alone (11.439-445).

In this rare moment of peace before the resumption of battle, Polynices weighs his options for exit from this war. His position at the entrance is poignant, as it places him at the interstice between the Argive and Theban territory, and, by extension, at the boundary where his conflicting loyalties collide. From this vantage point he can view his past, present, and future, and he lingers, perhaps unsurprisingly considering that Polynices' role so far has been limited to that of spectator rather than a catalyst of action.<sup>507</sup> Once again a gateway is the space of possibility: whilst torn by indecision, Polynices remains by the gate, only moving to find Adrastus once his decision has been made (11.154). Even as he addresses his father-in-law, Polynices' indecision and inaction is reflected in his acknowledgement that he has waited too long (*Theb.* 11.155-8). The clear anachronic nature of Polynices' realisation is heightened by a simultaneously belated (surely Polynices should realise his folly earlier), and preemptive (the war is not yet lost), outpouring of sorrow:

Ibant in lacrimas, veluti cum vere reverso  
 Bistoniae tepuere nives; summittitur ingens  
 Haemus et augustos Rhodope descendit in amnes  
 coeperat et leni senior mulcere furentem  
 alloquio... (*Thebaid.* 11.193-7)

They began to weep—as, once spring has returned, Bistonian  
 snows thaw, and those on soaring Haemus melt, and those  
 on mighty Rhodope pour down the slopes into choked streams.  
 Old Adrastus had just begun to speak, soothing this fit...

Standing in the Argive camp, the two men weep for one another and those they have lost (11.193-5). The camp itself is also a composite liminal space, as the army must pass through it to either flee the battlefield or enter into war. This intimate encounter within the interstitial encampment is the last between father and son-in-law. It contains echoes of the reconciliation of Priam and Achilles, where the enemies weep in shared grief for the victims of war (Homer. *Iliad.* 24.507-15). In this space between battles, between conflicts, Polynices and Adrastus can see the death that has been and the tragedy to come, and weep together for past and future fatalities. Just as he did in their first encounter at Argos (1.438-73),

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<sup>507</sup> Cf. Ahl 1986:2883.



Polynices again here bemoans his shameful lineage,<sup>508</sup> and Adrastus responds with kindness and empathy, moving to soothe his son-in-law and encourage him once more away from fratricide (11.196). Once again, the familial momentarily reigns over the martial, evoking the moment Jocasta burst into the encampment and pacified the Argive host with claims of motherhood and familial love (7.470-537).<sup>509</sup> Just as the pleas of his sisters and mother caused Polynices to waver in his pursuit of the Theban kingship, *'variamque animum turbante procella/ exciderat regnum: cupit ire'* ('in the wild storm of his mind's confusion he'd have renounced the kingdom, was eager to go' 7.536-7), so now the young man is easily calmed by the elder's soothing words: *'mulcere furentem alloquio'* (11.196-7). The men currently stand in a space marked simultaenously by both familial love and the madness of war.

However, before Adrastus can successfully turn Polynices' mind away from fratricide Tisiphone interrupts him (*Theb.* 11.197). Donning the false form of Argive Phereclus the fury whisks the younger man away to the Ogygian gate with tales of Eteocles' preparations for battle (11.197-204). From this point on Polynices becomes involved in an elaborate game of Chinese whispers with his brother, where rumours about the other's willingness to fight are passed back and forth through the closed door of the city, goading each of the young men to arms and inflaming their anger. Beginning with the lie of disguised Tisiphone to Polynices (*Theb.* 11.197-202), and after the ominous failure of Eteocles' sacrifice to Jove (11.205-38), the message of war is then passed to Eteocles via the messenger Aepytus (11.242-5). At this point the Theban people urge Eteocles to remain within the palace (11. 260-5), and the king heeds them, clinging to the throne despite Creon's exaggerated appeals to his duty and accusations of cowardice (11.262-314).

Into the vacant role of gatekeeper now step Jocasta and Antigone, both attempting reconciliation from the threshold. Jocasta, mother and grandmother of the warring brothers, first takes a stand before the doorway and turns inwards appealing to Eteocles in the most emotive of speeches:

stabo ipso in limine portae  
 auspicium infelix scelerumque inmanis imago.  
 haec tibi canities, haec sunt calcanda, nefande,

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<sup>508</sup> Cf. Bernstein 2003:361-4.

<sup>509</sup> Cf. p. 114



for one last time—and see whether you weep at these my words  
of woe.”

She appeals to Polynices by reminding him of his family in Argos (11.366), and of his family at Thebes (*Theb.* 11.370-2). Unlike the various rumours of conflict that Tisiphone passed back and forth through the closed door, Antigone, unhindered by the bolted gates speaks the truth: at this moment Jocasta intercedes with Eteocles on Polynices’ behalf (*Theb.* 11.377-9). Perhaps it is her position at the top of the walls that allows Antigone to be heard and calm her brother’s anger. It seems that as the words are not passing through the door, but remain unimpeded, they are not subject to distortion by Tisiphone and Megaera who have taken control of the gateway. The same would be true of Jocasta’s supplication to Eteocles, as they stand on the same side of the door. Yet peace is not to be, and the Furies use their power to push Eteocles out of his hiding place through the gate to confront Polynices (11.383-95).

As the brothers stare at each other in fury, finally face to face, the Argive king reprises again the role that he performed in the first book of Statius epic when he stepped between Polynices and Tydeus.<sup>513</sup> Once again he takes on the role of Janus, standing between the choices of peace and war. However, as Eteocles exits Thebes Adrastus’ influence wanes, and the time arrives for the Argive king to leave the battlefield:

illos ut stimulis ire in discrimen apertis  
audiit et sceleri nullum iam obstare pudorem,  
advolat et medias immittit Adrastus habenas,  
ipse quidem et regnis multum et venerabilis aevo.  
sed quid apud tales, quis nec sua pignora curae,  
exter honos? (*Thebaid.* 11. 424-9)

Hearing their taunts,  
Adrastus went flying and drove his war car between them—he  
a monarch and reverend elder. But men so possessed, paying  
their own flesh and blood no heed—what do they care for  
an outsiders’ authority?

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<sup>513</sup> Cf. Bonds 1985:225.

These lines show that the gentle king can no longer take the place of Polynices' father: their relationship has been reduced from father and son(in-law) to that of foreigners, as Adrastus is now no longer *pater* (*Theb.* 11.156), father, but *exter* (11.429), outsider. He who adopted Tydeus and Polynices, bringing them out of the wilderness and into community, is now himself exiled.<sup>514</sup> As he has been stripped of the title of father so Adrastus loses his place at Thebes beside Polynices. The relational bonds, that were formed when the king brought the young exile over the threshold at Argos, have been severed and replaced by the former ties between the Theban prince and his biological family.<sup>515</sup> The irony in this is that the bonds re-formed between Polynices and the house of Oedipus are perverted, abhorrent, and lead to death. As the two young men rush towards each other, we know that this time the fight will not be resolved by the joining of hands. Adrastus cannot remain within this space of conflict, and so the Argive king rushes back to his own home, alone (*Theb.* 11.439-43).

Neither of the brothers will return to Thebes. Their anger will never be abated, as even in death their spirits will reject each other, Eteocles' pyre pushing out the body of his fallen brother (12.429-46). In death, the final door to peace and community available to Eteocles and Polynices is shut. However, they are united again in exile, as each will never again cross the palace threshold, of either city. In this way, the Ogygian gate provides a picture of the ease with which an individual can transition from the security and safety of the interior to the chaotic and dangerous exterior world. Each crossing opens the possibility for new becomings as each threshold leads to new encounters.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen how Statius uses threshold spaces to portray a series of becomings. Some of these transformations take the form of adopting a new identity: this is what happens to Polynices and Tydeus as a result of their fight at the gates of Argos. Others mark a transition from one state to another, a move from peace to war, exile to adoption, life to death. Writing the threshold where these changes occur shines a light on the processes involved in such transformations. Statius repeatedly shows that change is not straightforward and involves loss as well as gain. Such changes can be made more

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<sup>514</sup> Cf. Harrison 2007:149-53. This underscores the link between Statius use of exile and dysfunction within the family.

<sup>515</sup> Cf. Bonds 1985:234

complicated by the presence of an other, and only a few characters, Adrastus being one example, can actually aid others without experiencing a profound change to themselves. Other gatekeepers, such as Eteocles, are unsuccessful and can actually reverse transformations that have already occurred. As the families of the *Thebaid* war with one another they progress from shouting threats in each others' doorways to taking the final step onto the battlefield to leave their cities behind them. Yet Statius reveals that the door to peace always remains open, despite the repeated choice of the *Thebaid's* protagonists to sustain their bloody war.

#### 4.v. Conclusions from the threshold.

From the thresholds of Argos and Thebes we have seen how seemingly insignificant, momentary instances of becoming resonate throughout Statius' narrative, amplifying and intertwining with the *Thebaid's* greater movements. Adrastus and Eteocles, gatekeepers to the Thebaid's main cities, facilitate and deny Polynices' and Tydeus' reintegration into shared spaces of family and community, with, some might say, equally catastrophic effect. Yet, in the doorway, in the borderspace between acceptance and rejection, regardless of the ultimate outcome we see the potential for peace. It is visible in Adrastus' joining of the exiles' hands or Tydeus' lightly held olive branch. The precarity of these moments of opportunity challenges us to view the epic's gateways as constricted, yet capable of containing infinite subjectivities and immeasurable alternatives.

Even closed, the *Thebaid's* gateways remain permeable. Sound, if muddled, travels through them, eroding seemingly impenetrable borders such as the locked doorway to Adrastus' palace (*Theb.* 1.431-8) and the bolted Ogygian gate (*Theb.* 11.239-402). Yet, despite being locations of possibility and opportunity, the threshold is also a space of defiance. To die within the threshold, either by suicide like Maeon or in battle like Amnytor, is to remain suspended in the space between. Each of the men die as both insiders and outsiders, denying the authority of the gatekeeper Eteocles in his attempt to seal Thebes from all exterior influence. Similarly, Tydeus' forceful re-entry to Argos bypasses Adrastus' control and the process of reintegration into the Argive community bringing war into what was a previously peaceful domain. It seems that the epic's thresholds, gateways, and even its locked doors, present us with a space as unsettling as its wildernesses and just as ephemeral as its battlefields.

## 5. Final Conclusions.

vix novus ista furor veniensque inplesset Apollo  
et mea iam longo meruit ratis aequore portum. (*Thebaid.* 12.808-9)

Scarce would new frenzy or oncoming Apollo fill those sails;  
after so lengthy a voyage, my craft has deserved safe haven.

## Dislocations and lingering ambiguities.

If there is one conclusion to draw from this journey through the *Thebaid's* wild forests, battlefields, and thresholds it is that the sheer number of these interstitial, composite and transitory spaces forces all those inhabiting the epic's landscape repeatedly to experience and explore their identities in locations external to and away from their own "home" environments. As familiar places confer certainty these constant dislocations perpetually present ambiguity, and within this ambiguity the *Thebaid's* individuals act in challenging and unexpected ways. Individuals such as Hypsipyle: the wet-nurse who casually abandons her charge (*Thebaid.* 4.778-85);<sup>516</sup> or Jocasta, entering the Argive camp demanding peace (7.481-502);<sup>517</sup> or even Adrastus, the gentle king, who, despite being confronted with two bloody and bellicose exiles, ushers Polynices and Tydeus into his home and family (1.431-73).<sup>518</sup> These startling moments accumulate, leaving Statius' readers with the continuous feeling of standing in the 'in-between' spaces: those sites that 'elaborate strategies of selfhood — singular and communal — that initiate new signs of identity'.<sup>519</sup>

By turning towards the spaces between and outside the traditional *moenia et campi* of epic action I have demonstrated that many of the *Thebaid's* pivotal scenes are also its most ephemeral. The journeys of Hoppleus and Dymas (*Theb.* 10.347-490),<sup>520</sup> and of Argia and Antigone (12.219-463),<sup>521</sup> across the darkened field are examples of attempts to sustain a presence within a space that is constantly under threat, a space that begins to disappear almost as soon as it is entered. Other spatial encounters exist as mere hints within the narrative: quick, intimate and briefly related meetings that can be easily missed as the epic pushes forward towards its deadly conclusion. It is only by lingering on these instances, Atalanta and Diana meeting in the shrine (*Theb.* 9.635-9),<sup>522</sup> Atys and Ismene's marriage on his deathbed (8.636-50),<sup>523</sup> Argia' and Polynices' conversation in the sleepless night (2.306-

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<sup>516</sup> See pp. 71-79.

<sup>517</sup> pp. 113-124.

<sup>518</sup> pp. 209-14

<sup>519</sup> Bhabha 1994:2.

<sup>520</sup> pp.166-77.

<sup>521</sup> pp. 177-96.

<sup>522</sup> pp. 84-89.

<sup>523</sup> pp. 124-31.



63),<sup>524</sup> that the pervasive instability within the spatial operations of the *Thebaid* becomes fully apparent.

Throughout this collection of readings, it is the persistent evocation of these complex transient locations that challenges out generic preconceptions, and, as I stated in the introduction to this thesis, unsettle any desire for narratological closure. The *Thebaid* is not a single story: it offers a multitude of possibilities, reflecting the palimpsest of spaces and identities it contains. There is no synecdochic hero. Instead, as Ahl noted, Statius presents us with ‘the individual in a complex network’,<sup>525</sup> and each individual is progressing through their own series of becomings, influencing and being impacted by those they encounter. Whether coming together in a violent collision, like the composite warriors within Ismenos’ waters (*Theb.* 9.259-60), or in empathetic recognition, like Jocasta and the Argive army (*Theb.* 7.532-3), one cannot survive these convergences unchanged.

The transformative potential of the space of enunciation is again and again revealed as the *Thebaid* suggests alternatives to the brothers’ fratricidal war through the successful interaction and co-existence of those who would be enemies: Argia and Antigone become sisters, Polynices and Tydeus become brothers. Yet, just as many encounters simultaneously demonstrate the destruction that occurs when the space between individuals breaks down: Hippomedon and Ismenos, Hypsipyle and Opheltes, and, of course, Eteocles and Polynices. Similarly doomed are those encounters where one participant desires to establish hegemonic control, failing to recognise the influence of others’ spatial practices on the nature of their environment. Here I think of Adrastus and Hypsipyle, whose disastrous misreading of Nemea grieves not only Eurydice and Lycurgus, but the forest itself (*Theb.* 5.579-82). An inability to correctly read the precariousness of one’s own environment is to invite disaster for one’s self and also those around them.

The strength of a reading of the *Thebaid* which begins, not with the Secondspace methodology concerned with generic convention or intertextual precedent, nor with a Firstspace methodology attentive only to a mapping of the epic’s physical monuments and landscape, but with a Thirdspace methodology, where the link between subjectivity and

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<sup>524</sup> pp. 184-8

<sup>525</sup> Ahl 1986:2818 as cited p.11

spatiality is consistently sustained, is that it enables a view into the space-in-becoming that is Statius' epic. Maintaining an understanding of the multidimensionality of the *Thebaid*, its complexity, non-sequentiality, and immensity, despite the potentially discouraging limitations of the linear tool of language,<sup>526</sup> can only lead to a deeper appreciation of this challenging and elusive text. The *Thebaid* offers the reader many questions regarding individuality, community, embodiment and intersubjectivity, yet it does not provide answers. By approaching the world of Statius' epic with a perspective that acknowledges its essential opacity,<sup>527</sup> rather than with the false conception of social space as 'an integrated, open, expanding code',<sup>528</sup> something that is self-evident and easily understood and possessed, it is possible to encounter this text without needing to reconcile its persistent ambivalence. Upon first encounter, the *Thebaid* accosts the reader with a world of conflict where difference is unbearable, unacceptable, and hated. However, as we notice the many encounters "in-between", we, the reader, learn to live, to coexist, within both extremes of the brothers' polarising struggle. Just as the many interlocutors of Statius' epic are forced to inhabit and negotiate the space-between, that is, a world persistently contaminated by the unsettling presence of the other, and, as a result are brought together, we find ourselves in unexpected and unsettling proximity with the other within the *Thebaid*.

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<sup>526</sup> Cf. Soja 1996:57 as cited in the introduction p.16

<sup>527</sup> Cf. Soja 1996:56.

<sup>528</sup> Bhabha 1994:37.

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