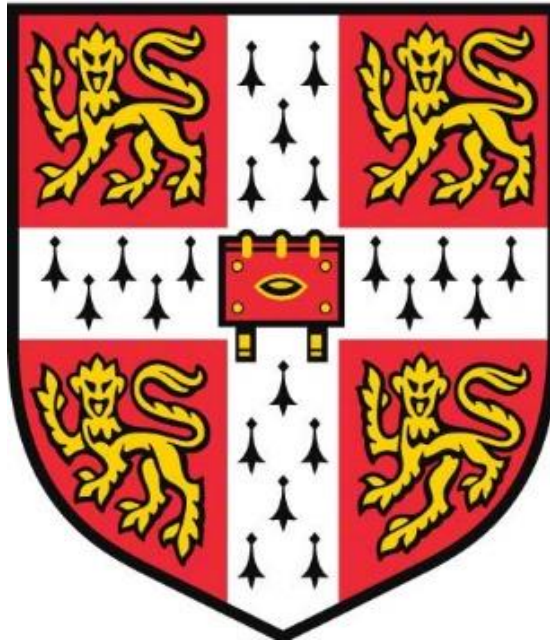# Heroic Self-Fashioning in Statius' *Thebaid*

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Preface

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

Some sections from chapter 2 (p143-164) have been reworked and expanded from my Master's dissertation at the University of Oxford (2014).

The length of this dissertation is 79,988 words. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Henry Tang

26/06/2018

Abstract

Heroic Self-fashioning in Statius' *Thebaid* – Henry Ka Chun Tang

This thesis will examine how heroes attempt to create their own heroic identity in Statius' epic poem, the *Thebaid*. The *Thebaid* is a poem with no single central character, but a central group of heroes of relatively equal standing. Among this large crowd, each individual attempts to prove their heroic worth by manipulating narratives about themselves. In this way, they hope to improve their standing in society, and their chances of being remembered well by posterity. But heroic identity relies on the recognition of society, meaning reputation is difficult to control among the public. Therefore, these individuals must perform a heroic identity, so that society would actually recognise them in such a way. However, the *Thebaid* is a poem about failure. Few of the heroes remain alive by the end of the poem. Fewer still remain with their good reputations intact. In their attempts to push pass the limits of humanity to gain eternal fame, most commit terrible sins.

The heroic greatness that they claim to have in their self-presentations is therefore called into question by the *Thebaid*'s narrative and its narrator, who condemns the actions of the heroes throughout the poem. Throughout my project, I will be interested in the gap that forms behind the heroic image, which the heroes create about themselves in their narratives, and those of the main narrator. The narrator will consistently undermine the efforts of the heroes, encouraging counter-interpretations to the heroic image that the characters hope to cement.

In my first chapter, I will examine how the heroes create narratives about themselves by trying to control the discourse about their family. This can involve suppressing or even changing details from their family history, so that their ancestors will have a positive effect on their reputation.

In my second chapter, I will examine how the heroes manipulate the rhetoric about monster-slaying. The heroes attempt to portray themselves as forces of good, removing evil monsters from the world; in reality, they themselves become monstrous through their actions, and become a source of evil to the world.

My final chapter will examine the relationship between the text and contemporary Flavian society. I suggest that Flavian society was one that was self-conscious about self-portrayal, and that a discourse had arisen about the appropriate ways in which this should be done. I hope to show that the attempts of the heroes to make themselves look like heroes are a reflection of these contemporary anxieties.

Contents

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written without the continuous support from numerous friends, family, and advisors. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their work. I lack the tongues and mouths to list out all of those, to whom I owe my gratitude; however, special mention must go to a few people here, so that the *fama* of their heroic deeds will be memorialised:

Firstly, I would like to thank my housemates on Milton Road, who have provided me with some weird and wonderful experiences over the last four years we have lived there, and a friendly home away from home to return to. I am also grateful to the graduate community, who have offered advice and support through some difficult times, and who have made the Classics Faculty common room a most welcoming place.

I must also thank Chris Whitton, Ingo Gildenhard, and Stephen Oakley, all of whose comments at the early stages of my project helped it to set out onto its voyage. Incalculable thanks must also go to Lea Niccolai for helping me set in order the chaotic maelstrom of my thoughts; Hanneke Reijnierse-Salisbury for showing me the ropes of art history; Olivia Elder for navigating me through the material evidence; as well as Laura Clash, who was on board with scanning the thesis with her keen eye for details. Of course, this list would not be complete without a mention of Philip Hardie, my supervisor, whose tutelary guidance has seen the project throughout its journey and ensured its arrival into a safe harbour.

I am also grateful to my examiners, Emily Gowers and Carole Newlands, for their perceptive comments, which have steered this thesis into its final form. Additional thanks must also go to Christina Tsaknaki and Talitha Kearey for their generous academic advice and general support throughout the whole of this voyage.

Finally, the last position in this catalogue of heroes goes to my family, whose financial and moral support (for what must be quite a baffling project to them) have kept me going.

To all of you: thank you.

Introduction

Heroic Self-Fashioning

This thesis will examine how heroes attempt to create their own heroic identity in Statius' epic poem, the *Thebaid*. The *Thebaid* is a poem with no single, central character, but a central group of heroes of relatively equal standing. Among this large crowd, each individual attempts to prove their heroic worth by manipulating narratives about themselves. In this way, they hope to improve their standing in society, and their chances of being remembered well by posterity. But heroic identity relies on the recognition of society, and reputation is difficult to control among the public. Therefore, these individuals must perform a heroic identity, so that society would actually recognise them as such. However, the *Thebaid* is a poem about failure. Few of the heroes remain alive by the end of the poem. Fewer still remain with their good reputations intact. In their attempts to push pass the limits of humanity to gain eternal fame, most commit terrible sins.

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In my first chapter, I examine how the heroes create narratives about themselves by trying to control the discourse about their family. This can involve suppressing or even changing details from their family history, so that their ancestors will have a positive effect on their reputation.

In my second chapter, I examine how the heroes manipulate the rhetoric about monster-slaying. The heroes attempt to portray themselves as forces of good, removing evil monsters from the world; in reality, they themselves become monstrous through their actions, and become a source of evil to the world.

I hope to demonstrate that the insecurities of the *Thebaid*'s characters reflect contemporary Flavian society. As I explore in my third chapter, after the civil war in

69AD the policies of the Flavian emperors created a society that allowed great social mobility. Thus, there was a need for those rising up through the social hierarchy to re-establish and reinvent themselves to justify their right to the newfound positions accompanying this change in circumstances. In the process, the nature of the values expected from the elite classes would be subject to constant negotiation by the Flavian writers. I suggest that the unusually self-conscious worries of the *Thebaid*'s heroes over how they are perceived by others are part of a wider conversation about suitable methods of self-representations in a new and still changing age.

In this introduction, I firstly explain the sociological theories that have informed my mode of reading the *Thebaid*. Secondly, I explore patterns of heroism. What kinds of values do heroes hold? How do they act? How typical are the heroes of the *Thebaid*? Finally, I explore the nature of 'heroic reputation' through the slippery characteristics of the Latin word *fama*. We will see to what extent (and to what limits) the characters can take advantage of *fama*, in their attempts to fashion their heroic identities.

Self-Fashioning and Performative Identity

My investigation begins with the premise that the heroes in the *Thebaid* are unusual for heroes in an epic poem, in the fact that they are particularly anxious over their self-presentation to others. As we will see, the poem flaunts the way that the heroes manipulate narratives about themselves in order to demonstrate to others that they are in fact heroes, and that they deserve the glory and honour that comes with the status. The poem's lack of a dominant protagonist means that the large number of heroes in this poem are in constant competition with one another, and strive to prove that they belong among mighty warriors. To this end, they do what they can to influence others to perceive them as heroes, pushing ever further against the boundaries of social and moral acceptability, until they breach even the limits of humanity.

The term 'self-fashioning' was coined by Greenblatt, who argued that in the Renaissance era there was "an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process".[1] The contemporary values of religion and culture governed the behaviour of upper class society in order to conform to a socially approved 'self'. He demonstrates an inextricable relationship between culture and art. Portraiture and literature were mediums by which individuals could publically project

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[1] Greenblatt (1980) p2.

their chosen identity, but they would also reinforce ideas of what was culturally appropriate. His choice of subjects of his study all benefited from mobility, mostly social and economic, and so they were perhaps particularly attuned to differing modes of identity.

The *Thebaid* was written in a period of political and social change, with high mobility for significant proportions of the elite members of society. As we will see, the question of how individuals should present themselves were being debated across conflicting books of conduct and other literature. Even the imperial family was carefully negotiating their position between renewal and continuity. As Greenblatt has shown for the Renaissance period, I suggest that the concern about identity manifests itself in the contemporary art and literature. Focusing specifically on the *Thebaid*, I will show how this negotiation of identity happens within the narrative levels of the poem itself. Many of the characters of the epic also undergo or attempt to undergo some sort of social change (princes to exiles; boy to warrior etc.), and so demonstrate severe anxiety over their public perception. The range of heroes and the differing versions of heroism, within and between the narrative levels of the poem, reflects the confusion in the Flavian society about the appropriate methods of self-fashioning.

My methodological approach to the heroes' behaviour has been influenced by theories of performative identity. This is a concept developed from theorists like Derrida and Foucault, which has recently been used by Butler and others in feminist theory.[2] In addition to these, Goffman's theories on social interactions have been of great value to me. As I understand it, the term 'performativity' denotes a process by which an individual portrays himself, through speech, actions, and other external methods in accordance with an identity or a 'mask' (a socially informed stereotype) that the individual has chosen and wishes to convey.[3] Therefore, identity is not something that is necessarily internal or innate, but something that is projected and shaped by external factors to be perceived by others. I attempt to broaden the scope of the theory from female gender and sexual identities, with which it has often been associated because of Butler's theories, to demonstrate that, in the *Thebaid*, the hyper-masculine ideal of the hero is also one that is

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[2] Butler (2007) p10-17.
[3] See Goffman (1969) p28 "When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be."

strived for and performed. To adapt Simone de Beauvoir's well-known phrase: one is not born, but rather becomes, a hero.[4] And it is through hard work that the individuals of the *Thebaid* cultivate their heroic status, constantly attempting to reaffirm that they do in fact belong to this category of social elites.

For Goffman, the identity that was portrayed had to be consistent: any contradictions between an individual's assumed identity and his actions would cause onlookers to feel as though they have been misled or even deliberately fooled by his prior actions and would lead to social embarrassment.[5] With regards to the heroes of the *Thebaid*, social embarrassment is, in practice, equal to social demotion. The heroes have to go to great lengths in order to keep reaffirming their claim to heroic status and to eradicate evidence that refutes this claim.

It is hardly controversial to claim that each hero of the *Thebaid* demonstrates dominating essences that mark them out as a particular 'type' of character. For example, in the poem's reception, Dante makes members of the Seven allegories of specific sins (or at least, sins from Dante's Christian perspective). And scholars like Vessey have compressed the entirety of each character into a particular "humour" neatly in a chart.[6] Even more recently, Seo's monograph on reading characterisation in Latin literature argues for an over-determined reading in the characterisations of Parthenopaeus and Amphiaraus: the poet, through a strategy of intertextual parallels, forces the reader to classify the heroes with certain character-archetypes, or "super-tropes".[7] This process contains and restricts the reader's expectations of the characters. According to Seo, characters in literature are not supposed to demonstrate "psychological roundness".[8] Readers are not meant to identify emotionally with characters in epic poetry, but to treat them only as literary constructions.

However, to regard the characters as having a single defining identity is too simplistic. These characters have multiple identities created by the benefit of multiple narrative levels. Usually the theory of 'masks' is applied to first-person, rather than third-person narratives.[9] Nonetheless, within the *Thebaid*'s third-person narrative, individual

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[4] de Beauvoir (1974) p301.
[5] Goffman (1969) p166-202.
[6] Vessey (1973) p66.
[7] Seo (2013) chapters 4 and 5 respectively.
[8] Seo (2013) p2-8.
[9] See Seo (2013) p7-8 on first-person authorial persona. See Oliensis (1998) p1-4 for an example of how Horace defines his first-person authorial persona like a real member of society might.

heroes tell first-person narratives about themselves, either in direct speech or more abstractly through artwork. But since the overall structure of the narrative is third-person, the hostile narrator is able to use all the tools of intertextuality that he has privileged access to (as argued by Seo) in order to supplement a different portrayal of the hero. This process exposes the construction of first-person narratives, highlighting the very fact that the heroes are wearing 'masks'. As such, each hero is recognised to have more than one identity: the one they project, the one received by other internal characters, and the one constructed by the narrator.

This idea of 'masks' is also facilitated by Roman thoughts about social conduct, in which the metaphor of theatre is often used to emphasise the importance of picking a 'character' and being consistent with it.[10] Seneca, for example, argues: *magnam rem puta unum hominem agere* (Sen. *Ep.* 120.22). While Seo argues that third-person characters lack "psychological roundness", I suggest that they are doing exactly what members of Roman society were encouraged to do. They put on a persona that represents their personal, idealistic vision of heroism and consistently reinforce it; but this persona they choose will often be unconvincing to others: for example, as we will see, Polynices fails at being seen as anything but Oedipus' son while Parthenopaeus fails at being seen as anything but a boy. At other times, the heroes deviate from their 'mask': for example, Amphiaraus sacrifices his pacifist, priestly piety on which he bases his identity, when he is forced to fight in the sinful war. Although he gains *virtus* (7.702) in battle, he does so driving an impious axle, (*impius axis*, 7.763).[11] As Goffman suggested, the disconnection between the characters' projected identity and their actions is problematising. It undermines the reader's overall faith in the characters' portrayals of heroism.

If the characters are enacting a code of behaviour familiar to the Roman people, then we can appreciate the poem's significance as a witness to society and culture in Flavian Rome. As we will see in the final chapter, the behaviour of the *Thebaid*'s characters, their multiplicity of identities, and the exposure of the first-person narrative

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[10] See e.g. Gill (1988) p185-186; Gill (2006) p417-21; Schiesaro (2009) p234-5.

[11] Masterson (2005) p293-4. Statius emphasises the priest's transformation with a Vergilian intertext. The words *quantum subito diuersus ab illo* (7.706) allude to the appearance of Hector's ghost in the *Aeneid*: *quantum mutatus ab illo* (Verg. *Aen.* 2.274). Hector's transformation is purely one of appearance, but Amphiaraus' transformation is both a physical change and a character change. While Hector's appearance changes from heroic to pathetic, Amphiaraus' change makes him a more warrior figure. See Smolenaars (1994).

responds to the transforming cultural environment in Flavian Rome and reflects the confusion over identity and status under the new Flavian emperors.

Patterns of Epic Heroism

What does it mean for heroes to try to make themselves look like heroes? What kind of acts are considered heroic? How do the *Thebaid*'s heroes compare against others from the heroic tradition? In this section, I will identify some traits of heroism and argue that there is no single concept of heroism, a feature which Statius will exploit to create multiple visions of each hero. Throughout this thesis, I will show that the *Thebaid*'s narrator takes on the spirit of Lucan's narrator, using a wide range of techniques – from open criticism to more subtle approaches – to consistently undermine the heroes' attempts to fashion their own heroic identity and reject their codes of heroic behaviour.

Both epic and heroism are notoriously difficult concepts to define.[12] The modern idea of the hero has evolved away from the ancient sense, which itself was widely heterogeneous.[13] The ancient epic hero is usually a male protagonist in an epic poem; usually descended from the gods; usually a warrior; and usually admired for his qualities. Nonetheless, even for each of these nebulous conditions, one can find exceptions. One epic hero looks and acts quite differently from another. The reason for this is that heroism is an incredibly protean construct. Its definition changes in accordance with shifts in culture, time, literary fashions, different political pressures, and philosophical influences, among other factors. Even the same hero can be represented in many different ways: for example, the archetypal hero Herakles/Hercules exists in countless versions, from the *Odyssey*'s violent brute (*Od.* 21.26-30) to, for example, Seneca's Stoic sage (Sen. *Constant.* 2.1).[14] In other words, heroism means something different to each individual, and needs to be defined through acts of self-fashioning. This has been a feature of the epic tradition since Achilles' obsession with his reptutation (*kleos*) in the *Iliad*. Indeed, as we will see, different ideas of what heroism is can cause tension within the same poem. The *Thebaid* constantly measures different types of heroism or heroes against one

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[12] Of course, epic is only one of many genres that shapes the cultural understanding of hero: Nagy (2005). I will be exploring the influence that tragedy has on the *Thebaid* in the following chapter.
[13] On heroes in Greek literature, see e.g. van Wees (1992) p6-9; Gill (1998) p94-174; Currie (2005) p60-70; Nagy (2013). On heroes in Latin literature, see e.g. Thomas (2001) p100-106; Sullivan (2014).
[14] As Cicero points out: *quamquam quem potissimum Herculem colamus, scire sane velim* (Cic. *DND* 3.42).

another, or an individual against his own ideas of heroism. The multiplicity of heroes in the *Thebaid* allows a spectrum of heroic characteristics from across the epic tradition to be showcased. However, in a poem of civil war, it will become clear that the heroes' attempts to recreate 'traditional' patterns of heroism, in a scenario that makes them impossible, will actually pervert them.

The *Aristos*

As Hardie has shown, a key feature of the hero is the desire to be the best, the *aristos* (ὁ ἄριστος), so that he will be remembered by posterity.[15] The *Iliad* sets down the precedent for the frictions among a self-interested group of heroes, which ignites the quarrel between Achilles (the greatest warrior) and Agamemnon (the expedition's leader). In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' heroism is based more on his wit. He too proves himself as 'the best': not only is he the only one of his crew to reach Ithaca alive (the singular ἄνδρα, *Od.* 1.1), but having returned to his palace, he must prove himself superior over all the suitors in physical strength and battle prowess.[16] The reward for proving himself the best is the restoration of order to Ithaca, reunion with his wife, and an end to his hardships acquired from the Trojan cycle.

In the Roman epics too, Vergil's Aeneas is the solitary leader (the singular *virum*, *Aen.* 1.1), just as his descendant Augustus is the *princeps* ('the first') of Rome, while Lucan's *Bellum Civile* is driven by Pompey and Caesar's refusal to yield to another (Luc. 1.120). This desperation to be the best individual carries over into the psyche of the *Thebaid*'s heroes: Tydeus repeatedly finds himself in the position of one man against an army (*solus / solus in arma voco*, 2.548-9; *unum acies circum consumitur, unum / omnia tela vouent*, 8.701-2),[17] and Capaneus displays a dominance that raises him above his own family members (3.598-600). His isolation is so extreme that he does not even rely on the gods, but prays to his own right hand for strength (9.548-50).[18] Their bids to make themselves 'the best' makes them almost superhuman at times, but this title is never definitively won. Fraternal pairs engage in a Roman anxiety over fraternal rivalry and

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[15] Hardie (1993) p3-8.
[16] Telemachus is Odysseus' only threat, and is prevented from participating by his father. On this tension, see Goldhill (1984), Nonetheless, Odysseus' intervention allows him to maintain his position as ὁ ἄριστος.
[17] Mimicking Lucan's Scaeva (6.196-262).
[18] This is modelled on Vergil's Mezentius (*Aen.* 10.773-6).

civil strife that can be traced to Ennius' Romulus and Remus.[19] Neither Polynices nor Eteocles become the sole king of Thebes, but snuff each other out, and so neither of these two can restore a sense of order or resolution to Thebes.

Ktisis and *Nostos*

Two more patterns of heroic behaviour are *ktisis* (the founding of a city) and *nostos* (the return to one's home city). In Greek culture, ktisic poetry was not isolated to epic, but was used in a variety of genres and occasions, including the celebration of the city founder in hero cult.[20] The ancestral hero functions as a figurehead, around which the city can gain a sense of civic identity. He represents the power and prosperity he has bestowed on the city. The most famous hero of the *nostos* narrative is Odysseus, who displays his endurance by travelling from land to land in his quest to return to his family and homeland. His return home and his removal of the suitors restores his kingdom to the correct social order. These types of narratives combine together for Vergil's Aeneas. He too faces different trials as he travels around while trying to find a new place to call home and sets in motion the events that cause the founding of Rome (*Aen*. 1.257-77).

Statius' *Thebaid*, however, is a perverted version of the *nostos* narrative. Ovid's treatment of the Theban myth in his *Metamorphoses*, from Cadmus' founding of the city to his exile from it, had already overturned the conventions of the *ktisis* hero:[21] Cadmus does not gain heroic status or secure prosperity for his city, but brings disaster and is forced to leave it. This pattern of the pessimistic *ktisis* is echoed in Polynices' *nostos*: his return home brings civil war that enacts Jupiter's desire to obliterate Thebes from existence (1.241-3). Instead of returning to a city and guaranteeing its prosperity, Polynices brings a destructive end to his own one.

The Unheroic Hero

After the Homeric poems, the epic tradition took a new turn in Hellenistic Greece. The third century neoteric poets set themselves against the perceived bombastic style of earlier epic that was represented by Homer. Instead they aimed for brevity and

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[19] Goldschmidt (2013) p72-4.
[20] Dougherty (1994).
[21] Hardie (1990) calls this section the first "anti-*Aeneid*".

refinement.[22] Their choices of subject matter were often a deliberately provocative reaction to traditional modes of representing heroic activity. Poems might share the same mythic world as the heroes of early epic, but the focus is pointedly on the 'unheroic', with more emphasis placed on the heroism of women. Callimachus' epyllion *Hecale* is the archetype of this, which selects its narrative from a tiny section of Theseus' broader mythic cycle. Instead of focusing on a heroic show of strength, the traditional hero is displaced by the poem's real hero(ine) – Hecale, the eponymous old lady, who welcomed Theseus into her home.

Under these literary ideals, Apollonius created the *Argonautica*, a short but densely packed four book epic. With the change in epic style comes a change in the type of epic hero. The Argo's journey is nominally led by Jason, since Hercules rejects the leadership first, but his authority is frequently compromised by his other companions who show more martial ability or supernatural talents. He is not ὁ ἄριστος: that title can only go to Hercules, whose presence (or absence) influences the other Argonauts' character and behaviour.[23] He has also been criticised for lacking the independence of the 'traditional' heroes of Homeric epic, because he relies on the talent of others or magical artefacts to help him survive his encounters. The interventions of the young maiden, Medea, who will one day become Euripides' vengeful sorcessess, is more powerful than Jason ever is, and undermines any of Jason's 'manliness' (ἀνδρεῖα/*virtus*) that is expected from heroes.

More recent evaluations of the *Argonautica* have been more sympathetic towards Jason.[24] In accordance to the style of the neoteric poets, Jason's heroism inverts that of the Homeric heroes. Unlike the demigod heroes, Jason represents the unheroic, an ordinary man among greater men. His strength lies in the very fact that he is able to achieve his goals by using his skills of diplomacy and his sexuality to persuade other characters to help him. Moreover, he is generally able to maintain a sense of cohesion and collective identity among a large group of heroes, in contrast to the heroes of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, whose group behaviour is characterised by division and strife.

This idea of the 'unheroic' also comes into the Latin tradition. Catullus' epyllion (poem 64), in the spirit of Callimachus' *Hecale*, focuses on a single 'unheroic' moment (the wedding of Peleus and Thetis) from the adventures of the Argonauts. But Catullus

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[22] See Lyne (1978) on the style of the neoteric poets.
[23] Feeney (1986).
[24] Hunter (1987).

distracts the reader from the background heroic setting even further, by allowing an ekphrasis of Ariadne (a woman) to take up the core section of the poem.

Ovid is particularly prominent among Latin writers of the 'unheroic'. Challenging both the traditional Homeric and the neoteric traditions, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* forces the two styles to work together in an episodic *perpetuum…carmen* (1.3-4). Accordingly, the poet can showcase a wide range of different heroes, myths and genres.

Ovid clearly enjoys poking fun at and deflating the expected grand representations of heroism and epic. His characters frequently present a problematic version of heroism, for which he has often been accused of producing a 'mock-epic'. For instance, familiar Greek heroes are given Homeric egos, but then made to look ridiculous in the bungled Calydonian Boar hunt.[25] Elsewhere, as we have seen, the foundational ideals of the *Aeneid* are turned upside-down in the Theban section of the poem. Even the gods' jealous natures and arbitrary moral values are self-consciously highlighted by Arachne's metaliterary tapestry.[26] On the other hand, the story of Baucis and Philemon replicates a version of heroism held by Callimachus' *Hecale*, where the couple achieve a form of heroic uniqueness by being the only ones who would welcome strangers (Jupiter and Mercury in disguise) into their humble home and are rewarded for it.[27]

The unheroic hero has come into Statius' poetry in the figure of Polynices. Similar to Jason's questionable authority in the *Argonautica*, Polynices' role in the expedition is dubious. While the war against Thebes is being conducted for his benefit, he is not leading the expedition. That honour goes to Adrastus, who is past his heroic prime. Additionally, Polynices is never allowed to prove himself as hero in the 'traditional' way – through martial prowess – since he is frequently prevented from demonstrating his skills by his father-in-law,[28] or because he shirks from killing his own kinsmen in a war he has brought about (*Theb.* 7.689).[29] Polynices' authority is further eclipsed by the power of Tydeus, who fits the character of the *aristos* better. He undercuts Polynices' appearance of leadership when he is shown to have more initiative, and even speaks on behalf of the hero (2.173-76). Finally, like Medea's emasculation of Apollonius' Jason, Argia completely overshadows her husband by the end of the poem. Despite starting off in the

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[25] Horsfall (1979).
[26] Feldherr (2010).
[27] Griffin (1991).
[28] Cf. n.16.
[29] When we do see him fight, Polynices is brutally animalistic (1.425-27) or commits the sin of fratricide. As we will see, he is more *monstrum* than *vir*.

poem as the most traditionally passive maiden, it is Argia who encourages Polynices to enter the male sphere of warfare (2.334-352), and who then makes her own journey onto the battlefield (after his failure) to achieves her own *virtus* (12.177) – something that her husband never displays. While Jason relied on unconventional skills but nonetheless completed his mission, Polynices remains an ineffectual hero and fails utterly.

The Roman Hero: Emperor and Empire

Early Roman identity formed from a complex relationship with the Greek world, simultaneously marking its similarity and difference. Latin writers begin by adapting the Greek myths to fit a Latin cultural context. Livius Andronicus, for example, translates the *Odyssey* into a Latin Saturnian metre (perhaps because Odysseus was believed to have founded Italian cities), while Naevius transposes the Greek muses onto the Italian deities, the Camanae.

As a character from a Greek epic who migrates to Italy, Aeneas embodies the transference of epic from a Greek world to a Latin world. This might explain his popularity as subject-matter in the early Latin epics of Naevius and Ennius. But Vergil's version of the hero is also influenced by the specific political pressures of his time – specifically the dawn of Augustan Rome after decades of bloody civil war. The change in political system to one-man rule, coupled with Roman epic's inclinations towards national concerns, means that epic heroes and their actions become attractive candidates for political allegories. Heroes both shape and are shaped by the image of the *princeps*. Vergil capitalises on this: Aeneas' founding of a city that eventually becomes Rome evokes a national nostalgia in line with the Augustan propaganda. As Augustus' ancestor, he becomes a forerunner for the *princeps* himself, sharing many of his values (such as *pietas* towards the gods and family).[30]

Although the *Thebaid* is set in mythical Greece, not Rome, the figure of the Roman emperor is found in Theseus, who is depicted celebrating a Roman-style triumph for his victory over the Amazons, and who shares the Roman value of *clementia*. For this reason, many have tried to associate the hero with the Flavian emperors. His qualities as a warrior, a leader, a family man and his ability to pacify the uncivilised makes him close

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[30] On Augustus and traditional Roman values, see Eder (2005). For Aeneas' eventual support of all the gods, see Feeney (1984). For Augustus' religious policies, see Scheid (2005).

to becoming the ideal Roman statesman, and the ideal hero in the poem. However, as I will argue in chapter two, there are many signs that show that Theseus' actions are just too good to be true. He does not necessarily stand for any particular emperor, but is just another hero in the midst of the *Thebaid* who is trying to fashion his own heroic identity.

A novel feature of Roman epic is the focus it puts on the vision of empire. Incomparable to any ideals of Panhellenism imagined by the Greek states, Rome saw itself as the centre of a vast empire that would cover the entire world.[31] Therefore Vergil's Aeneas is not just commemorated as founder of an individual city, but his actions also set in motion the limitless expansion of Rome's power over all other nations and cities (*imperium sine fine*, *Aen.* 1.279).[32] This sets the precedent that an epic hero's actions are potentially world-changing.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* also has an interest in Rome's global superiority. Gods like Hippolytus/Virbius (*Met.* 15.540-46) and Aesculapius leave Greece for Rome (*Met.* 15.622-745), while the narrative shifts from myths set in Greek territories to Roman ones, culminating in the deification of Julius Caesar and a celebration of Augustus' power. Since there is no single heroic narrative in this poem, the rise of Rome seems an inevitable consequence of the passing of time rather than stemming from the act of an individual. This is exemplified in Pythagoras' announcement of Rome's upcoming world domination and its triumph over all the Greek states, which have risen and now fallen as all things do: *sic tempora verti / cernimus atque illas adsumere robora gentes, / concidere has* (*Met.* 15.418-52). While this is celebratory in tone, the logical implication of this claim is alarming: surely even Rome too will also fade away.

Although Ovid does not explicitly voice such a transgressive comment, the idea that a civilisation can crumble as well as grow is later exploited in epic. In Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, the narrator laments that Pompey and Caesar's actions in the civil war sets in motion the disintegration of the Roman state, which will eventually lead to the disintegration of the universe and its destruction in a cosmic blaze, in keeping with Stoic doctrine (7.812-15). Instead of expanding ever further outwards, the Civil War causes Rome to collapse inwards, in a suicidal act of self-destruction (1.8-23).

Valerius' *Argonautica* returns to a more nuanced vision of imperial globalisation. His Jupiter announces that ruling power would first move from Asia to Greece before

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[31] See Galinsky (2005) for the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* as world literature.

[32] However, an anxiety over falling cities remains pervasive in the *Aeneid*: e.g. Morwood (1991).

finally settling in Italy forever. He will use the Argonauts' voyage to open up the world so that Roman imperialism can be achieved through warfare, *Bellona* (*Arg.* 1.545-6).[33]

Since the narrative of the *Thebaid* is almost entirely limited to mythical Greece, any positive connotations that the events of the poem could lead to the Roman Empire is occluded. There is no vision of a glorious future. Instead, the themes of constriction and expansion are made perverse in the *Thebaid*. As we have seen, the actions of the *Thebaid*'s heroes causes the annihilation of Thebes, not expansion. But, as I will argue, the heroes' actions actually distort the vision of a Rome without limits, by causing unbounded evil and suffering to spread through time and the world.

The Roman Anti-Hero: Heroes of Civil War

Given Rome's own repeated history of civil war, it is unsurprising that it appears in some form in most Roman epics. As we saw in Lucan's poem, the great tragedy of the Roman narrative is the fact that when Romans could be conquering other states and expanding its empire, they decide to attack other Romans instead (1.8-23). In the *Aeneid*, the war between Italians and Trojans are portrayed as a quasi-civil war, since both groups are connected through their shared ancestry of the Romans. The pessimistic attitude towards this war is represented by *furor* – a quality that comes to represent civil wars in general.[34] For Vergil's Jupiter, *Furor*'s personification must be locked up for Augustus to bring a complete end to its civil wars (*Aen.* 1.294-6). The Fury Allecto has the power to inflict *furor* upon humans (as she does with Amata and Turnus), and to turn brother against brother (*Aen.* 7.335) – the definitive symbol of civil war.[35] The rage and *furor* that governs Aeneas' actions in the latter part of the poem certainly creates, at the very least, an uncomfortable vision of the Roman ancestor.

Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, as the name suggests, is far more explicit in his civil war themes, emphasising its perverse nature through the interfamilial conflict of father-in-law and son-in-law. Once again, madness is responsible for the war: *quis furor?* (Luc, 1.8). Naturally, it is difficult to celebrate heroes after a civil war. In fact, as Masters has shown, Lucan's narrator takes an innovative approach by constantly condemning his heroes for

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[33] Manuwald (2009) p590.
[34] For madness in epic, see Hershkowitz (1998), Fratantuono (2007) and (2012).
[35] Cf. Ennius' Romulus and Remus.

their actions with open hostility.[36] As the poem itself makes explicit, any act of martial heroism will also paradoxically be a crime against a countryman (*scelerique nefando / nomen erit virtus*, 1.667- 8).[37] Accordingly, the ability to spin one's own narrative so that they can still appear heroic becomes vital – a fact that Caesar recognises: *haec acies uictum factura nocentem est* (7.260). However, the hero is wrong: Lucan's narrator controls his characterisation and never allows this victor to appear as the hero he wants to be seen as.

Statius' poem about *fraternas acies* (1.1) further emphasises the horror of civil war by emphasising not just the destruction of other Romans, but other family members. The influence of madness on the actions of the *Thebaid*'s heroes is further stressed, with the involvement of the Furies to a far greater degree than before. As in Lucan's poem, the civil war scenario puts the characters' vision of heroism in constant conflict with the narrator's.

Philosophical Heroes: Tyrants and Sages

A final pair of heroic characteristics that I want to explore here are informed by philosophy. A range of Greek philosophical schools had found an audience with the Romans and were guiding their intellectual thought and their behaviour in society. Therefore, epic poetry and the actions of the heroes also reflect or convey philosophical ideas. Two archetypes in particular cross over from philosophical discourse into Roman epic poetry (and Senecan tragedy): the tyrant and the sage.

Lucretius brings together Epicurean teachings and hexameter poetry. He honours Epicurus, the father of his school, by depicting him as an epic hero that opposes the oppressive *Religio* using his reasoning (Lucr, 1.62-71).[38] This sets up an alternate version of heroism from the Homeric adventurers and warriors. It is a version of heroism based on inner virtue, rational thought, and resilience in the face of tyrants.

Readers have also acknowledged the influence of philosophy in non-didactic literature too.[39] The tyrant is a familiar figure of Roman epic that inverts the ideals of the sage. He is usually an opponent of freedom, subject to fear and anger, and cruel for the

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[36] Masters (1992). This has also been read as a metapoetic civil war between the narrator and characters: Henderson (1987).
[37] See Gorman (2001) on the paradox of the heroic *aristeia* in a civil war.
[38] Chaudhuri (2014) p256-97.
[39] The tyrant and the sage are also major features of Senecan dramas.

sake of cruelty (particularly in his violation of corpses). Hence, Lucretius' *Religio* oppresses the people, Vergil's Mezentius ties prisoners to corpses (*Aen*. 8.481-88), and Lucan's Caesar enslaves Rome and eats his breakfast in front of slaughtered soldiers (Luc, 7.789-795). These characteristics will come to inform Statius' own tyrants: Eteocles is constantly paranoid and forbids the burial of Maeon (3.97-8); while Creon bans the burial for all Argives (11.661-4).

On the other hand, heroes are also measured by their commitment to philosophical teachings. Scholars going back to antiquity have been evaluating Aeneas' heroism based on his stoic qualities:[40] his ability to endure, to follow the paths of fate laid out for him, and to do his duty for the good of society at the cost of his own personal desires.[41] However, the rage and *furor* which govern his actions towards the latter part of the poem complicates the reading of the hero. Should he be judged on philosophical terms, whereby his failure to offer clemency, control his emotions, and his disrespect of corpses make him a tyrant figure? Or should he be judged by the values of the Homeric hero, whereby he displays powerful martial strength in his *aristeia* and founds a city? There can never be a resolution to this conflict.

Even in Lucan's severely pessimistic poem, there are glimmers of heroic behaviour which opposes Caesar's tyranny. He is undoubtedly influenced by his uncle, Seneca, whose tragedies were pervasive with the Stoic conflict between tyrant and sage and did a lot to shape Statius' epic.[42] The unwarlike Cato, the exemplary Stoic, shows remarkable resilience in the face of disaster and hardship, especially across the snake-ridden desert.[43] Elsewhere, Domitius joyfully escapes Caesar by dying, and taunts the tyrant with the Stoic terminology '*liber*' and '*securus*': *Magno duce liber ad umbras / et securus eo* (7.612-13).[44]

Similarly in the *Thebaid*, one of the few examples of heroism that the narrator praises is the prophet Maeon's, who chooses to escape from the tyrant Eteocles by committing suicide.[45] In a lengthy apostrophe, the narrator declares that for his bravery

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[40] Cf. e.g. *Epist*. 56.12-13, where Seneca both praises Aeneas' fearlessness in battle but criticises his fear for his family's safety. On Seneca and the *Aeneid*, see Motto & Clark (1978) and Ker (2015) p113-14.
[41] Edwards (1960); Colish (1985) p246.
[42] On tyranny in Seneca see e.g. Rose (1987).
[43] However, Johnson (1987) p35-66 sees Cato as a parody of Stoic ideas and Seo (2013) p66-93 argues that Cato does not live up to his own expectations.
[44] See Lounsbury (1975) on Domitius' death.
[45] See Colish (1985) p275-80 for a discussion of Stoic themes in the *Thebaid*.

in opposing Eteocles, he will be rewarded with *ampla libertas* (*Theb.* 3.99-113).[46] But, despite the narrator's optimism, Mcguire sees a sense of futility in Maeon's suicide:[47] the political situation can be resisted but not changed by these self-destructive acts of suicide.

There is an irreconcilable difference between the *Thebaid*'s heroes' and the narrator's perception of heroism. As I will argue in the coming chapters, the internal characters will build their heroic image on 'traditional' heroic values, by vaunting their ancestry and portraying themselves as slayers of evil and monsters. However, they vitally misunderstand the world they live in. In poem of familial conflict, family relationships are compromised, creating opportunities for discord not honour. And, as we have seen, both parties in a civil war are morally wrong. The strength they display in warfare contributes to the evil, it does not remove it. For the narrator, in a civil war, only modes of heroism that resist the war and hence the continuation of evil can be worthy of praise.

In an age when the values of the Roman elite and the methods they use to publicise these values were being rewritten and questioned, the *Thebaid* captures the contemporary confusion about what it means to be a member of Flavian society. In the final chapter, I will explore a range of historical writers that offered opinions about how contemporary Romans should behave, which are as conflicting as the ideas of heroism displayed in the *Thebaid*.

The Nature of *Fama*

The desire for heroes to protect their heroic status is not only held with their contemporaries in mind, but also posterity: a good reputation in their lifetime will lead to undying glory and fame. For that to happen, they have to take control of their own *fama* – a word with shifting nuances:[48] 'enduring fame' conveying the Homeric idea of *kleos*, or unstable 'gossip', or 'rumour'. Finally, not incompatibly with the other notions of *fama*, the word can allude to the pre-existing literary tradition.[49]

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[46] Cf. also Hopleus' and Menoeceus' suicides (10.439-41; 10.774-6).
[47] Mcguire (1997) p147-184.
[48] See Clément-Tarantino (2006); and Hardie (2012) p3-11; Syson (2013) p28-33; though Guastella (2016) disagrees.
[49] See Horsfall (1990) on Verg. *Aen.* 6.14; Hinds (1998) p2) on the Alexandrian footnote. Metapoetic *fama* can also be 'falsely' attributed by the author (see Gervais (2017) on lines 267f.). The Alexandrian footnote can also add a note of scepticism from the narrator (Parkes (2012) p32-5).

Doing heroic deeds will earn one fame: Thiodamas encourages others to fight with him, by touting it as an opportunity to earn *fama* (10.215-16). But the opposite is also true: Achelous' defeat by Hercules 'defames' him (*infamabat*, 7.417). By being remembered by posterity, the heroes gain a kind of immortality, 'living on' in the memory of future generations.[50] But in the mythic world, metaphorical immortality merges with the literal. Ritual commemoration becomes cult and true immortality is a possibility. Thus, the heroes will have to earn *fama* by exhibiting their *virtus*[51] – the marker of Roman herosim – to ensure their commemoration and immortality.

When *fama* means malleable gossip or rumour, it is often personified as *Fama*, famously represented by Vergil. And, in a similar manner, she appears in the *Thebaid* (2.211-3), where she pre-emptively announces war.[52] In reality, it is only after failed negotiations and years of deliberation from Adrastus, does war occur. Hence, a key feature of *fama* is that it does not have to be based on absolute truth. Statius' *Fama* follows Vergil's (Verg. *Aen.* 4.190) in 'singing' of truths and fictions: [*Pavor*] *urget…/…facta, infecta loqui* (3.429-30).

Moreover, the narrator's comments on *Fama, quae tanta licentia monstro, / quis furor?* (2.212-13), almost quote Lucan's *quis furor, o cives, quae tanta licentia ferri* (Luc. 1.8), with a rearrangement of the rhetorical questions, an omission of the vocative *o cives*, and a replacement of *ferri* (sword) with *monstro* (monster). Lucan's words have become emblematic of civil war,[53] and these words are indicative of the role that *Fama* will have in instigating the quasi-civil war between Polynices and Eteocles. The omission of the address (*o cives*) takes the agency of the war from human actors, to a malevolent, supernatural force. Finally, by replacing Lucan's *ferri* with *monstro* (i.e. *Fama* – a monster made of words), Statius signals that a shift in focus has occurred: this is a war that will engage heavily in propaganda, misinformation, and augmented facts, not just a battle of the (s)word but also a battle of word(s).

However, the stable type of *fama* and the shifting kind are not distinct.[54] Even the authoritative kind of *fama* is itself open to re-interpretations.[55] There does not have to be

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[50] For immortalising *kleos*, see e.g. Currie (2005) p71-78; Nagy (2013) p26-32. For immortalising *Fama*, see e.g. Hardie (2012) p51; Syson (2013) p55; Karamalengou (2017) p47.
[51] As heroism is multifarious, so is the idea of *virtus*. Literally meaning 'manliness', the definition of virtus similarly shifts over time and cultural pressures. Thuillier (2017) provides a useful overview.
[52] Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*
[53] Gervais (2017) on line 212f.
[54] Hardie (2012) p5.
[55] Cf. discussions on Vergil's first ekphrasis: e.g. Boyd (1995) p78.

an 'accurate' way of interpreting a reputation, since reputation does not have to be based on historical fact. This is a wider feature of the narrative. In this respect, *Fama* and history have an intrinsic connection. It is *Fama prior* and *arcana Vestutas* that the narrator calls upon for inspiration for the Argive catalogue (4.32).[56] *Fama* is what passes through the memory of posterity and becomes history. And so, it follows that if *fama* is flexible, then a society's perception of history is also subject to manipulation.[57] This is something that the narrative encourages the reader to recognise.

A programmatic example occurs in the first divine council. Jupiter announces that he wishes to destroy Thebes and Argos because of their multitude of past sins (1.241-7). But Juno objects and provides a long list of other past offences that Jupiter makes no mention of punishing (1.270-82). Juno's point is that ancient history should remain in the past and should not be dredged back into the present consciousness. Of course, Juno's comments are rhetorically controlled to prevent her beloved Argos from being destroyed (1.259-1). Her objection is particularly ironic, given that she accurately remembers and recites a list of past offences (1.270-82). Furthermore, she seems hypocritical when the reader remembers that Juno's own destructive actions at the opening of the *Aeneid* were motivated by her memory of a similar list of grudges.[58]

Nonetheless, her objection exposes the flaws in Jupiter's reasoning, and programmatically highlights the manipulation of history and memory. Jupiter cannot offer a counter-argument, instead he simply reinforces his decree by adding the authority of the Styx (1.290-2). The jarring nature of his *non sequitur* to Juno highlights the fact that he has chosen to recall Theban and Argive sin only because it suits him to do so. While Jupiter's carefully chosen arguments are not outright lies, they do show the ability to be selective with information – a common strategy of self-fashioning used by the other characters too.

But the slippery nature of *fama* and history is double-edged. They are threatened by alternate versions of *fama*. Moreover, a hero's *fama* risks being suppressed by someone else's greater fame or fading away through time. Therefore, *fama* inspires in the heroes of the *Thebaid* a competitive recklessness.

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[56] On the credibility of both personifications, see Parkes (2012) *ad loc*. See also Clément-Tarantino (2006) p69-73, who argues that Statius makes *Fama* a complementary facet of tradition rather than a competing force.
[57] On altering social memory, see Seider (2013) p21-27.
[58] Verg. *Aen*. 1.26-8.

An example of this can be found in Adrastus' inset story in Book 1 about the heroism of Coroebus. The king's honouring of the hero demonstrates the memorialising power of *fama*. But long-term fame comes at a cost of a short life – a tension established since Achilles.[59] When Coroebus decides to fight the snaky monster Poene, he is ardently joined by a band of youths:

> haud tulit armorum praestans animique Coroebus
> seque ultro lectis iuvenum, qui robore primi
> famam posthabita faciles extendere vita
> obtulit.
>
> (1.605-8)

These youths prioritise their *fama* over their lives (*posthabita…vita*). The ablative absolute implies that their desire is to extend fame *by* valuing their life less, as if the very act of caring little about their lives qualifies them for eternal recollection.[60] Unfortunately for these aspiring heroes, there is some cruel irony in the fact that they remain nameless. Only Coroebus' name is remembered. He does not only risk his life once, but he also chooses to offer himself up to Apollo as sacrifice to save the city. Thus the other youths lose out to Coroebus' greater deed.

However, even within this internal narrative, there is an element of competition over heroic recognition. Apollo had demanded the sacrifice of all the young men involved in the murder of his monster, as shown by the *iuvenes* and *potiti* in their plural forms:

> Paean…iubet ire cruento
> inferias monstro **iuvenes, qui caede potiti**
>
> (1.636-7)

But (in Adrastus' narration, at least), Coroebus is the only one to go willingly to his death this time. And when Coroebus arrives at the temple of Apollo, he subtly rewrites history in his speech to the god:

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[59] Cf. also Sarpedon's comments (Hom. *Il.* 12.322-5), and Priam's (Hom. *Il.* 22.71-6). See Vernant (1992) p86-7.
[60] Cf. Jupiter's words to Hercules (Verg. *Aen.* 10.467-9). See McGuire (1997) p23 on self-destruction and *fama*.

has egere uias. **ego sum, qui caede subegi**

(1.645)

The phrase echoes the earlier *iuvenes, qui caede potiti*, both verbally and metrically (after the caesura in the third foot), but the plural forms of *iuvenes* and *potiti* have been replaced by the emphatically singular forms *ego sum* and *subegi* respectively. Coroebus continues to change the narrative to make himself out as the sole transgressor: *me, me…solum / obiecisse caput Fatis praestabat* (1.651-2).

Is Coroebus' wording simply an innocent act to preserve his countrymen, or is it also an act of self-promotion? Regardless of his intent, the effect is clear – his name is the only one that is remembered. Narratives of heroes, even those set within epic narratives, have an instructional purpose, teaching others the correct codes of behaviour.[61] Both Adrastus' commemoration of both Coroebus' self-sacrifice, and the hero's omission of his companions, reinforce to the current heroes that this is a correct course of action to take for eternal fame.

This competitive mentality is pervasive in the *Thebaid*. Menoeceus, committing an act of *devotio*, also chooses to sacrifice himself to a deity to atone for the death of a snake-monster. For this, the narrator considers him worthy to be commemorated (10.630-1). His motivation is the opportunity for self-promotion: *Virtus* personified approaches him and convinces him to exchange life for immortality:

linque humiles pugnas, non haec tibi debita uirtus:
astra uocant, caeloque animam, plus concipe, mittes.

(10.664-5)

There is a correlation between the deed, the renown, and the opportunity for immortality. His self-sacrifice will be a greater deed (*plus*) than what the other warriors are doing (*humiles pugnas*), and for that, he will gain the requisite *virtus* (and implicitly *fama*) to join the heavens.

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[61] See e.g. Griffith (2001) p33-5; Nagy (2013) p65-70.

The final flourish of her speech sets Menoeceus in rivalry even with his own brother: *i, precor, adcelera, ne proximus occupet Haemon* (10.671).[62] Whoever carries out the deed first will secure the glory. Menoeceus' early death brings him a fame that gives him literal immortality, which he self-confidently demands: *nam spiritus olim / ante Iovem et summis apicem sibi poscit in astris* (10.781-2).

Thus, there is a connection between the acts of *virtus* committed by heroes, and the *fama* that they receive in exchange. Heroes want to gain *fama* because it allows them to be commemorated and gain immortality. However, the desire for *fama* also encourages a culture of competition among the *Thebaid*'s characters: each one tries to outdo each other to secure their celebration by posterity, and to avoid becoming a nameless individual. But we have also seen that *fama* is malleable, and not necessarily reliant on complete objective truth. I will now turn to how the heroes try to control how they are perceived by others, by propagating *their* own version of their *fama*.

Vehicles of *Fama*

This thesis focusses on the narratives that individuals tell about themselves, the methods that they use to construct their own *fama*. These narratives can be conveyed visually or verbally. Objects (such as artworks or clothing) tell stories and provide information about the individual they are associated with (such as their lineage, nationality, their qualities or values etc.). Accordingly, I will be exploring some of the ekphrases in this poem. My approach will involve questioning the ideas of focalisation and the different narrative levels within an ekphrasis.[63] I will show that Statius manipulates the ekphrases so that the artwork simultaneously tells multiple narratives about the hero – the narrator's and the artwork owner's. The narrator's biased rhetorical language and his additional anecdotes makes the reader perceive the artwork differently from the internal audience. Therefore, the reader is presented with a much more pessimistic evaluation of the hero than their own idealised projection. Thus two narrative voices seem to appear: the optimistic voice of the internal characters, portraying their own heroism; and the pessimistic voice undermining this heroism.[64]

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[62] Ganiban (2007) p139-140.
[63] This mode of reading ekphrases has been standardised since Fowler (1991).
[64] See Parry (1963) and Lyne (1987) on the optimistic and pessimistic voices in the *Aeneid*. See Masters (1992) on Lucan's narrator, who despises his own characters and narrative.

I will also explore the verbal narratives that the heroes tell about themselves, particularly in their self-introductions. But unlike visual narratives, oral transmission is momentary: once the narrative has been told, it is spent. Therefore, heroes must keep repeating their narrative so that it remains in the memory of their audience.

Although the narrator is hostile to the heroes, there is a clear divide between what I consider the authorial persona, and the narrator. The authorial persona is heard in the prologue and epilogue, while the narrator is in charge of the narrative proper. The ideologies of these two personae are incompatible. As Newlands has shown, while the authorial persona announces that the poem's subject-matter will be limited to the *Oedipodae confusa domus* (1.17), the narrator frequently threatens to break down these boundaries.[65]

Furthermore, the narrator's famous apostrophe after the mutual fratricide is inconsistent with the authorial persona's epilogue.[66] While the former hopes that only kings will remember his narrative, the latter rejoices that Italian youths and Domitian himself are reading the text in schools.[67] The result of this dichotomy is that, unusually, the narrator does not hold complete authorial omniscience as he normally does in epic texts. The narrator becomes just another internal narrator within a larger structure. While his version of the character's *fama* dominate the reader's impression of them, his opinions about the characters do not hold absolute authority.

Tydeus: a Case Study

Here I explore Tydeus' attempts to enforce his heroic reputation. In the first extended battle-sequence of the poem, Tydeus fends off an ambush by fifty Thebans, utterly crushing them with his martial superiority. This could be proof of his *virtus* and a deed worthy to be remembered. An important point about the logistics of heroic

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[65] Newlands (2012) p47-52.

[66] Many have recognised the incompatibility between the narrator's apostrophe and the authorial voice. See. e.g. Malamud (1995) p24-5; Bernstein (2004) p82; Ganiban (2007) p204, n92.

[67] The authorial persona's ***Fama…/…coepitque novam monstrare futuris*** (*Theb*. 12.812-3) puns on the narrator's ***monstrumque infame futuris*** / *excidat* (*Theb*. 11.578-9), which emphasises the disjunction between the two statements. For the authorial persona, the narrative is *fama,* not *infame*. It is not a monstrosity (*monstrum*) to be forgotten by posterity, but something to be shown to them (*monstrare*). Moreover, it is not something to be remembered (*memorent*) by kings alone, but rather an educational text for youths to remember (*memorat*).

recognition is raised: if Tydeus' domination over his enemy is so complete, and there are no other witnesses to his actions, how would others know about such a great victory?

Tydeus finds a solution in the following way: when only one Theban remains, Tydeus' initial intention is to finish the job and then march to Thebes in order to announce his own victory in person:

> Ille etiam Thebas spoliis et sanguine plenus
> isset et attonitis sese populoque ducique
> ostentasset ovans…

> (2.682-84)

Revelling in his victory, Tydeus intends to parade himself (*sese…ostentasset ovans*) with the spoils of his defeated enemy (*spoliis et sanguine plenus*) to all the Thebans (*populi et duci*), mimicking the traditions of the showy Roman triumph.[68] This would cultivate his *fama* through a visual demonstration.

However, Tydeus cannot take on the whole of Thebes single-handedly. The attempt would certainly be suicidal. If Tydeus kills all the Thebans and then gets himself killed at Thebes, there would be no witnesses and no one to memorialise his great victory.

The goddess Pallas, in her role as the goddess of reason,[69] intervenes and prevents his rashness. Instead, she urges Tydeus to stop, stating that he should only hope to be believed for achieving this incredible victory: *huic una fides optanda labori* (2.689).[70] His heroism needs to be known and to be believed to count for anything. His heroic deed is paradoxically too great – there is a risk that no one would believe that he has accomplished such a great task.

And so, instead, Tydeus consolidates his heroic reputation in two ways. First he leaves Maeon, the final Theban survivor, alive and bids him return to Thebes as a witness to his deeds: *fumantem hunc aspice late / ense meo campum* (2.702-3). Then Maeon must translate this visual proof into verbal proof by telling the other Thebans about what has happened.

Simultaneously, Tydeus himself will return to Argos, firing up the people to go to war against the treacherous Eteocles, while also spreading his own reputation as a

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[68] On *ovo* as a kind of triumph, see Maxfield (1981) p103-4; Beard (2007) p61-71.
[69] Feeney (1991) p365-67; Gervais (2017) on lines 684-90.
[70] See Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

powerful warrior. In fact, he diffuses it continuously and repeatedly, a fact emphasised by both the language and the narrative. Within a short span of sixty lines, a summary of Tydeus' encounter with the Thebans is recounted three times. The first occurrence is narrated by the author:

> medias etiam non destitit urbes,
> quidquid et Asopon veteresque interiacet Argos,
> inflammare odiis, multumque et ubique retexens
> legatum sese Graia de gente petendis
> isse super regnis profugi Polynicis, at inde
> vim, noctem, scelus, arma, dolos, ea foedera passum
> regis Echionii; fratri sua iura negari.
> prona fides populis; deus omnia credere suadet
> Armipotens, geminatque acceptos Fama pavores.
>
> (3.336-44)

There is great emphasis Tydeus' repetitiveness and his far-reaching effect (*non destitit*; *quidquid…interiacet*; *multumque et ubique*; *retexens*; *geminat*). *Fama* (as rumour) helps him spread the news, but it also reinforces Tydeus' *fama* (as *kleos*), spreading a narrative about the hero far and wide.

Then Tydeus himself he announces the story to the Argive council:

> bello me, credite, bello,
> ceu turrem validam aut artam compagibus urbem,
> delecti insidiis instructique omnibus armis
> nocte doloque viri nudum ignarumque locorum
> nequiquam clausere; iacent in sanguine mixti
> ante urbem vacuam.
>
> (3.355-60)

Vocabulary shared between the Tydeus' version of the narrative and the narrator's emphasises the repetitiveness. The narrator's version presented a summarised list of topics: *vim, noctem, scelus, arma, dolos ea foedera passum / regis Echionii* (3.331-32).

Most items from this list are aurally and/or semantically echoed in Tydeus' account: *noctem/nocte*; *dolo/dolos*; *arma/armis*; *scelus/insidiis*; *vim/viri*.[71]

The same narrative is recounted a third time, returning to the indirect speech of the narrator. Tydeus regales his admirers with the story of his adventure once again:

> Turbati extemplo comites et pallida coniunx
>
> Tydea circum omnes fessum bellique viaeque
>
> stipantur. laetus mediis in sedibus aulae
>
> constitit, ingentique exceptus terga columna.
>
> […]
>
> ipse alta seductus mente renarrat
>
> principia irarum, quaeque orsus uterque vicissim,
>
> quis locus insidiis, tacito quae tempora bello,
>
> qui contra quantique duces, ubi maximus illi
>
> sudor, et indicio servatum Maeona tristi
>
> exponit, cui fida manus proceresque socerque
>
> adstupet oranti, Tyriusque incenditur exsul.
>
> (3.394-406)

Renarrat emphatically stresses that this is a reiterative process. The indirect questions show that he can now recite with precision the key details of his narrative: *quaeque*; *quis*; *quae*; *qui*; *quanti*; *ubi*.

Tydeus' repetitive storytelling associates him with *Fama*. His words set his audience aflame with anger (*inflammare odiis*, 3.338), reflecting Vergil's *Fama* (*incenditque animum dictis atque aggerat iras*, Verg. *Aen.* 4.197). *Fama* even helps Tydeus diffuse his report: *geminatque acceptos Fama pavores* (3.344).

Later in the narrative, he continues to make this heroic success part of his identity: *ille ego inexpletis solus qui caedibus hausi / quinquaginta animas* (8.666-7). Because he repeats the same narrative again and again, he moves *fama* (as rumour) towards *fama* (as *kleos*). Yet his audience's reaction to Tydeus' narrative is not simply admiration for the

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[71] The Romans thought *vir* and *vis* were etymologically related words. See Wheeler (1997) p195, and Ahl (1985) p38-40 on the relationship between *vir* and *vis* through the name Iphis; see also Maltby (1991) *s.v. vis*; Isidore of Seville explicitly claims: [*v*]*ir nuncupatus, quia maior in eo vis est quam in feminis: unde et virtus nomen accepit; sive quod vi agat feminam* (*Etymologiae* 11.2.17).

hero, but *Fama* doubles their fears (3.344), the Arigve nobles are *turbati* (3.394), and his wife is *pallida* (3.394). Only Tydeus remains *laetus* (3.396).

These passages also stress that the narrative must be credible. When Minerva told Tydeus that it was enough to hope that his feats would be believed: *huic una fides optanda labori* (2.689). Mars adds credence to Tydeus' story: *deus omnia credere suadet / Armipotens* (3.333), and Tydeus urges the Argive nobles to believe him: *credite*! (3.355).[72] Since fame is entire dependent on external perceptions, if the hero wishes to cultivate his heroic reputation, others have to believe that the heroic deeds have actually occurred. By repeatedly stressing his narrative, Tydeus attempts to make his version the dominant one, the one that is believed.

A reading of Tydeus as his own epic narrator will emphasise the self-fashioning aspects of his account.[73] His acts of narration are all words with heavy metapoetic resonance: *retexens* (3.338), *renarrat* (3.400), and *exponit* (3.405).[74] Moreover, when Tydeus' account is presented to the reader in direct speech, his narrative's first words are: *arma, arma, viri*! (3.348), echoing Vergil's most famous line. Using recognisable epic language, he calls his comrades to other heroic deeds.[75] By narrating his own deeds, as an epic narrator, he makes himself an individual worthy of commemoration.

Throughout this thesis, we will continue to explore other ways that the heroes tell narratives about themselves in a way that consistently helps them to perform their personal ideals of heroism. Many are selective with history and freely alter 'facts' to create a *fama* that is sympathetic towards themselves. However, we will also see how the narrator guides the reader towards a critical attitude towards the heroes' self-presentations. I hope that this mode of reading will also provide a key for reading

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[72] It is tempting to apply this theme of the hope for credibility to Statius' poem as a whole. Earlier critics of the *Thebaid* often commented on its exaggerated and bathetic style. Dewar (1991) pxxxiv almost seems apologetic for the author's excessiveness: "until one grows accustomed to it, much the hyperbole [can prove] intolerable". Here, Tydeus' incredible story represents the poem's style as a whole. The author seems self-aware of but also insecure over his over-the-top style. The stress on the need to believe these accounts requests the audience to suspend their disbelief at the hyperbole. Statius' mythic setting allows for a more unabashedly fictionalised method of story-telling that can push the margins of logic to the extreme.

[73] Cf. Gibson (2004) and Heslin (2016), who read Hypsipyle's more extensive internal narration in Book 5 as a successful attempt at self-fashioning that promotes her status from slave to queen.

[74] Compare Aeneas who keeps repeating (*renarrat*, Verg. *Aen.* 3.712) his story about his escape from Troy to Helenus and then to Dido.

[75] See Milnor (2014) p238-52, who argues that the words *arma virumque* are enough to bring the *Aeneid* to mind.

Theseus' intervention in the *Thebaid*'s controversial ending, and will help to set the poem in its place among Flavian society.

Chapter 1 – Ancestors

Introduction

      This chapter will explore how the characters in the *Thebaid* shape their own identities by carefully managing how others perceive their relationship with their ancestors. The topic of familial relationships in the *Thebaid* has been the object of intense recent scrutiny.[1] This is perhaps not surprising, given the prominence of the theme of familial discord in the poem. This is not an unusual theme in epic: there are hints of familial disharmony in the Homeric poems;[2] Apollonius' Medea (almost literally) sacrifices her blood-relatives for an elective family through marriage;[3] and in the Latin epics, conflicts between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law (Vergil's Latinus and Aeneas; Lucan's Pompey and Caesar) are major plot points.[4] But the essence of the *Thebaid*'s plot finds its own origins in tragedy, a genre which generates narratives of conflict within a family unit even more frequently.[5] These generic roots provide the potential for the *Thebaid* to reinvigorate the tragic energies latent in epic.[6] In this chapter, I will explore the different ways that characters talk and think about their ancestry in epic and tragedy prior to Statius, and then show how the setting of the *Thebaid* is more tragic in terms of its ancestral treatment, even though the heroes continue to promote themselves using the traditional rhetoric of ancestry from the epic tradition. Then examining some case studies from the *Thebaid*, I will see how this dichotomy creates a gap between the reality created by the narrator and the characters' idealised versions of their relationship with their ancestors. As part of this strategy, Statius will flaunt his learned knowledge of many

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[1] Cf. e.g. Newlands (2006); Bernstein (2008); Rosati (2008); Parkes (2009b); Augoustakis (2010); Augoustakis (2012); Conrau-Lewis (2013); Bernstein (2015); Gervais (2015); McAuley (2015); Newlands (2016).

[2] See Querbach (1993). Homer does not make much of Helen and Menelaus' marital problems as the cause of the Trojan war, but some later authors do exploit it, on which see Zagagi (1985).

[3] Medea's future infanticide is also strongly hinted at through her characterisation in Book 4; see Hunter (1987). On Apsyrtus' murder as a sacrifice, see Hunter (2015) on 468; Hunter (1993) p449.

[4] Hardie (1993) p93-4. See also Gowers (2011) on the tensions arising from Aeneas' rebranding as Priam's only legitimate descendant at the cost of the death or sterility of his other family members in the *Aeneid*.

[5] Variations of the Theban myth exist in the epic tradition, through the so-called Theban cycle, and through the Hellenistic writer Antimachus; however, there is not enough extant evidence to demonstrate Statius' dependency on these texts. On Statius and Antimachus, see Dewar (1991) pxxx; McNelis (2007) p74; Vessey (1973) p69, 71n, 75, 139n, 143, 152, 209; and Vessey (1970), the last of whom is particularly sceptical of any influence. On the *Thebaid*'s relationships with the tragedies, see Soerink (2014); Hulls (2014); Bessone (2011) p132-5.

[6] For a few examples of the huge bibliography on tragedy in epic, see e.g. Harrison (1972); Harrison (1989); Hardie (1997); Lovatt and Vout (2013) p10-14.

various strands of the different mythic traditions. The characters usually pick the less lurid strands of myths about their ancestors to present, while the narrator frequently undermines their position by making the worst versions of these myths the reality in the *Thebaid* with his narrator's authority. This will illuminate how Statius reads and masterfully manipulates the works of other authors into his own epic.

The Rhetoric of Ancestry in Epic before Statius

Ancestry in both the epic and the real world can be used as a rhetorical tool, a way of defining oneself against a model of an ancestor, and it often functions as causation for why characters behave as they do. Clearly in reality, a genetic inheritance can affect physical traits of a descendant: tall parents, for example, are more likely to give birth to tall children (although even then, a complex combination of genetic make-up and environmental factors can bring about surprising results in the physical appearance of the offspring). Analogous with this, however, there is usually an assumption that character and ability are also features that can be carried over through generations.

The dominant paradigm in epic, established by Homer and Vergil, is the ideal that sons look to their fathers as models for their own code of behaviours, with an assumption that sons will surpass, or at the very least, replicate their father's achievements, which Hardie identifies with the term 'the dynastic principle'.[7] So, in Homer's *Iliad*, Hector prays that his son will one day become a leader of Troy like his father (ὣς καὶ ἐγώ, 'as I am', Hom. *Il.* 6.477), and for others to say 'that he is better than his father by far' (πατρός γ᾽ ὅδε πολλὸν ἀμείνων, Hom, *Il.* 6.480). Similarly, in the *Odyssey*, as Athena mentors Telemachus, the goddess reinforces the ideal that fathers are a standard for sons to measure themselves against and to surpass, although she cynically adds that this is a rare occurrence (Hom. *Od.* 2.276-7). In the *Aeneid*, on a scene based on the Iliadic example above, Aeneas urges Ascanius to learn from the examples of his father and his uncle Hector (12.435-40). However, that is not to say that this is the only type of father-son relationship in these epics: for example, the difference in quality between the tyrannical Mezentius and his pious son Lausus explores questions raised by

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[7] Hardie (1993) p91-9.

philosophers and others about the extent that fathers should be an influence onto their sons, especially if they are morally impaired.[8]

Since this is the ideal paradigm, characters in epic manipulate the narrative of themselves and their ancestors in order that they might conform to it. In the epic world, famous ancestors are traditionally a source of honour for individual heroes, and so heroes define their own identity through their ancestors. They typically draw attention to their fathers, or family founders, or others in the traceable lineage who have committed particularly glorious deeds, or to the family unit as a whole: so for example, Turnus defends himself against Drances' insults by defining his own *virtus* relative to his ancestors', *Turnus ego, haud ulli veterum virtute secundus* (Verg. *Aen.* 11.441).[9] This also works on a wider level to create a national identity: as when Latinus claims that the Latin race are fair (*aequam*) because they have inherited the quality from their ancestor, Saturn (Verg. *Aen.* 7.202-4).

Heroes who can trace their lineage back to divinity can claim an especially high status among other heroes. The quality of the ancestor is perceived as being directly proportional to the quality of the hero: so the Iliadic Achilles taunts Asteropaeus, by trumping the boy's descent from the river-god, Axios, with his own descent from Zeus (Hom. *Il.* 21.190-1). The trend is seen in Latin epic as well: Perseus, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, plagued by accusations of illegitimacy, reveals his own anxieties over self-identification. As he introduces himself to Atlas, he emphasises the "*gloria*" he gets from his status as Jupiter's son (*Met.* 4.639-40), prioritising it ahead of his own heroic achievements (which he keeps short and vague, encompassed simply in the word *rerum, Met.* 4.641). In the next scene too, as he asks Andromeda's parents for the right to marry her, he doubly stresses his relationship to the king of the gods: first he states that he is 'born from Jove', *Iove natus*, and immediately afterwards, also born 'from the one who was impregnated by Jupiter', *et illa, quam clausam implevit fecundo Iuppiter auro* (*Met.* 4.697-8). Ovid's Perseus emphasises his divine heritage, because he believes that his

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[8] Bernstein (2015) p21.
[9] *Veterum* is ambiguous. It could mean Turnus' own ancestors, or those of the Latins whom he is addressing. Some have also read the term as focalised through Augustan readers to mean their own ancestors of the Roman Republic. A long chain of emulation is created from the ancient Latins down to Vergil's contemporary generation. See Horsfall (2003) *ad loc.* and Goldschmidt (2013).

divine heritage in itself can be a source of *gloria*, on equal terms to the *gloria* which is acquired through one's own personal achievements.[10]

Mortal ancestors, who have achieved their own personal heroic reputation (or *kleos* in Homeric language) by their past deeds, are frequently evoked in a descendent-hero's own self-introduction. The implication seems to be that the current generation of heroes have the same genetic potential as their ancestor to commit a similar kind of deed. In a sense then, the *kleos* of an ancestor becomes a kind of theoretical guarantee for an individual's own heroic destiny. However, this generational dynamic can also be a burden upon the current generation, whose actions are therefore measured against the high standards set by their ancestors.

Narratives of ancestry can be manipulated by others into praise and insult, usually for some self-interested cause. The assumption that arises from the "dynastic principle" is that ancestors engender a moral and physical excellence in their descendants: hence 'appropriate' behaviour from a hero can elicit a confirmation from others that they have proved themselves the offspring of particular ancestors. For example, Dido declares that Aeneas must be born from the gods (*genus…deorum*) because of how nobly he has suffered through misfortune (*Aen*. 4.12), and Evander connects Aeneas' status as the 'strongest of the Teucrians' to the memory of Anchises (*Aen.* 8.154-6). However, one who is deemed not to be behaving 'appropriately' can be denied their famous heritage, such as Dido's declaration that Aeneas was not born from Venus and Anchises, but from rocks and tigresses (Verg. *Aen*. 4.365-6), in a reversal of what she had said earlier. Because it is important for heroes to be seen in line with the rest of the ancestors, accusations of degeneracy (i.e. not living up the expectations set by the ancestors) or illegitimacy (i.e. not belonging to the family group at all) are considered attacks on their character and abilities, which ought to be defended. Thus, Agamemnon chides Diomedes, by contrasting the military prowess of his father, Tydeus, with the son's, whom he claims to be worse in actual battle, but all talk in the councils: τοῖος ἔην Τυδεὺς Αἰτώλιος· ἀλλὰ τὸν υἱὸν / γείνατο εἷο χέρεια μάχῃ, ἀγορῇ δέ τ᾽ ἀμείνω (Hom. *Il.* 4.399-400).[11] For Agamemnon, it is not enough to present yourself as a hero: words have to be backed up

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[10] Cf. Drances, who is given a high status in Latinus' council on the basis of his noble mother, even though his father is obscure (*incertum*) (11.340-1). See Gransden (1991) and Horsfall (2003) *ad loc* on the force of *incertum.*

[11] Athene continues this line of attack, when, upon seeing Diomedes standing apart from the fighting, she accuses him of not being the son of Tydeus, because the prior hero went to fight even against the commands of Athene: οὐ σύ γ᾽ ἔπειτα / Τυδέος ἔκγονός ἐσσι δαΐφρονος Οἰνεΐδαο (5.792).

by heroic deeds. Sthenelus, as the charioteer of Diomedes and hence a partner in his military achievements, feels insulted by proxy. He reacts angrily, and refutes Agamemnon's premise, by drawing attention to how they managed to raze Thebes, which their fathers could not. Diomedes, on the other hand, accepts Agamemnon's rebuke and promises to do better henceforth.[12] Though they react differently to the charge of degeneracy, both characters demonstrate how important it is for an epic hero to be recognised as a continuation or an improvement on the tradition of their noble ancestors. To the charge of illegitimacy, Ovid's Phaethon, provides an example of a similar reaction. For Phaethon, being the son of the Sun is a feature of himself he can boast about (Ov. *Met.* 1.750-3), since, as we have seen, divine heritage can bring honour to a hero. But when challenged on this claim, Phaethon is forced by societal pressure into embarking on a mission to prove his descent, and to reclaim the debated source of honour, at a cost to his own life.

But a descendant can also choose to declare their own degeneracy, in order to distinguish themselves from the characteristics associated with an ancestor, even if they have positive connotations: Pyrrhus in the *Aeneid*, for example, tells Priam to tell Achilles in the underworld that he is *degenerem…Neoptolemum* for opting to deviate from the example set by his father of showing mercy to Priam (Verg. *Aen.* 2.549). The statement is ironic: Pyrrhus is not saying that he is a lesser warrior than his father (quite the opposite!), but that he is a more pitiless killer than him, and presumably, therefore, a more successful warrior.[13] It is his values that differ from his father's. He represents a rebirth of an even more vicious version of Achilles, as demonstrated by his comparison to a snake that awakens from hibernation, with a fresh skin, and a full supply of venom (Verg. *Aen.* 2.471-5).[14]

Epic heroes do not just convey the narrative of their lineage verbally to a targeted audience; they can also supplement their narrative by bearing heirlooms or possessing artworks that signal their ancestral connections to any general observer. In comparison to spoken words, however, what the connection is that the physical objects represent are more open to interpretation, as we will see later in the *Thebaid*. For instance, Homer's Agamemnon owns and displays an ancestral sceptre, which has passed through

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[12] Statius' Tydeus will 'inherit' this self-consciousness about his parentage from his son. See Lovatt (2005) p194; Ripoll (1998) p24.

[13] In the Odyssean underworld, Achilles rejoices to hear from Odysseus that his son was as formidable as himself (Hom. *Od.* 11.492-540). See Barchiesi (2015) p158 n24.

[14] See Horsfall (2008) *ad loc.*; and Knox (1950) p392-6.

successive members of his family dynasty, as a symbol of his family dynasty's authority and rule over Argos (Hom. *Il.* 2.100-8). And Achilles, by the time he comes to fight Hector, wields both his father's spear in battle, the sole piece of his original set of arms that Patroclus does not lose to Hector (*Iliad* 16.141-4), and dons the divine armour gifted to him by his mother. The combination has been read as symbolic of his strength and status received from his mortal and divine heritage.[15] Similarly, in the *Aeneid*, for instance, Dido brings out an ancestral wine-cup, while entertaining the foreign Trojans (Verg. *Aen.* 1.728-30), and Latinus displays a group of ancestral statues outside his palace (Verg. *Aen.* 7.177-82), to reinforce his own regal authority by assimilating that of their forefathers.

Romans and Models of Emulation

Roman attitudes towards ancestors were very similar to those held by characters in epic.[16] This is not surprising given that epics were used as educational texts for Roman males to teach codes of masculine behaviour.[17] Accordingly, Roman society operated on a mode of emulation. Descendants were expected to inherit, not only family property, but also its name, its traditions, its values, and sometimes even the public offices held by their fathers.[18] These abstract legacies manifested themselves in the physical form of *imagines*, images of ancestors that were displayed in the public spaces of the upper-class Roman household.[19] The purpose was not just to display the family's honours to vistors (although this must have been a part of it), but also to inspire the descendants to achieve their ancestors' renown, as Sallust describes:

Nam saepe ego audivi Q. Maximum, P. Scipionem, praeterea civitatis nostrae praeclaros viros solitos ita dicere, cum maiorum imagines intuerentur, vehementissime sibi animum ad virtutem accendi. Scilicet non ceram illam neque figuram tantam vim in sese habere, sed memoria rerum gestarum eam flammam egregiis viris in pectore crescere neque prius sedari, quam virtus eorum famam atque gloriam adaequauerit.

(Sallust, *BJ* 4.5-6)

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[15] Shannon (1975) p27-8.
[16] Hardie (1993) p89.
[17] Keith (2000) p8-35.
[18] Dixon (1992) p111.
[19] On *imagines*, see Flower (1996) p206-9; Walter (2004) p89, and n25; Dasen (2010).

The wax works (*ceram*) and features (*figura*) have no force (*vis*) in themselves, but it is the memory of the noble ancestors that they invoke which inspires a passion in the republican elites to do better, until their *virtus* equals the fame and glory (*famam atque gloriam*) of their ancestors. In a sense, they do not just mimic the ancestors but relive them.[20]

However, the *imagines* also make for convenient tools to attack individuals, who are not perceived to be behaving according to the standards set by their forebears. So Cicero flamboyantly accuses Clodia of disgracing her family line, by acting the part of her illustrious ancestor Appius Claudius Caecus to rebuke her actions: *nonne te, si nostrae imagines viriles non commovebant, ne progenies quidem mea, Q. illa Claudia, aemulam domesticae laudis in gloria muliebri esse admonebat* (Cic. *Cael.* 34). Her crime is not just her own scandalous actions, but that she has failed to emulate (*aemulam*) either her male or female ancestors. Cicero's use of *imagines* collapses the temporal distance between ancestor and descendant. The ancestors and their deeds ought to be always presently in the mind of a good Roman.

Thus, the family image is central to a Roman's sense of identity. But what that family image is, is itself open to interpretation. Cultural memory was quite flexible for the Romans, and individuals could choose which ancestors, or what aspects of them it would be most advantageous to mimic.[21] Descendants could exploit narratives about their ancestors to create definitions of themselves.[22] For examples, Cato the Younger openly styles himself after his great-grandfather, Cato the Elder, and assumes his predecessor's famous austerity.[23] And Brutus (the assassin of Caesar), draws his lineage back to the Brutus who overthrew the kings and instated the republican system, and so politically sets himself up as a defender of the republic.[24] The qualities of their ancestors are apparently replicated in these descendants. However, in imperial literature, Juvenal points out the fallacy of the societal assumption that having distinguished ancestors makes one equally notable. His *Satire* 8 is framed around members of the social elite, who act

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[20] Baroin (2010). See Dixon (1992) 111, on children being a kind of immortality (cf. e.g. Dio 56.3.4). The ancestors 'live on' through them.
[21] van der Blom (2010) p16.
[22] On choosing a model to emulate, see Baroin (2010) p27-8.
[23] van der Blom (2010) p94.
[24] Though the reality of this lineage is disputed even in antiquity. See van der Blom (2010) p96-8, on his strategies to model himself after this ancestor.

without regard for the *imagines* in their halls, while he lists historical Romans, who achieved greatness without renowned family lines. For Juvenal, it is better to act nobly than just to be noble-blooded. His poem lays bare and ridicules the elite Romans' strategies of manipulating family histories to secure the high status they have in society.[25]

A comment from Statius' epilogue shows that the poet was well aware of his own poem's educational value and its potential cultural influence: *Itala iam studio discit memoratque iuuentus* (12.815). As a result, Statius' heroes both reflect and reinforce the behaviour of his contemporary Roman society. They similarly demonstrate a range of strategies to define themselves using their own narratives about their ancestors. However, like Juvenal, Statius consistently exposes and challenges the artificiality of ancestral narratives. These heroes are not models to be emulated, but warnings on the limits of self-presentation. In particular, a conspicuous gap opens up between how the heroes want their relationship with their ancestors to be perceived and how the reader, privileged with a higher plane of awareness, actually sees it. The heroes mistake the world they are in for an epic world that follows the conventional genealogical rules of epic or the Roman world, and treat their ancestors accordingly. Instead, as we will soon see, the ancestors of the *Thebaid* are a destructive force that can only do harm to their descendants.

The Curse of Ancestry in Tragedy before Statius

While the *Thebaid*'s genre is epic, the substance of the plot comes from tragedy. Zeitlin has already argued how the city of Thebes had taken on a symbolic significance in Athenian drama as *the* city of tragedy, the 'other' to fifth-century Athenian values, where tragic themes could be explored. As an inverse reflection of Athens, Thebes becomes a concept, by which Athenians can question their own notions of self and polis.[26]

In contrast to the positive emulative paradigm in epic, tragic plays tend to focus on discord among small family units (between siblings, parents and child, husbands and wives, step-mothers and step-sons etc.). In particular, generational continuity is problematic for individuals, and 'ancestral fault' is frequently perceived as being passed down through a family line.[27] So, for example, Sophocles' Electra identifies her ancestor

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[25] Henderson (1997).
[26] See Zeitlin (1986)=Zeitlin (1990) p131.
[27] The term 'ancestral fault' is complicated and broadly covers a variety of ways that newer generations are worse off because of their ancestors. Cf. e.g. West (1999); Gagné (2013) p3-17.

Pelops as the originator of all the troubles in the last few generations in her family because he had killed Myrtilos (Soph. *El.* 504-15). Similarly, when the chorus in *Antigone* lament Antigone's current misfortune, their wording implies that she is suffering from an inherited mass of misfortune that has accumulated over the previous generations (Soph. *Ant.* 594-7).[28] The theme continues into Latin tragedy: for example, Seneca' Tantalus, as the ancestor of Atreus and Thyestes, is made to manifest as a ghost, to symbolically infect the household with evil intentions. In the process, Tantalus laments that he is not independently punished for his sins, but that he plays a part in the continuation and repetition of the family sin: *me pati poenas decet / non esse poenam* (Sen. *Thy.* 86-7).[29]

But Statius is not the first writer to bring the concept of tragic Thebes to Latin epic:[30] Ovid devotes almost all of Books 3 and 4 of the *Metamorphoses* to a 'Theban cycle' of myths. It focuses on Theban mythical figures (with a few digressions): Cadmus; Actaeon; Semele; Tiresias; Narcissus; Pentheus; three digressive internal narratives from the daughters of Minyas; Ino and Athamas; and finally Cadmus and his wife again.[31] Ovid thus precedes Statius in linking up various strands of the Theban myths in an epic narrative.[32] His narrative is a tragic 'anti-*Aeneid*', which relates the misfortunes of a self-destructive family.[33] Unlike Aeneas' family, who successfully establish an eternal race (*imperium sine fine*, Verg. *Aen.* 1.279), the Theban royal family are unable to escape the *furor* of the narrative, and are eradicated or exiled.

In addition, Ovid sows the seeds for Statius' use of the tragic 'ancestral curse' in his epic narrative. The Theban section of the *Metamorphoses* is given a circular structure.

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[28] ἀρχαῖα τὰ Λαβδακιδᾶν οἴκων ὁρῶμαι / πήματα φθιτῶν ἐπὶ πήμασι πίπτοντ᾽, / οὐδ᾽ ἀπαλλάσσει γενεὰν γένος, ἀλλ᾽ ἐρείπει / θεῶν τις, οὐδ᾽ ἔχει λύσιν. See Griffith (2000) on lines 582-625.

[29] See Tarrant (1985) p4-5; Boyle (1997) p97-102.

[30] There may have been other non-extant Theban epics, e.g. Propertius' friend Ponticus'; but see Heslin (2011) p53-5 for Ponticus and his epic as a fictional construct.

[31] See Hardie (1990b); Gildenhard and Zissos (2000); Janan (2009). Gildenhard and Zissos (2000) also recognise that the so-called 'Theban cycle' replays the plotlines of the Theban tragedies, and suggest that Oedipus, notably missing in Ovid's collection of tales, is substituted by the myth of Narcissus. Statius' intent to discuss the *Oedipodae confusa domus* (1.17) is a 'correction' of Ovid's omission.

[32] As a metaliterary nod to Ovid, Statius alludes to all these same figures and summarises their myths in his own necromancy scene of Book 4, with the exceptions of Narcissus (who is not Theban, and would not belong in the family procession), the daughters of Minyas (who transformed shape, but did not die, and therefore cannot be summoned from the underworld), and Tiresias, (who is still alive in the *Thebaid* but is present performing the necromantic rites). However, Statius also includes Niobe at the end of the necromantic procession of Theban ancestors, who also featured in the *Metamorphoses* and claimed ties with both Argos and Thebes, by claiming descent from Tantalus, and links to Cadmus via marriage (Ov. *Met.* 6.172-9). Her position at the end of the group emphasises the kindred nature of the war.

[33] Hardie (1990b) p224.

It opens with Thebes' ktisis-myth: Cadmus kills Mars' sacred snake at the destined site of Thebes, whereupon a disembodied voice warns him that he will one day become a snake himself. There follow narratives regarding the disastrous fates of a number of Cadmus' children and grandchildren.[34] At the close of the Theban section, Cadmus returns to the narrative again, pondering, with his wife, the chain of misery passing through his family (*dum prima retractant / fata domus releguntque suos sermone labores*, Ov. *Met.* 4.569-70). He identifies himself as the cause of his descendants' respective destruction for having killed the sacred snake: *quem* [the killing of the snake] *si cura deum tam certa vindicat ira, / ipse precor serpens in longam porrigar alvum* (Ov. *Met.* 4.574-5). His own subsequent transformation into a snake appears to verify his claim (Ov. *Met.* 4.576-80);[35] however, it should be noted that the original mysterious voice that prophesied Cadmus' transformation never explicitly made the connection between Cadmus' killing of the snake and his transformation. It is Cadmus himself, who regards the snake-slaughter as something transgressive that needs to be punished (*vindicat*) with the destruction of his line, and retrospectively uses it to explain his family's misfortunes. It raises questions regarding the nature of the 'ancestral curse' in the *Metamorphoses*: is it a real force that haunts successive family members, or is it an abstract concept that is used by mortals in hindsight to explain events that have transpired?

Tragic Ancestry in the *Thebaid*

Unlike Ovid, Statius makes the 'ancestral curse' a very real thing, using a spectrum of the various features that are associated with the idea, including (in West's terminology) "inherited guilt", "genetic corruption" and "persistent but unexplained adversity".[36] Disaster systematically passes down from one generation to the next. As we have seen in the introduction, the past in the *Thebaid* keeps intruding into the narrative.[37] Many of the references to episodes from the Theban and Argive histories allude to

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[34] Cadmus' direct descendants in Ovid's Theban narrative (Actaeon, Semele, Pentheus, Ino and Athamas with Learchus and Melicertes) are all destroyed by divine wrath. There is no evidence to suggest that a curse is at work, except for Cadmus' own assumption. The other Theban characters are not members of Cadmus' direct family. On which, see Gildenhard and Zissos (2016) p31-37.

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] West (1999) p33-4.

[37] And in different formats: Theban history intrudes in the narrator's voice in the prologue (1.3-7); in the voice of certain characters such as Jupiter (1.227-47); as display in the necromantic scenes (4.553-8). Similarly with Argive history: the necklace of Harmonia (2.289-96); the necromancy (4.579-92); and Adrastus' ancestral statues, discussed below (2.217-22; 6.270-93).

versions from the tragic tradition. Statius takes advantage of the broad range of ideas that make up the concept of the 'ancestral curse' from the genre of tragedy, and uses it to over-determine the inevitablilty of the *nefas* that is the plot of the poem.[38]

Statius thematises the causal link of present-day sin and the acts of ancestors repeatedly, and early in the poem.[39] An initial verbal curse in the *Thebaid* sets the teleological drive of the epic in motion.[40] Oedipus opens the narrative by calling on a Fury to bring vengeance upon all his son's (and therefore his own) descendants: *tu saltem debita uindex / huc ades et totos in poenam ordire nepotes* (1.80-81).[41] Recognising his own prayer as an 'ancestral curse' (*uotisque…paternis* 1.83), he calls for his own sons to be thrown into strife. He finishes this curse by claiming that the Fury will be able to recognise his sons: *mea pignora nosces* (1.87). The significance of this final, sardonic flourish, is that it shows that Oedipus subscribes to the idea that criminal propensity is something that can be inherited down through the family line, a feature that is a part of the broad concept of the 'ancestral curse'.

Oedipus' prayer is heard by the Fury Tisiphone. She leaps into action and instils the brothers with the 'family madness': *gentilisque animos subiit furor* (1.126). Again, this suggests that the kind of *nefas* that will be committed by the brothers is innate in them and their family. The Fury exacerbates qualities that were natural to members of the house of Oedipus, replaying the roles of Vergil's Allecto, Ovid's Tisiphone (who also left the underworld to torment Thebes), and Seneca's unnamed Fury.[42] Statius' choice of the Fury Tisiphone, as opposed to any of her sisters, replicates Ovid's Tisiphone. In fact, Statius alludes to Ovid's Theban section by making the route to Thebes familiar to the Fury: *arripit...notum iter ad Thebas* (1.100.1), in reference to the *Metamorphoses*' 'Theban cycle'.[43] By using the same Fury as Ovid, Statius emphasises the repetitive nature of the misfortunes, and that the evil force that is Tisiphone has a special affinity

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[38] See Fantham (2011).

[39] On causes and effects between past, present, and future in the *Thebaid,* see Ahl (1986) p2818.

[40] Oedipus' curse is a long-standing part of the tradition; see e.g. Vessey (1973) p71.

[41] Perhaps this is a metaliterary nod to the tradition of the *Epigoni*, a variant of the Theban myth otherwise suppressed in Statius' poem. Cf. also Dis' curse, coming structurally in the second half of the poem. However, his curse is not strictly an 'ancestral curse', because it does not target an individual and their descendants with calamities, but he demands specific crimes.

[42] The Furies in the Latin tradition have evolved from the Greek tradition as punishers of sin, to inspirers and manifestations of sin to be punished. See a discussion of the literary progression and intertextual links between the different portrayals of the Furies in Schiesaro (2003) p26-36; and Feeney (1991) p239-41.

[43] Words like *notus* are often markers of allusion. See Hinds (1998) p1-16 for a discussion of intertextual markers.

with the city. In addition, by evoking her Vergilian and Senecan models, she also becomes a symbol of repeated transgressions and misery. Like Seneca's Fury, Tisiphone appears at the beginning of the plot, in contrast to Vergil's who appears at the halfway point. As Statius makes clear to us, the narrative of the *Thebaid* takes place *in mediis rebus*. A long line of misfortunes have already occurred, and the tale to be told now is just the next link in the chain. Therefore rather than building up to the increased violence and themes of civil war, Statius takes them from the second half of the *Aeneid* and sets them down in the outset of his poem, while still allowing room for the violence to worsen. Though not solely a figure of tragedy, Tisiphone's presence, nonetheless, demonstrates an aspect of the 'ancestral curse' as an evil spirit that continues to haunt the family.

Moreover, Jupiter, in his opening speech, reinforces the idea that the guilt of an ancestor has to be inherited by a descendant and accordingly punished. He also expands on the idea of biological propensity for crime, which he claims is innate to all members of the family: *mens cunctis imposta manet* (1.277). Going further back than Oedipus does in the family history, he traces the offences of the Theban royal family right back to Cadmus, the founder of Thebes (1.227-35), as the narrator did in the prologue (1.4-17), and follows this up with a list of other historic Theban transgressions that lead right down to Eteocles and Polynices.[44] It is for this reason that Jupiter sets in motion a second divine impetus, in addition to Oedipus' Fury, to punish Eteocles and Polynices. Likewise, he states that the current generation of Argives should also be punished because of the transgressions of their ancestor Tantalus (1.245-7).

Jupiter sends Mercury off, who in turn, summons Eteocles and Polynices' grandfather Laius from the underworld, in a reversal of his role as psychopompus. In a scene that replays Tantalus' role in Seneca's *Thyestes*, the ghost of Laius inspires further antagonism in Eteocles towards his brother.[45] Once he has succeeded in his mission, in a final gory display, Laius reveals the gash in his neck, received from his son, and pours phantom blood over his grandson (2.123-4). The moment crystallises the theme of inter-familial strife in the poem. Eteocles inherits the sin of familial violence from his grandfather with a baptism of blood.

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[44] Which has a metaliterary acknowledgment to the past tradition: *quis.../...nesciat?* (1.227-8).
[45] Although Laius is much more eager to inflict suffering upon his family than Tantalus was. See Bernstein (2008) p67.

Furthermore, the 'ancestral curse' also features in regards to Harmonia's necklace in Book 2.[46] This time the curse involved is not verbal, but attached to an object, made by Vulcan in vengeance for Venus' infidelity; nonetheless, it fulfils the same function. The divine marital disharmony will spread and jinx the marriages of a long line of mortal women (Harmonia, Semele, Jocasta, Argia, Eryphyle, and others). The evil-infused pendants, hanging one by one on a literal necklace chain, prefigures their chain of misery. As the necklace is inherited down the generations, so are the misfortunes and the criminal nature of the family. The necklace not only represents a spreading of moral pollution through the generations, but also a geographical one, for when Polynices brings the necklace with him to Argos and gives it to Argia as a wedding present, the ancestral curse then spreads to Argive families as well. Eryphyle's later acquisition of the necklace sets off a chain of inter-familial antagonism for her own family: in exchange for the necklace, she gives up her husband to the doomed war, for which she is then avenged by their son beyond the *Thebaid*'s narrative, as alluded to by Amphiaraus on two occasions (7.786-8; 8.120-2). Statius emphasises the long lasting effect of the curse: it does not end with Eryphyle and her family, but continues far beyond them: *post longior ordo* (2.296). This curse, unusually attached to an object, acts as a perversion of the kind of scenes where characters show off their ancestral heirlooms.[47] Rather than granting the owner any beneficial sense of authority, the necklace fatally dooms them.

As we can see, in terms of the theme of ancestry and generational continuity, the *Thebaid* follows the paradigm of tragedy. But while the external readers are made aware of this, as we will see, the heroes are ignorant of the real nature of the world they live in. Most of these curses are enacted by divine forces beyond either their control or even their knowledge: Laius, for example, directly lies to Eteocles, stating that Jupiter has sent him out of pity for his situation (2.115-6), when Jupiter has actually sent him to set off a chain of events that will destroy the king.[48] Instead, the heroes attempt to form their heroic *personae* under the rules of the epic tradition, and use their noble ancestry to bolster their own reputation. In the following sections, we will examine how Statius creates a gap between the characters' own positive (or at least sanitised) narratives of their ancestry, and the narrator's emphasis on the fact that ancestry in the world of the *Thebaid* is actually a burden to the heroes.

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[46] For a metaliterary reading of Harmonia's necklace, see McNelis (2007) p51-75.
[47] See above.
[48] Vessey (1973) p234.

<u>Polynices: *Oedipodionides*</u>

For my first case-study, I will examine the approaches offered to Polynices to navigate the pitfalls of his embarrassing ancestors. Four strategies are either taken by the hero, or suggested to him, by which he can attempt to control his status as the son of Oedipus: to omit, ignore, replace, and deny the narrative. Bernstein has examined these, in an important study on the relationship between ancestors and descendants in the *Thebaid*.[49] I will briefly outline these strategies, but I will also stress how the hero's choice of self-portrayal is undermined, as a way of showing up the artificiality behind the process, and also the difficulties in controlling one's own reputation.

First, omission. When Polynices first appears on the scene, the hero is wandering through the wilderness in a storm, until he eventually takes rest on the threshold of Adrastus' palace. At the same time, Tydeus, another wandering exile, also comes to the same place looking for shelter. There, the two heroes engage in a feral brawl for the right to shelter there. Their loud commotion awakens Adrastus, who comes out to see what all the noise is about. Seeing the bloodied warriors, he interrupts their fight and asks who they are. Tydeus answers immediately, and identifies himself in the traditional epic style, which we will explore later; but Polynices reacts in an extraordinary manner. Initially, his instinct is to match Tydeus' self-introduction, in the usual epic way with a declaration of his own great ancestry, but suddenly changes his mind:

> 'nec nos animi nec stirpis egentes –'
> ille refert contra, sed mens sibi conscia fati
> cunctatur proferre patrem.
>
> (1.465-7)

The aposiopesis, though a relatively common feature in the *Thebaid*, here emphasises Polynices' concerns over what people might assume about him, because of his relationship specifically with his father (*patrem*, 1.467). The stigma of his father's crimes has the potential to be passed on to Polynices too, and mark him out as a product of incest – a corruption of the natural order and the epic ideal of generational continuity. Polynices is barred from the usual way of introducing oneself as an epic hero, because it will discredit him instead.

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[49] Bernstein (2008) p69-80.

After a break of two hundred lines, Adrastus returns to his line of questioning, and again tries to identify Polynices by asking for information about his ancestors (*quae progenies?*), and it is only then that the hero responds with a circumlocutious answer:

> Non super hos divum tibi sum quaerendus honores,
>
> unde genus, quae terra mihi, quis defluat ordo
>
> sanguinis antiqui: piget inter sacra fateri.
>
> sed si praecipitant miserum cognoscere curae,
>
> Cadmus origo patrum, tellus Mavortia Thebe,
>
> est genetrix Iocasta mihi.

<div align="center">(1.676-81)</div>

Polynices' response to Adrastus involves a four-line, wordy "preamble" and then a line and a half referring to the founder of his family line (Cadmus), his homeland (Thebes), and his mother (Jocasta), in quick succession.[50] Notably, Polynices avoids mentioning his father, the memory of whom had put Polynices off from answering the question in the first place. This unusual move runs against what we would expect from an epic hero.

The first two of these reference points are mentioned as an attempt to divert the negative judgement of his listeners. By omitting Oedipus from his self-identification, Polynices bypasses the most recent, and the most controversial of his ancestors, and associates himself instead with the achievements of his family founder. Moreover, when he announces his homeland as Thebes, he adds the epithet *Mavortia*. This is another reference to the origins of the Theban race. The relevance of the adjective is twofold: first it can refer to Cadmus' slaughter of Mars' sacred snake, with whose teeth the founding hero uses to repopulate Thebes. In a sense then, the population of Thebes will either be descended from Cadmus, or Mars' snake's teeth (hence Mavortian).[51] Secondly, in the version of the myth upheld by Statius, Cadmus marries and fathers children with Harmonia, the child of Mars and Venus. This also puts Martian ancestry in the Theban royal line. Therefore, the genealogical reference points that Polynices chooses to use to identfy himself, removes him from the corrupted lineage of Oedipus, to which he directly

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[50] Bernstein (2008) p71.

[51] Cf. Pentheus' evocation of his fellow Thebans as: *anguigenae, proles Mavortia* (Ovid, *Met.* 3.545).

belongs, and instead connects himself to more remote and apparently nobler ancestors that link him to divinity.

However, Polynices' attempts to deflect the stigma fails when the following things are taking into account: firstly, Cadmus has already been identified by Jupiter as one of the reasons that the Theban race should be destroyed (1.227). The heroic Theban founder has been set up as one of the instigators of the cycles of sin that befalls the Cadmean family. Secondly, as the poem progresses, it becomes evident that the association with Mars will also be of no benefit to his descendents, but actually a further source of misery. Although Mars promises to Venus that he will act in favour of the Thebans (i.e. their descendants through their daughter, Harmonia) in the war (3.295-316), he never actually helps them in any explicit way. Instead he demands the sacrifice of Menoeceus (the youngest of his royal Theban descendants) as revenge for Cadmus' murder of his snake so many generations ago.

But even beyond the problems associated with these points of references, the hero's strategy in re-shaping his self-portrayal fails, because his relationship with his father is ever present in the reader's mind. The glaring omission of his father, where we would expect it, instead draws attention to it. His father's very existence defines Polynices: even in the hero's first appearance in the poem, the narrator refers to him with the striking patronymic *Oedipodionides* (1.313), a patronymic that is not found in extant classical Latin outside the *Thebaid*.[52] After Polynices identifies himself to Adrastus, the king bluntly announces that there is no point to the hero's attempts to obfuscate his father: everyone up to the furthest barbaric lands know about his family:

> Regnum et furias oculosque pudentes
> novit et Arctois si quis de solibus horret
> quique bibit Gangen aut nigrum occasibus intrat
> Oceanum et si quos incerto litore Syrtes
> destituunt.
>
> (1.684-8)

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[52] At least until Ausonius *Epigr.* 139 (4th C): *Oedipodionidae fratres*. The word appears later in the *Thebaid* when Jupiter refers to Eteocles and Polynices as *Oedipodionidas* (7.216), as objects that he has an obligation to destroy, drawing on a sense of genetic guilt again as justification for their destruction.

The pervasive nature of the gossip about the controversial family is emphasised by the four carefully chosen locations, representing the four cardinal directions (*Arctois…solibus* in the North; *Gangen* in the East; *occasibus* in the West; *Syrtes* in the South). The sentiment echoes that of Jupiter in his earlier speech: *quis…/nesciat* (1.227-8), in relation to the series of sins committed by the Theban royal family, culminating in Oedipus and his sons. Statements about how widespread particular myths such as these invite metapoetic readings: the fame of a myth runs parallel with the spreading of rumour.

Oedipus' family is well known to a Roman audience, but, nonetheless, variants existed: for example, the early Greek epic writer, Cinaethon, partly absolves Oedipus by having his sons be born from his wife Euryganeia, not his mother/wife Jocasta.[53] On some occasions, elements of a myth might also be considered to be rejected through omission: so for example, Ovid, although relating Oedipus' encounter with the sphinx in the *Metamorphoses*, is curiously silent over his patricide and incestuous marriage. However, the mythical tradition that depicts Oedipus' patricide and incest, because of its very luridness, is overwhelmingly dominant, drowning out any possible version of an innocent Oedipus, and undermining any attempt to omit his sins from a narrative (as Ovid does).[54]

Polynices' problem with trying to keep mum about his relationship with his father, in order to minimalise its stigma, is the same as the problem of portraying Oedipus in any way other than the transgressive in the the mythic tradition more generally: Oedipus' reputation is just too well known – everyone, according to Adrastus and Jupiter, knows it. His *fama* dictates how the narrative will be remembered. This goes to show that *fama* is not something that can ever be fully controlled. It can be encouraged, suppressed, or manipulated in a certain direction, but ultimately it is the unnamed masses, the agents of *fama*, that decide what an individual's *fama* should be. For Polynices, his own reputation is tied in with Oedipus', and it is not something that can easily be altered.

However, Adrastus also offers a second solution to Polynices – to just ignore it:

> ne perge queri casusque priorum
> adnumerare tibi: nostro quoque sanguine multum
> errauit pietas, nec culpa nepotibus obstat.
> tu modo dissimilis rebus mereare secundis

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[53] Paus. (9.26).

[54] See Gildenhard and Zissos (2000) on the shadow casted by Oedipus over the Theban section of the *Metamorphoses*, even when his myth is unmentioned.

excusare tuos.

(1.688-92)

Adrastus persuades Polynices to mentally dissociate himself from the crimes of his ancestors. He argues that they have no effect on the current generation. He uses his own family history as an example, summarised euphemistically in the phrase: 'piety went astray' – a severe understatement of the events.[55] Adrastus' advice breaks away from the traditional model of ancestral emulation in epic; instead, each individual's deeds should speak for themselves. What the ancestors did or did not do should be ignored, and each hero starts with a fresh page. However, Adrastus has serious misconceptions about the workings of the world.[56] As explored earlier, the poem does follow a tragic paradigm where actions have a lingering effect on posterity: the crimes of an ancestor are paid for by descendants. By Adrastus' speech at the end of Book 1, this paradigm has been firmly exposed by various divine forces, and made explicit by Jupiter. Greater powers ensure the failure of Adrastus' advice.

Later, Tydeus goes to Thebes as an ambassador in an attempt to persuade Eteocles to give up the throne to his brother peacefully. There, the awkward problem of Polynices' heritage comes up again. Eteocles and Tydeus offer two more ways for him to deal with the issue. Eteocles suggests that Polynices should leave him on Oedipus' throne, while he alone takes on the responsibility of being the son of Oedipus; instead, Polynices should be content with the kingdom of Argos, obtained as a dowry from his marriage to Argia:

te penes Inachiae dotalis regia dono

coniugis, et Danaae (quid enim maioribus actis

inuideam?) cumulentur opes. felicibus Argos

auspiciis Lernamque regas: nos horrida Dirces

pascua et Euboicis artatas fluctibus oras,

non indignati miserum dixisse parentem

Oedipoden: tibi larga (Pelops et Tantalus auctor!)

nobilitas, propiorque fluat de sanguine iuncto

Iuppiter.

(2.430-38)

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[55] Heuvel (1932) *ad loc.*

[56] Cf. e.g. Ganiban (2007) p9-23 on Adrastus' misunderstanding of the morals to be taken away from his own Coroebus story.

Eteocles' suggestion is for his brother to overwrite his problematic and corrupted ancestry with that of an apparently nobler version that he can claim from his father-in-law. On the other hand, Eteocles himself would take up his hereditary claim on Thebes, and, with it, the associated stigma of having Oedipus as his father. The issue is framed as a concern about how to fit Oedipus in their self-presentation (*non indignati miserum dixisse parentem / Oedipoden*), rather than a concern about any problem innately inherited from him. In this situation, Oedipus presents a social problem to his children, not a genetic one.

Although Eteocles' proposition is self-serving, the advice is almost reasonable.[57] The benefits offered to Polynices focus again on the opportunity to distance himself from his father. Moreover, he would be able to claim a descent from Jupiter with fewer generational stages in between.[58] The latter of these is designed to appeal to the sensibilities of a traditional epic hero. However, even in this attempt to persuade Polynices to drop his claim on Thebes, Eteocles cannot stop himself sliding in an insult that undermines his own advice, when he surprisingly marks out Pelops and Tantalus as the intiators of the race.[59] These ancestors are as problematic as Oedipus, the first of whom was Jupiter's justification for destroying the Argive race. The perversity of the idea that descent from Jupiter is advantageous is emphasised because Eteocles' metaphorical language of rivers (*fluat*, 2.436-7) echoes the god's words describing the family tree that descends from him (*scinditur; fluit*, 1.245-7).[60] But as Jupiter makes clear, it is exactly because they are descended from the supreme god that both the Theban and Argive royal families are in danger (1.225-6).[61]

Tydeus' response to Eteocles' slight is to amend Polynices' stigmatised reputation in an even more radical way. In an angry conclusion to the peace-talks, Tydeus insults the king through his relationship with Oedipus – 'like father, like son', he claims. But he then goes so far as to deny Polynices' descent from Oedipus:

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[57] In Rome, family status can be transmitted through a line of sons-in-law as an alternative to genetic descent; Gowers (2018). Roman men who had married into a family with a longer-standing tradition of distinction than their own, could display the *imagines* of their wives' ancestors; see Flower (1996) p103.

[58] See Gervais (2017) on 2.437f. for the family tree.

[59] Ahl (1986) p2852 notes that Eteocles' decision to mention these two Argive ancestors are unexpected. Adrastus would be the natural parallel against Oedipus, but he is not mentioned.

[60] *Perseos alter [domus] in Argos / scinditur, Aonias fluit hic ab origine Thebas*. See Gervais (2017) on 437f. See *OLD s.v. scindo* 3b, for *scinditur* as a technical term for branching rivers.

[61] See below on the problems associated with Adrastus' ancestry.

nec crimina gentis

mira equidem duco: sic primus sanguinis auctor

incestique patrum thalami; sed fallit origo:

Oedipodis tu solus eras.

(2.462-5)

Tydeus claims that Eteocles must be the son of Oedipus, because his sinful ways befit those of his family. Tydeus' insulting rhetoric relies on the assumption that criminality is an inherited trait – a paradigm established in the narrative already by Oedipus and Jupiter.[62] This is the very assumption that Polynices is concerned about: not that there is any actual genetic defect inherited from his father, but that others think or say that there is. However, Tydeus is careful to distinguish what this statement means for Eteocles and Polynices. The stories about Eteocles and Polynices' origins, he claims, are false (*fallit origo*): only Eteocles is the son of Oedipus and hence a product of incest, and not Polynices. In this way, he can protect his brother-in-law's reputation by disconnecting him from a genetic relationship with Oedipus, while insulting Eteocles at the same time by emphasising his. Tydeus' strategy is to manipulate history, by rhetorically denying whatever unfavourable things other people might about Polynices' heritage as false.[63] But like Polynices' rhetorical strategy, Tydeus' also fails. From a logical perspective, Shackleton Bailey rightly objects to Tydeus' strategy: "a foolish flourish. If Polynices was not Oedipus' son, whose was he and what right did he have to the throne?" This logically flawed argument adds to Statius' earlier characterisation of Tydeus as a high-spirited man, but not a practised rhetorician, when he began his speech: *utque rudis fandi pronusque calori / semper erat, iustis miscens tamen aspera coepit* (2.391-2). It is such a preposterous claim, that it forces the reader to recognise how narratives of ancestry might be manipulated. But of course, even without the logical flaw, Tydeus' rewriting of Polynices' history cannot be taken seriously by anyone, especially Polynices' biological brother, who knows that Polynices is the son of Oedipus.

Tydeus' response is a glib reaction to Eteocles' own perceived insolence. He does not genuinely believe that he can successfully alter how the Thebans perceive Polynices'

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[62] See above.

[63] Of course, the act of declaring information that is unfavourable to a particular individual as inaccurate has become a familiar feature of modern day political commentary. See Collins Dictionary, Word of the Year 2017.

biological history. But nonetheless, it reveals how a hero's ancestry can be manipulated to serve a particular point. The reason that no one would believe Tydeus' claim here, even if he meant it, is that all of Thebes already has a fixed awareness of who Polynices' father is. It proves a difficult task to alter the dominant narrative.

All these strategies offered to or taken by Polynices involve distancing himself from his father's actions. The unusual situation of having a father well-known for his transgressions instead of heroic activity forces Polynices to reverse the dominant epic mode of self-definition through parentage, as a way of preventing his own reputation from being tarnished. However, the picture is more complicated. Even though he understands his family's tragic background, Polynices does not manage to fully break away from the traditional epic paradigm. Those who meet him, like Adrastus, define him through his relationship with Oedipus, even if he tries to backtrack from this stance. But even Polynices himself continues to display associations with his father or homeland (two strongly connected ideas) through the image of the Sphinx, which he proudly displays on his shield in the parade as the Argive forces assemble (4.87).[64] The association marks him out both as a son of Oedipus, the Sphinx's killer, and as a native citizen of Thebes. Both are politically necessary for Polynices to justify his claim as king of Thebes. If Tydeus' claim about Polynices' heritage is right, then this would not be possible. The poem reveals how difficult it is for an individual to change the narrative about their family history. It is impossible for an individual to simply avoid, ignore, replace, or lie about the stigma arising from the past, because, at the same time, there is a reliance on using them to maintain some sort of identity. In an unavoidable contradiction, Polynices' family past both legitimises and stigmatises him.

The Insecurities of Tydeus

Tydeus, as we have seen in the introduction, is another particularly self-conscious hero, and is keen to validate himself in the eyes of others. One tempting reason to explain this is that he is a victim of so-called small-man syndrome. He has the classic traits associated with the alleged phenomenon: he is quick to anger and eager to bask in praise, and physically, of course, he is a small man.[65] There are frequent references to his small

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[64] The significance of monsters on artwork will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.
[65] His short temper is often referred to (e.g. 2.391-2; 6.71-2), and he often lingers on his own past victories (3.329-30; 3.4.18-19; 6.906-8).

stature, set in contrast to his taller and sometimes literally gigantic companions.[66] From his first appearance, he is described as smaller than Polynices, but his strength and manliness (*viribus*, 1.415; *virtus*, 1.417) are more concentrated in a smaller frame:

> sed non et uiribus infra
> Tydea fert animus, totosque infusa per artus
> maior in exiguo regnabat corpore uirtus.
>
> (1.415-7)

Later during the funeral games of Opheltes, Tydeus demonstrates his eagerness to prove himself among all the heroes, while impatiently waiting for his event to come: *iamdudum uariae laudes et conscia uirtus / Tydea magnanimum stimulis urguentibus angunt* (6.826-7). It is in keeping with what we have seen earlier that it is the desire for recognition through praise (*laudes*) that drives Tydeus, and the desire for others to recognise the *virtus* he believes he has (*conscia*). The narrator again stresses that his *virtus* is not proportional to his size, but this is something that goes against the characters' (and the reader's) natural assumption. If his stature does not speak for him, Tydeus must prove his *virtus* by his actions. In his wrestling match, he is pitted again against a much taller opponent: this time it is a son of Hercules, who has long limbs (*ardua…/ membra*, 6.836-7), a mass equal to Hercules (*Herculea nec mole minor*, 6.838), and who towers above with his broad shoulders (*grandibus alte / insurgens umeris hominem super improbus exit*, 6.837-8). Tydeus, on the other hand, is again emphatically smaller, but still full of strength (*vires*):

> quamquam ipse uideri
> exiguus, grauia ossa tamen nodisque lacerti
> difficiles. numquam hunc animum natura minori
> corpore nec tantas ausa est includere uires.
>
> (6.843-6)

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[66] For example, Adrastus is compared to a *taurus…arduus* (4.69); Polynices has *ardua…/ tempora* (6.921-2); Amphiaraus' limbs magically grow at the moment that he reaches the peak of his heroism during his aristeia (*maioraque membra*, 7.700); Hippomedon is repeatedly called *arduus Hippomedon* (4.129; 5.560; 6.654; 9.91); and Capaneus is consistently associated with gigantomachic imagery and is taller than the rest of the army by a head (4.165-6). Thus, there is an assumed correlation between height and internal 'manliness'.

Statius' physical characterisation of Tydeus demonstrates a careful reading of Homer, when Athene comments briefly on the small but strong stature of this hero: Τυδεύς τοι μικρὸς μὲν ἔην δέμας, ἀλλὰ μαχητής (Hom. *Il.* 5.801).[67] However, Statius develops this simple physical description by making it have a psychological impact on his behaviour.[68] Thus, because Tydeus' biological appearance undermines his heroic image, I suggest that he needs to make the most of every opportunity to show off his otherwise latent *virtus*. Accordingly when he is put in positions of contrast with the other heroes, he makes himself stand out by speaking or acting before the others heroes can, for example, when Adrastus proposes the marriage between his daughters and Polynices and Tydeus, it is Tydeus, who speaks first in this situation (and in every other): *sed cunctis Tydeus audentior actis / incipit* (2.175).

However, Tydeus' performance of heroism is not just let down by his short stature, but, like Polynices, there is also a risk of stigmatisation because of his family. As the narrator informs the reader during Tydeus' entrance into the epic, the hero has been exiled from his homeland of Calydon because he has killed his brother: *fraterni sanguinis illum / conscius horror agit* (1.402-3). This biographical detail makes Tydeus a perfect candidate for Polynices' partner in crime: a man, who has killed his own brother, substitutes as a surrogate brother in the place of Polynices' biological one. At the same time, he becomes Polynices' right-hand man in his efforts to kill his own brother.[69] But Tydeus also becomes a kind of substitute for Eteocles' anger as well: the narrator, Polynices, and Tydeus, each imply that Eteocles' act of setting an ambush against Tydeus was an unreasonable act of anger that would have been better targetted against his actual brother.[70] Even in the generation after Oedipus, the family relationships remain perversely tangled.

This status as a brother-killer provides the greatest threat to Tydeus' self-maintained heroic image. It has made him an exile, ousted from his family and distanced

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[67] This characterisation of Tydeus remains strong among Latin poets. Cf. e.g. the *Priapeia Carmina* 81.5-6: *utilior Tydeus qui, si quid credis Homero, / ingenio pugnax, corpore parvus erat*.

[68] Although, it must be admitted that Tydeus' belicose nature is part of the tradition since at least Aeschylus' *Septem*.

[69] See Vessey (1973) p95; and Henderson (1993) p176, on Polynices and Tydeus' compatibility.

[70] The narrator: *quas quaereret artes / si fratrem, Fortuna, dares?* (2.488-9); Polynices: *hosne mihi reditus, germane, parabas? / in me haec tela dabas! pro uitae foeda cupido! / infelix, facinus fratri tam grande negaui* (3.69-71); Tydeus: *me potius, socii, qui fidum Eteoclea nuper / expertus, nec frater eram, me opponite regi* (7.539-40).

from all the benefits that the association with a noble family could bring to an epic hero. Accordingly, this is why Tydeus' self-presentation is so different from Polynices'. If Polynices were to identify himself with his father, he would be stigmatised through association with Oedipus' sins. Therefore he would rather distance himself from Oedipus by not mentioning him at all. But Tydeus has been exiled as a result of his own actions, not his ancestors. Unlike Polynices, Tydeus' strategy regarding his relationship with his family must instead involve strengthening his associations with his family, and compensating for his isolation from the family by overstating it.

As a foil to Polynices' aposiopesis and hesitation to mention his father, Tydeus proudly declares his own heritage to Adrastus:

> magni de stirpe creatum
> Oeneos et Marti non degenerare paterno
> accipies
>
> (1.463-65)

This, I suggest, is a deliberately ambiguous statement. Tydeus creates for himself two possible father figures: *magni Oeneos* and *Marti paterno* (1.463-4). The genealogy of Tydeus varies among accounts over whether his father was, among others, the mortal Oeneus or the god of war.[71] The more popular tradition is the one Adrastus recounts, that he was the son of Oeneus,[72] who was himself the son of Porthaon (1.669-71), the son of

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[71] As noted by Shackleton Bailey (2003a) p75 n.53; and 213 n.17. Diodorus Siculus records that Tydeus' mother was Periboea, who, after claiming that she was pregnant with Ares' child, was sent by her father, Hipponous, to Oeneus for execution. Oeneus instead, married Periboea and 'begat the child, Tydeus', ἐγέννησεν υἱὸν Τυδέα (Diod. Sic. 4.35.1-2). The wording implies that Oeneus has biologically fathered Tydeus rather than just adopted him, though logically there must only be one child. Thus the ambiguous language here reflects the Statian phrasing: Tydeus' biological progenitor can be thought of as both Ares and Oeneus. Lactantius commenting on 1.463, records a variant that Mars impregnated Tydeus' mother with Tydeus in the guise of Oeneus. In other variations, pseudo-Apollodorus (1.8.4-5), citing from Hesiod, claims that Hippostratus, another mortal suitor, had seduced Periboea first, before her father sent her to Oeneus, which raises futher issues of illegitimacy. In another account mentioned by pseudo-Apollodorus, Oeneus seduces Periboea and the two are sent away by her father. In yet another addition, pseudo-Apollodorus records a variant tradition from Peisander: that Tydeus was the son of Oeneus and Gorge, Oeneus' daughter: thus an incestuous version which would neatly parallel Polynices' situation. See Parkes (2012) on line 111.

[72] As in the Homeric account (*Il.* 5.813; *Il.* 10.497), followed by the late antique epic Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*: Οἰνεὺς δ᾽ υἱέα γείνατ᾽ ἀρήιον ἐν Δαναοῖσι / Τυδέα (1.772-3), a statement which still activates the association of Ares with Tydeus through the epithet: ἀρήιον.

Ares/Mars.[73] *Paterno,* here, for translation purposes is usually treated as 'ancestral', but its literal meaning of 'paternal' is important, in light of the possible varied traditions, in this exchange about parentage. But Tydeus himself seems to be aware of the different strands of tradition and takes advantage of them by blurring them together.

This blurring of parent figures is something that the poet does for other characters too. Both Parkes and Lovatt have shown how Statius has combined different parent figures from the literary tradition in the construction of Parthenopaeus' background. Lovatt looks to the problem of whether there was one or two Atalanta-figures in the mythographic tradition, arguing that Statius combines the two Atalanta traditions into the single character of Parthenopaeus' mother.[74] Parkes looks instead at Parthenopaeus' father – or rather the lack of one in Statius' narrative. She argues that Statius' silence on Parthenopaeus' paternity invites his audience to recognise traits in Parthenopaeus from past literary presentations of the numerous father-figures attributed to him.[75]

Tydeus, in constructing his own self-image, makes use of the various literary traditions to create associations with multiple famous fathers. But, aside from their ancestors, the heroes of the *Thebaid* may also use past heroes as reference points for comparison.[76] For Tydeus, the foremost model he styles himself after is Hercules: he wears the hide of a monster, the Calydonian boar, which mimics the familiar image of Hercules garbed in the pelt of the Nemean lion. Moreover, Tydeus' wrestling style in the games recalls some of Hercules' past literary fights, in particular his wrestling match with the river Achelous.[77] He also has the patronage of Pallas, a similarity that Hercules himself points out (8.506-513), and he almost gains immortality after death as Hercules did.[78] It is tempting to read Tydeus' ambiguous statement, suggesting that he has dual paternity from both the mortal, Oeneus, and a god, Mars, as an attempt to replicate

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[73] For Ares/Mars as the father of Porthaon, see the introduction to the *Meleagrides* tale in Antoninus Liberalis' *Metamorphoses*; however, this was again not the only variant: in Apollodorus, Porthaon is the son of Agenor and Epicaste (daughter of the epynomous city-founder, Calydon). For Porthaon as the son of Oeneus, see Hesiod, Fragments *CW* F98 and Hyginus, *Fabulae* 172; however, Strabo seems to cast doubt on Oeneus' descent from Porthaon, and keeps referring to him separately from Porthaon's other two sons (Strabo, *Geography*, 10.3.1; 10.3.6).
[74] Lovatt (2005) p76-7.
[75] Parkes (2009b).
[76] In the next chapter, we will see how Perseus and Hercules are models of successful heroes for the current heroes to follow.
[77] Lovatt (2005) p195-207.
[78] Vessey (1973) p288.

Hercules' complicated paternity, as both the son of Zeus/Jupiter,[79] and the son of the mortal Amphitryon, emphasised by the frequent use of the patronymic Amphitryoniades.[80]

A comparison for this strategy of drawing special attention to a possible immortal father figure is Achilles in Statius' other epic, the *Achilleid*. In this poem, the hero is loaded with a self-consciousness about the fact that he is the son of the mortal Peleus and not of Jupiter. In a similar way to Tydeus, Achilles has been "exiled", albeit metaphorically, from the heaven of his "father".[81] Thus this diminishes his heroic status as he lacks the associations with his immortal "family", at least on his paternal side, which as we have seen before, is so important to an individual's construction of their heroic identity. After the rape of Deidamia he reveals his identity to her: *ille ego (quid trepidas?) genitum quem caerula mater paene Iovi* (*Ach.* 1.650-1). Thus Achilles constructs his identity around his non-existent relationship with Jupiter in a way that overstates his genetic relationship with the god.[82]

In this way, Tydeus overcompensates for the isolation from his family. He makes up for the loss of honour that comes with familial disownment by stressing his genetic bond with his mortal father figure (*creatum*). Even if he is socially and physically cut off from his father he implies that heroism is an innate biological trait of his. Secondly the additional hint towards a second, divine father brings with it the high status for being associated with divinity, a feature which, as we have seen, is highly valued, and is therefore advertised by epic heroes. Mars is established as Tydeus' personal yardstick with which to measure his own abilities, when he claims that he is not degenerate (*non degenerare*) from the god.

But the hero cannot just pronounce who his ancestors are (as a way of hinting at his own potential) and leave it at that. Identity must be a sustained performance and

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[79] E.g. when Hercules and Pallas confront each other on the battlefield, in tandem with their respective protégés, Haemon and Tydeus, the hero-god states that he would rather wage war against his great father, Jupiter (*magno...parenti*, 8.505) in heaven (as indicated by the presence of *fulmina*), or let Tydeus attack Amphitryon (as well as Hylas) from the Stygian realm (*Stygio ex orbe*, 8.508), rather than have to oppose his old mentor. The juxtaposition of Hercules' two father figures shows that the hero-god engages in the rhetoric of his dual paternity.

[80] 1.486; 5.401; 6.312; 8.499; 10.647; 11.47.

[81] Cf. the opening lines of the epic: *Magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti / progeniem et patrio vetitam succedere caelo, / diva, refer* (Stat. *Ach.* 1.1-3).

[82] See Heslin (2005) p165 on this line. Compare also the historical example of Alexander "the Great", whose inheritance of the kingdom of Macedon and the title "the Great" is dependent on his descent from his mortal father Philip II, but he also adopts the god Zeus-Ammon as his father for propagandistic purposes. See Whitmarsh (2016) p147-8.

constantly refreshed in the memory of a long-term audience. So Tydeus continues to stress his familial connections through costume, by dressing himself with items that belonged to his family members. His garb, as mentioned, is made of the Calydonian boar's skin, a monstrous boar that was killed by his brother Meleager, according to the usual traditions.[83] The right of ownership of the boar-hide after the hunt is particularly controversial in these traditions, leading either to familial murder, or even, in some cases, outright war between family members. And so it is somewhat puzzling that Statius' Tydeus is very frequently described wearing the boar hide, from his first appearance to his last, only stripping it off to wrestle naked in his wrestling match; though the very mention of its removal draws attention to it (6.835-6). While the hero is associated with boars in general because of the 'lion and boar' prophecy, in no other literary version does Tydeus specifically wear the Calydonian boar hide, nor does it seem a part of his characterisation on artwork.[84] Statius does not explain how Tydeus came to possess the Calydonian boar-hide in his version of the myth, and it is not important for our purposes. What is important is the fact that this pelt (which Statius' hero is so attached to, but which also should not belong to him from a literary and logical point of view) was not obtained through any heroic deed of Tydeus' own, but his brother's. Thus Tydeus garbs himself in the achievements of his brother as a way of identifying himself as having the potential for monster-killing. Perhaps also Tydeus' choice of dress is designed to strengthen his association with one of his brothers, and so repeals some of his stigma as a brother-killer.

In addition to the boar-skin, Tydeus' sword also once belonged to other members of his family: *trahit ocius ensem / Bistonium Tydeus, Mavortia munera magni / Oeneos* (2.586-8). The family connections are again stressed in this description through the item's chain of ownership. As Gervais understands it, Mars gave the sword to Oeneus, who gave it to Tydeus.[85] Tydeus' associations with both Mars and Oeneus are visually hinted at here, and continues to form an essential part of his projected identity.

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[83] See Homer, *Iliad* 9.547-9; Bacchylides, Epinician Odes 124-129; Diodorus Siculus, 4.34.3-7; Pseudo-Apollodorus 1.8.2-3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.425-444; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 174; Antoninus Liberalis *s.v. Meleagrides*.

[84] Pseudo-Apollodorus (3.6.1) records that Polynices and Tydeus had the images of the respective animals emblazoned on their shields; Hyginus *Fabulae* (69) records that the heroes wore the skin of the respective animals in a version similar to Statius'. But also, interestingly, he adds that Tydeus wore the boar's hide only as a representation of the Calydonian boar (*significans aprum Calydonium*), to mark his origins from his native Calydon. Therefore, in this account, the boar-skin that Tydeus wore was not the same as that from the Calydonian boar. For Tydeus' depiction in material art, see *LIMC s.v.* Tydeus.

[85] Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* However, *Mavortia* could be read in an allegorical sense: i.e. 'Mavortian gifts' denote 'gifts that are to be used in war'.

Therefore Tydeus' self-presentation relies on emphasising the close relationship with his family more than perhaps he rightly should. As a brother-killing exile, who has been rejected by his family, he needs to restore the heroic status that would be lost to him otherwise. His anxiety over his standing among his noble family seems to be reversely 'inherited' from his Iliadic son, Diomedes. The Illiadic hero was equally insecure about living up to his father's reputation, against which multiple characters measure Diomedes' apparent deficiencies.[86]

We never find out whether Adrastus and Polynices know of Tydeus' past. He (understandably) does not tell them when he introduces himself in Book 1. The issue never comes up among the Argives again, which suggests that he is mostly successful in controlling the narrative regarding the relationship he has with his family, and maintaining his heroic prestige to the other characters at least, if not to the readers. However, Tydeus' status as a brother-killer does come up on one other occasion in the poem – when the ghost of Laius approaches the sleeping Eteocles. Declaring himself a conduit of *Fama* (2.108), while in reality being its instigator, he announces Polynices' new allies: Adrastus, and "Tydeus, stained with a brother's blood" (*pollutus placuit fraterno sanguine Tydeus*, 2.113). Tydeus' carefully managed reputation conflicts with a supernatural source of *Fama* (as well as the authoritative narrator). Controlling the narrative about one's self remains an impossible task for the heroes of the *Thebaid*.

Tydeus overly emphasises his genetic and symbolic connections to his family, through verbal announcements and external accoutrements. This, I suggest, is an overcompensation for feeling that he does not measure up (quite literally and metaphorically) to the other heroes. His height and the lack of social ties with his family creates insecurity over the loss of heroic status that accordingly follows. Throughout the *Thebaid*, Tydeus will be characterised by this tendency towards excess. Eventually his actions will overstep heroic limits, spilling over into the monstrous and cause his rejection from the gods.

Adrastus: the Push and Pull of the Ancestors

Before we study how Adrastus enages in the discourse regarding his own ancestors, we should examine his puzzling attitude towards how others relate to their

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[86] Hardie (1993) p89; Lovatt (2005): p194.

ancestors. Given the importance that epic heroes place on their ancestors in determining their own heroic identity, Adrastus' response to Polynices' insecurities are, on first inspection, rather surprising:

> Ne perge queri casusque priorum
> annumerare tibi: nostro quoque sanguine multum
> erravit pietas, nec culpa nepotibus obstat.
> tu modo dissimilis rebus mereare secundis
> excusare tuos.
>
> (1.688-92)

Adrastus attempts to persuade Polynices that his embarrassment regarding his relationship to Oedipus is misplaced: each person is an individual and is judged independently from their ancestors.[87] He uses his own family as an example, though he understates their transgressions with the cryptic phrase *erravit pietas*, avoiding any direct description of these crimes.

However, Adrastus' words are surely crafted for this specific context: to comfort Polynices, who is clearly uncomfortable about his heritage. This philosophy which Adrastus espouses then becomes advantageous to himself and to Polynices. By using his own family as an example, he draws similarities between his household and Polynices', since it would benefit both men's status to be isolated from their ancestors' crimes. Moreover, Adrastus has already recognised that Polynices will be his son-in-law as decreed by prophecy (1.493-7), even if he does not actually propose the marriage until Book 2. It makes sense then to absolve a future family member of a lingering sense of sin and attach him to his own family with a clean slate.

However, while Adrastus' speech declares that an individual's ancestors should have no influence over the individual, elsewhere his words and actions contradict this. As we will see, Adrastus maintains an epic mode of thinking and repeatedly does use another person's ancestors to identify the individual. For instance, when Adrastus initially met the two men quarrelling, he inferred that their violent actions arose because of the greatness of their birth:

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[87] These words will be echoed in the *Achilleid* by Neptune to Thetis: *Pelea iam desiste queri thalamosque minores* (Ach. 1.90). The advice similarly relates to avoiding the association with a family member they are embarrassed by, but similarly too fails as advice.

<center>nam uos</center>

<center>haud humiles tanta ira docet, generisque superbi</center>

<center>magna per effusum clarescunt signa cruorem.</center>

<center>(1.444-6)</center>

For Adrastus, their warrior spirit and *ira* proves to him that they are not of lowly birth (*haud humiles*) and belong to a proud family (*generisque superbi*). Therefore the king still maintains the traditional epic expectation that the character of a descendant is linked to that of their ancestors, but, perhaps surprisingly, he also sees wrath as a marker of heroism – a trait which, as we will see, runs in his own family. When Polynices fails to declare his ancestry, Adrastus temporarily drops the subject-matter; however, as soon as he is done with his Coroebus narrative, he sharply returns back to trying to identify Polynices (1.668-72). Once again, he explicitly asks to know of Polynices' *progenies* as a way of finding out who the person in front of him is.

This pattern of asking who someone's ancestor is, not getting a response, and asking once again recurs when he meets Hypsipyle, yet another exile separated from her family. When the Argives have been held up in Nemea by Bacchus' drought, Adrastus meets Hypsipyle nursing the baby Opheltes. He asks her to direct the Argives to water. Hypsipyle displays an aura of royalty despite being dressed in shabby clothing.[88] Adrastus recognises her majesty, but mistakes her for a woodland goddess, and addresses her accordingly in his opening words to her: '*Diva potens nemorum (nam te vultusque pudorque / mortali de stirpe negant)*' (4.753-4).[89] As is becoming typical of Adrastus' behaviour, he instantly brings the subject of ancestry into his speech and attributes her graceful qualities to her birth.

Hypsipyle responds to Adrastus' words by confirming the king's belief in her divine ancestry, but fails to identify either herself or these ancestors (4.776-80). Instead she breaks off her introduction and decides that it is more important for the army to quench their thirst first, and leads them to water. Book 4 ends here and Adrastus' curiosity must wait until the next Book to be satisfied, where finally she identifies herself to

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[88] *Quamvis et neglecta comam nec dives amictu, / regales tamen ore notae, nec mersus acerbis / exstat honos* (4.750-2).

[89] The scene is modelled on Odysseus' words to Nausicaä (Hom. *Od*. 6.149ff.), and Aeneas' words to a disguised Venus (Verg. *Aen*. 1.325ff.).

Adrastus after another prompting from the king. His insistent need to identify her is emphasised through the repeated use of *dic* at the start of the line as he asks for her nationality and, once more, who her father is:

> Dic age, quando tuis alacres absistimus undis,
>
> quae domus aut tellus, animam quibus hauseris astris.
>
> Dic quis et ille pater. Neque enim tibi numina longe,
>
> transierit Fortuna licet, maiorque per ora
>
> sanguis, et afflicto spirat reverentia vultu.
>
> (5.23-7)

Again Adrastus bases his assumptions (correctly) on the idea that traits are passed down through a family. In this case it is an awesome sense of divinity, which remains etched into her face and is able to withstand difficult times.

Only now does Hypsipyle reveal her identity: *claro generata Thoante.../...Hypsipyle* (5.38-9). She identifies herself with her father, unlike Polynices who notably tried to avoid mentioning Oedipus. The difference between their two statements is the fact that Oedipus' notoriety undermines Polynices' own reputation; Hypsipyle's mention of Thoas, conversely, stresses her daughterly piety that has made her an exile. Her relationship with her father, and what she has done for him, becomes a tool to raise her own profile. And this is successful. Indeed, as soon as the Argives learn of Hypsipyle's heritage, their respect for her increases: *aduertere animos, maiorque et honora uideri / parque operi tanto* (5.40-1).

As we can see, each time Adrastus wants to find out who an individual is, he asks to know who their fathers are, drawing a link between their actions and appearance with their ancestry. The resistance from both Polynices and Hypsipyle to announce their ancestry gives Statius an opportunity to really stress Adrastus' interest in the matter, allowing him to double the number of times Adrastus asks about someone's ancestry.

One more example suggests Adrastus' belief that an ancestor affects a descendant's reputation: after there has been much delay in the war preparations, Adrastus' daughter and Polynices' wife, Argia, beseeches the king to actually march against Thebes (3.678-721). She approaches her father with her son, *parvum...Thessandrum* (3.682-3), whom she uses as a tool of emotional blackmail: *atque hanc, pater, aspice prolem / exulis; huic olim generis pudor* (3.697-8). Argia cleverly

plays on her father's preoccupations with ancestral reputation. Her reasoning is that the stigma of Polynices' exile will be passed down to her son.

Adrastus' insistence on identifying another person through their ancestors, and his recognition that his grandson would be at a social disadvantage if he were to remain the son of an exile contradicts his words to Polynices: on one hand, according to his philosophy, people should be distinguished from their ancestors and considered independently; on the other, he is unable to identify another character without using their ancestors as some form of reference. Ancestors have a complicated push and pull effect on Adrastus. His mixed attitude illustrates a wider problem with trying to control the ancestral narrative. The traditional assumptions that heroes assimilate and continue their ancestors' values, morality, status, and abilities is ingrained in the characters of the *Thebaid*. Even Adrastus, who would benefit greatly from his own philosophy by distancing himself from his ancestors, is unable to change his attitude to fit it. He might advise others to dissociate themselves from their ancestors, but this something that is impossible, even for himself.

The Artistic Designs of Adrastus: Photoshopping the Family Pictures

In this section I will examine two ekphrastic descriptions of a collection of artworks that depict Adrastus' ancestors. As with visual art in real life, ekphrastic pieces in literature contain an internal narrative. And as any narrative, it is subject to manipulation at the will of the artist. The artist can tell the narrative in the way that he wants, adding or removing details that he wants, and even changing them to suit his own purposes. Given the impact of ancestors on an individual's reputation, artworks about the family are inevitably going to be a vehicle of *fama* (as *kleos*), a way of spreading a message about an individual. But the static artwork is also an attempt to pin down a narrative. This is what Adrastus tries to achieve, portraying his family in a way that directs an audience's attention away from the misdeeds of his ancestors. However, while the designer of the artwork can spin a narrative as they wish, at best, they can only guide an audience's response to the image. But the picture becomes more complex, since ekphrases are literary descriptions of material objects. Thus an ekphrastic description does not just contain a narrative, but is itself part of a narrative that is being told by the omniscient narrator of the poem to an external audience of readers. This creates different levels of audiences, privileged with varying degrees of understanding. We will see a clash

between the narratives of Adrastus and the narrator, complemented by a clash in the literary and plastic mediums, as they compete to tell the dominant narrative, to cement *their* version of *fama*. The two layers of audience, the internal spectators, and the external readers, are left with two contradictory interpretations over these images.[90]

The first of these ekphrases is found in Adrastus' palace during the royal wedding:

> species est cernere avorum
> comminus et vivis certantia vultibus aera.
> Tantum ausae perferre manus! Pater ipse bicornis
> in laevum prona nixus sedet Inachus urna;
> hunc tegit Iasiusque senex placidusque Phoroneus
> et bellator Abas indignatusque Tonantem
> Acrisius nudoque ferens caput ense Coroebus
> torvaque iam Danai facinus meditantis imago.
> Exin mille duces. foribus cum inmissa superbis
> unda fremit uulgi, procerum manus omnis et alto
> quis propior de rege gradus stant ordine primi.
>
> (2.215-25)

On the second occasion, Adrastus' ancestral images are brought out in a parade before the funeral games of Opheltes:

> Exin magnanimum series antiqua parentum
> invehitur, miris in vultum animata figuris.
> Primus anhelantem duro Tirynthius angens
> pectoris attritu sua frangit in ossa leonem.
> Haud illum impavidi quamvis et in aere suumque
> Inachidae videre decus. Pater ordine iuncto
> laevus harundineae recubans super aggere ripae
> cernitur emissaeque indulgens Inachus urnae.
> Io post tergum, iam prona dolorque parentis

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[90] On the levels of audience created by an ekphrasis, and the different perspectives that it produces, see e.g. Gransden (1984) p89; Boyd (1995) p73-4; Barchiesi (1997) p271-2; Lowrie (1999) p112-4; Beck (2007) p534-5.

spectat inocciduis stellatum visibus Argum.

Ast illam melior Phariis erexerat arvis

Iuppiter atque hospes iam tunc Aurora colebat.

Tantalus inde parens, non qui fallentibus undis

imminet aut refugae sterilem rapit aera silvae,

sed pius et magni vehitur conviva Tonantis.

Parte alia victor curru Neptunia tendit

lora Pelops, prensatque rotas auriga natantes

Myrtilos et volucri iam iamque relinquitur axe.

Et gravis Acrisius speciesque horrenda Coroebi

Et Danae culpata sinus et in amne reperto

tristis Amymone, parvoque Alcmena superbit

Hercule tergemina crinem circumdata luna.

Iungunt discordes inimica in foedera dextras

Belidae fratres, sed vultu mitior astat

Aegyptus; Danai manifestum agnoscere ficto

ore notas pacisque malae noctisque futurae.

mille dehinc species.

(6.268-94)

Gervais suggests that the strong linguistic parallels and the structural similarities between the passages indicate that the two descriptions of the series of ancestral portraits are about the same collection.[91] I think we can assume this to be correct, even if it requires some suspension of disbelief at the practicalities of Adrastus' decision to bring over a thousand bronze images with him on a military campaign. This would help address an assumption that these second group of statues do actually belong to Adrastus: given that the statues are displayed during the infant Opheltes' funeral, one would expect the ancestral statues to belong to Lycurgus, the child's father. However, as Ganiban has argued, Adrastus completely hijacks Opheltes' funeral for his own political purposes,

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[91] See Gervais (2017) on lines 2.215-23 and 2.223: the second description, he argues, is just a more detailed description of the first. For the linguistic similarities: the figures are made of bronze (2.216; 6.274); and described as *species* (2.215; 6.287; 6.295); *exin* in the final line of the former passage is echoed in the first line of the second passage (2.223; 6.270); and both passages end with a reference to a thousand other unmentioned statues (2.223; 6.295). Structurally, both passages begin with Inachus, and end with Danaus.

while the displaced parents fade away in the background of the scene.[92] Therefore, Adrastus even seems to have replaced the ancestral images of Lycurgus with his own.

We now turn to how Adrastus attempts to control his public image to his people through these civic displays of artwork,[93] and how the narrator turns Adrastus' own self-promoting narrative against him. While Lovatt has already discussed the combination of the victorious and the "darker" aspects of the second ekphrasis, I would like to separate these out and examine the ekphrases on the different narrative levels. By focalising the narratives through Adrastus and the narrator respectively we see that the internal and external audience each receive a very different sense from the ekphrasis.

The immediate model for the collection of ancestral images is found in the palace of Vergil's Latinus (*Aen.* 7.177).[94] In the first passage, in particular, there are linguistic similarities that recall the Vergilian scene: the first two ancestors in Adrastus' series are the two-horned river-god Inachus (***pater ipse bicornis...*/*...Inachus** 2.217-8) and old Phoroneus (*Iasius...**senex*** 2.219), which recall Latinus' ***pater**...Sabinus* (*Aen.* 7.178), *Saturnus...**senex*** (*Aen.* 7.180)*,* and *Iani...**bifrontis** imago* (*Aen.* 7.180).[95] The similarities between the two kings also help strengthen the connection between them. Both are aged leaders with no male offspring. Both have been forbidden by prophecy to marry their daughter(s) off except to a destined suitor(s), which in both cases is an exiled foreigner.[96]

Latinus' statues, it has been argued, have been designed with a practical political purpose: their position in the hall, in which Latinus greets outsiders like Aeneas' embassy, allows the Italians to demonstrate their rural and divine roots with rustic ancestors like Faunus and Saturn (who brought in the original golden age). But the addition of the war-heroes and war-trophies also hints at a strong military power.

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[92] Ganiban (2013) p253 suggests that the Argives take charge of Opheltes' funeral, in order to control the discourse about the child's death. Many had seen the death as an unlucky sign, so the Argives must spin his tragic death, in a showy spectacle, into a celebration of his (apparent) deification that will help the Argives in the long run.

[93] On reading the artist of an ekphrastic piece as a "motivated agent", constructing their own selective and slanted versions of the past, see Fitzgerald (1984) p53-7 on Daedalus in *Aeneid* 6.

[94] Gervais (2017) on 215-23. Cf. also Vergil's description of ancestral statues outside his metapoetic temple to Augustus (*Georgics* 3.34-6).

[95] Five of Latinus' ancestors are named in total: Italus, Sabinus, Saturn, Janus, and Picus; although Picus' description is separated from the other four by an intervening description of the statues of war-heroes and their trophies. The three ancestors alluded to by Statius' description of Inachus and Iasius therefore all belong to the initial group of named ancestors. Vergil gave no epithet to the Italus, the first of Latinus' ancestors mentioned, and therefore Statius had no convenient verbal allusion to him.

[96] Adrastus is a complex composite character; aside from Latinus, his other models include: Evander who lends troops to a foreigner; Dido, who invites a foreigner into her home with disastrous consequences; and Lucan's Pompey, whose past grandeur has faded and who flees from the battle of Pharsalus, as Adrastus flees from the final duel.

Therefore the images of the past ancestors and heroes in Latinus' hall would suggest to the foreign Trojans that the present day Italians have inherited these same traits, and that they are capable of a proud peaceful existence, but also war, if the need arises.[97]

Adrastus' images make a similar political point; however, the primary audience for these images are not foreign embassies, but his own people during civic rituals – a wedding and a funeral. Moreover, his statues are restricted only to blood ancestors: there are no war heroes in the collection (with the exception of Coroebus, whose insertion among the statues will be addressed later). The nationalistic ideology represented by Latinus' statues narrows its focus to project the values of an individual family. It becomes not a show of civic unity and military might to outsiders, but rather a legitimising statement about the dynastic ruling family to those it rules.

What kind of messages do these statues convey about Adrastus and his family? To answer this question, it would be beneficial first to examine these statues 'objectively', to separate out the narrator's comments from the artwork. These images, as a whole, fit Laird's term of "obedient ekphrasis":[98] that is, aside from a few temporal impossibilities where the scenes are described as if the static images are playing out in front of the viewer as a nod to how realistic the artwork looks, the images can be understood as descriptions of real artwork, and they "obey" the constraits of physical law. Parallels of many of these described images can be found also in actual plastic arts too.[99] And so we should first reconstruct what artwork the internal audience would be seeing, and therefore, what kind of response they would have to the statues.

The first ekphrasis occurs when Adrastus allows his citzens to come into his palace for the special occasion of the royal wedding. There they see the images in the hall. Aside from Coroebus, the men displayed in the first showing of ancestors are all past kings of Argos, and an entirely masculine group. The focus of this display, therefore, is on the theme of succession to the throne. This befits the context of the marriage between Adrastus' daughters and Polynices and Tydeus. Adrastus was forbidden to allow

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[97] Rosivach (1980) p149-52.
[98] See Laird (1993) p19.
[99] See Lovatt (2007) p81, for a discussion on the nature of Adrastus' statues, and the influences from real life plastic arts. On Statius' other ekphrastic pieces and real life plastic art, see also Dewar (1991) on lines 9.404-445. As Lovatt explains, it is unclear what form these artworks take: whether they are statues or reliefs etc.; although we do know that they are made from bronze. Therefore I will refer to them generally as images, or artworks, *vel sim.* I assume that the artworks are individual to each other, however, and so additional pieces can be slotted in at various points and the order of the images can be moved around, hence explaining the discrepancies between the first and second ekphrastic passage.

his daughters to marry just anyone, even though he knows that they are the only way by which he may continue the family line (*geminae mihi namque, nepotum / laeta fides...natae*, 2.158-9). His fatherly concerns over their marriage (*tantum in corde sedens aegrescit cura parenti*, 1.400), is therefore tied in with anxieties over a succession crisis: if he cannot marry off his daughters, he cannot have heirs. His daughters' marriages with Polynices and Tydeus, however, confirms a successful continuation of the family line, as represented by the statues. The audience, however, also become part of the public display.[100] In the palace they act out an idealised microcosm of the Argive society. The people in the hall are ordered by social status: those of a higher social rank stand nearer the king in a sliding scale (*procerum manus omnis et alto / quis propior de rege gradus stant ordine primi*, 2.224-25), while the commoners stand by the entrance (*foribus cum inmissa superbis / unda fremit uulgi*, 2.223-24). The Argive audience are quite literally put in their place in the royal halls. The rigid hierarchy supplements the narrative of a continuous dynastic succession shown in the artwork. An idealised vision of an uninterrupted, unchallenged, royal family arises.

In the second passage, the images put forth two further messages about the royal family: first it puts an emphasis on parent-child relationships, and second on the family's divine connections. The majority of the figures in the display can be paired together as parent and child. This family theme is equally fitting for the circumstances, since these funeral games are being held in honour of a deceased child: the images reinforce the general concept of family bonds and unity between the generations as consolation for the loss of the child. Hercules is found twice in the display, once by himself in the privileged position at the start of the procession, as the saviour of Nemea, but also as an infant with his mother in a later image, emphasising their familial relationship. Inachus and Io are also connected by their juxtaposition, as the image of Io comes directly behind her father, *Io post tergum* (6.276). Their father-daughter relationship is also emphasised by Inachus' epithet of *pater* (not just an honorific title for an ancestor used by the Argives but also the specific status he holds for Io), which corresponds to Io's description as *dolorque parentis* (6.276). Similarly, Tantalus is introduced as *Tantalus…parens* (6.280), both as an ancestor to the the Argives, but also father to Pelops, whose artwork appears next to

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[100] For audiences of ekphrases as part of the ekphrasis, see Boyd (1995) p76-8 on Aeneas and the temple of Juno.

his fathers.[101] Continuing the trend are the king Acrisius and his daughter Danae, who again are found close together in the text, separated only by Coroebus. Aegyptus and Amymone make the final pair with yet another father-daughter bond. The ekphrasis ends with one example of brotherhood: Danaus and Aegyptus stand with their right hands clasped, a symbol of both familial and political unity.[102]

The second theme, that there is a strong divine affiliation with Adrastus' family, is emphasised through the heavy presence of divine and deified ancestors in the display, women who bore children to the gods, and men with divine favour.[103] Accordingly, Hercules is present, who has already been deified in the narrative. Inachus too is portrayed in the traditional artistic representation of a river-god, inclining on his side by the river accompanied by a signifying urn.[104] Jupiter is depicted in the act of raising the recently deified Io to her new station as the eastern goddess, Isis (6.278-9).[105] The moment of Io's transformation back into human form is also traditionally the moment at which she is made pregnant with Jupiter's son.

In addition to Io, in the latter half of the procession, there is a quick succession of three other women (with Coroebus intervening), who have had children with Jupiter or Neptune: Danaë, Amymone, and Alcmene. In each of the four women's images, attention is drawn to signifiers of their relationship with the gods. Io's first image shows her in bovine form, guarded by Argus – the consequences of Jupiter's affections. Danaë is portrayed with a 'guilty lap' *culpata sinus*, which suggests that she is currently pregnant with Perseus. Amymone is depicted next to a 'discovered stream' (*in amne reperto*, 6.287). This is a reference to the myth that Neptune rescued the girl from a wanton satyr, but then desired to have her for himself. In exchange for consummation of the

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[101] At least in the text, even if not in the actual procession. Pelops' ekphrasis is introduced with the phrase *parte alia* (6.283), which could suggest that Pelops' image is independent of his father's and is located elsewhere in the parade.

[102] Cf. Aeneas' frustrated words over his mother Venus' deception as she vanishes: *cur dextrae iungere dextram / non datur, ac veras audire et reddere voces?* (*Aeneid* 1.408-9); and his hopeful, though equally futile, request to his father: *da iungere dextram / da, genitor, teque amplexu ne subtrahe nostro* (6.697-8). For a diachronic examination of the so-called *dextraum iunctio* in material art, see Davies (1985).

[103] Lovatt (2007) p77 sees symbols of glory and victory as the main theme in the procession, to unite the Argive forces under a common purpose for the war.

[104] Cf. the figure of the river-god on the west pediment of the Parthenon, which lies on its side; and see Campbell (2012) p155 for an image of the Tiber portrayed reclining on an urn from which water flows on Roman coinage (RIC *III*, p118, no. 706). More generally on characteristic representations of river-gods see *EAA*, *s.v. Fluviali*.

[105] I assume that this scene is part of the artwork, and not a narrator's comment on the relative dating between Io's deification and the creation of the images, as suggested by Shackleton Bailey (2003a) p346, n.27.

relationship, Neptune revealed some springs to her, in order to end a drought for her people. Finally Alcmene is honoured both with the infant Hercules and the symbol of his conception, the triple moon around her head. These snapshots of the narrative of these women's relationships with the gods portray different chronological points of the relationship. Hence Io (as cow) is still yet to have a child with Jupiter, but is already possessed by the god; then Io (as Isis) and Amymone are portrayed at the moments that they conceive. Danaë is pregnant with Jupiter's child. Finally Alcmene with the infant Hercules, shows her as a mother-figure to the demi-god.

Furthermore, male ancestors with divine favour are emphasised. The image of Tantalus portrays him in accordance to the tradition that because he was the mortal most honoured by the gods, he was welcomed to dine with them on Olympus (*sed pius et magni vehitur conviva Tonantis*, 6.282). Near Tantalus, is his son, Pelops, who was beloved by Neptune and is therefore portrayed on the magical chariot, given to him by the god (*victor curru Neptunia tendit / lora Pelops*, 6.283-4).

Therefore, if we were to view the artworks entirely objectively, as genuinely "obedient" ekphrases, we would see a very optimistic representation of Adrastus' family line. The king's rule is supported by depictions of generational continuity, strong family unity, and divine favour. The only reactions that arise in the internal audience of the statues is fear (at Hercules' brute strength, *haud illum impavidi quamvis et in aere suumque / Inachidae videre decus* (6.272-3), and pleasure (*voluptas*, 6.294). Both are valuable for Adrastus' needs as a king: the idea of the fearsome strength of his ancestor, Hercules, is assumed by Adrastus through genetic association, thus indicating that his rule is not to be messed with.[106] The pleasure that arises in the Argives demonstrate that they rejoice at the positive messages conveyed by the images and at the stable kingship they suggest.

However, the narrator's commentary of these two sets of images is not objective. He colours the reader's interpretation with subjective epithets and ancedotes about other mythic variations that clash awkwardly with Adrastus' optimistic narrative in the artwork. Therefore, the reader's response to the collection of statues is guided in a different, more pessimistic, direction to that of the internal audience.

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[106] Though Parkes (2012) reads the simile comparing Adrastus as a battle-scarred bull (4.69-3), as a sign that his rule has been threatened and challenged.

The narrator's verbal explanation of the scenes forces a more negative response from the external reader. While Adrastus uses the relationships between his female ancestors and the gods to celebrate his association with the divine, the narrator, on the same images, far more sympathetically, focuses on the personal cost to the victims of divine rape and their family. Io, for example, after being stolen from her father Inachus, is a source of grief to her father (*dolor parentis*). This would not necessarily be visually accessible to the internal viewers, but is made evident to the external reader by the narrator as a piece of extra commentary about the artwork. The narrator's additional description of Acrisius as *indignatus Tonantem* (2.220), reminds the reader of the father's treatment of his daughter Danaë. After Danaë was impregnated by Jupiter with Perseus, Acrisius casts his daughter and her son into the sea in a wooden chest, expecting them to die. Thus, Danaë's pregnancy is described by the narrator as *culpata sinus*. The 'guilty' aspect is ironically focalised through the unreasonable father (*gravis Acrisius*, 2.286), which instead forces the reader to sympathise more with the innocent daughter. Finally Amymone, the victim of a double rape, is given the epithet *tristis*, again an emotional attribute ascribed by the narrator. The power of the Argive kings, the narrator seems to suggest, is built on the silent suffering of women.[107]

But the narrator also challenges the narratives portrayed by the artworks. The description of the Tantalus scene in the second ekphrasis is the most evident example of this. While Tantalus is actually portrayed in the display as an honoured dinner-guest of the gods, the narrator interjects in the ekphrastic description with a variant part of the myth, which stresses how unusual this illustration is. He states that Tantalus was *not* depicted as a sinner, who was eternally punished in the underworld (*non qui…*, 6.280), *but* as a pious friend of the gods (*sed pius…conviva*, 6.282). The narrator's comment refers to the fact that Tantalus is more usually depicted as one of the emblematic sinners who are punished in the underworld. His particular punishment varied in the accounts: the first was to always be held in fear under a suspended rock that might fall on him at any moment. The second was to be kept in an eternal state of hunger and thirst while being 'tantalised' by nearby fruit and water, which would recede from him when he reached out for them. This latter version is the one the narrator refers to (1.280-1). There were also various versions of what Tantalus' crimes actually were: he either stole nectar

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[107] Of the four women, who bore children to gods, only Alcmene is portrayed as enjoying the results of her rape: *parvoque Alcmena superbit / Hercule* (6.288-89).

and ambrosia from the gods during the banquet, revealed the secrets of the gods, which he had overheard at the banquet, to mankind, or, in the most lurid tradition, killed and served up his son, Pelops, to the gods in order to test their omniscience.[108] Although the narrator does not make it completely clear what crime has been committed, it is patent that *some* crime was committed by Tantalus at the banquet according to Jupiter: *hanc etiam poenis incessere gentem / decretum; neque enim arcano de pectore fallax / Tantalus et saevae periit iniuria mensae* (1.245-7). The phrase *saevae…mensae* suggests that it is the gory, cannibalistic version that is being alluded to here. Moreover, the reader, having connected Jupiter's speech in Book 1 to this passage, remembers that it was because of Tantalus' offence at this banquet that Jupiter decides to destroy Argos. Therefore, while Adrastus' internal audience only sees a positive portrayal of Adrastus' ancestor, the narrator reminds the external readers of the untold parts of the myth: the filicide, the (attempted) cannabilism, the eternal punishment. Adrastus' glorious narrative of a harmonious relationship with the gods is severely undermined by the narrator.

The image of Tantalus leads on to the image of Pelops. As already mentioned, aside from their proximity in the text, the two are thematically linked through their father-son relationship (stressed by Adrastus), but also the filicide (hinted at by the narrator). This scene depicting Pelops, I think, needs some explanation. According to Pelops' myth, suitors for Hippodamia had to defeat her father Oenomaus in a chariot-race. The suitors would race on ahead, while pursued by Oenomaus' chariot, piloted by the king's charioteer, while the king himself (also in the chariot) would attempt to spear the suitor. Roughly thirteen suitors are killed before Pelops attempts the challenge. Here the myth diverges: either Pelops won the race because Poseidon/Neptune gives him a magic chariot and horses that can outstrip Oenomaus', and/or (the more popular version, which is again more lurid) he bribes Myrtilos with half his kingdom and one night with Hippodamia to throw the race or sabotage Oenomaus' chariot so that it collapses during the race. After the race, Pelops reneges on his deal and murders Myrtilos by throwing him into the sea, henceforth known as the Myrtoan Sea.[109]

Translators tend to take the scene as referring to Pelops' chariot-race against Oenomaus. Shackleton Bailey's comment sums up their confusion: "Statius appears to be confusing the death of Myrtilos (thrown into the sea by Pelops later on according to

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[108] Cf. Pindar who in his first ode explicitly rejects the version that Tantalus was punished for killing his son, and claims instead that he was punished for stealing nectar and ambrosia (Pind. *O*. 1.35-102).
[109] Though on the many variant parts of the Pelops myth, see Finglass (2007) on *Electra* 504-15.

the usual account) with that of Oenomaus. The wobbling wheels evidently allude to Myrtilos' sabotage of Oenomaus' chariot".[110] Shackleton Bailey's consternation, however, I think is misplaced. Even if this scene does depict Pelops' chariot-race with Oenomaus, Myrtilos' presence on the chariot would not be surprising, given that he was driving the chariot, while Oenomaus was getting ready to spear Pelops. This is how the scene is often depicted on material artworks,[111] and also how it is presented on Jason's cloak, the only ekphrasis in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1.752-8).[112] It is therefore not Myrtilos' presence that is surprising; what is unusual is the absence of Oenomaus. Futhermore, there are logical problems with the scene if it does convey the chariot-race: why would Myrtilos be trying to hold together the chariot, which he has himself dismantled?

However, many of the problems can be resolved, I believe, if we accept that this scene does not refer to the chariot-race at all, but instead to the murder of Myrtilos.[113] In some accounts, Neptune's horses were not just supernaturally swift, but even had the capability of running over water and flight. I believe that the Pelops scene in Adrastus' collection of images is a representation of the following passage from Euripides' *Orestes*:

> οἳ κατεῖδον ἄτας,
>
> ποτανὸν μὲν δίωγμα πώλων
>
> τεθριπποβάμονι στόλῳ Πέλοψ ὅτε
>
> πελάγεσι διεδίφρευσε, Μυρτίλου φόνον
>
> δικὼν ἐς οἶδμα πόντου,
>
> λευκοκύμοσιν
>
> πρὸς Γεραιστίαις
>
> ποντίων σάλων
>
> ᾐόσιν ἁρματεύσας.

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[110] Shackleton Bailey (2003a) p347, n.29. Mozley's translation similarly seems to be trying to describe the chariot's collapse during the race: "Myrtilos the charioteer grasps at the bounding wheels, as the swift axle leaves him far and farther behind". On this scene too, Wilson Joyce (2008) notes: "the artist has apparently combined Oenomaus' fate…with Myrtilos' own".

[111] LIMC *s.v. Myrtilos: D. La course de chars.*

[112] See Shapiro (1980) p283, on the influence from the plastic arts on Apollonius' depiction of this scene.

[113] Lovatt (2007) p84, seems to be the only commentator on this ekphrasis who reads the image as I do. However she does not address the translator's confusion with the scene, and only briefly describes Pelops' part in a summarising list of scenes in the ekphrasis: "Pelops is driving across the sea in his winged chariot". As such, I think a fuller explanation would be beneficial here.

ὅθεν δόμοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς

ἦλθ᾽ ἀρὰ πολύστονος.

(Eur. *Or.* 987-96)

Electra in distress relates the curse that has befallen her family that starts from Pelops'
actions. Her words allude to the horses' ability to fly (ποτανὸν…δίωγμα πώλων), and
cross the sea (πελάγεσι διεδίφρευσε). An example of this scene can be found also
portrayed on a lekythos from Capua, dating to the second half of the 4th century BC.[114]
The lekythos shows Pelops and Hippodamia in the chariot riding over the waters, and
Myrtilos being ejected from the chariot into the sea, while an Erinys watches from above.

Photograph of Lekythos showing *the death of Myrtilos,
Capua, LCS, plate 134, ill. 819* removed for copyright
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Lekythos showing the death of Myrtilos, Capua, LCS, plate 134, ill. 819.

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[114] See LIMC *s.v. Myrtilos 25, La mort de Myrtilos.*

If this is the scene being described in the ekphrasis, it would resolve Shackleton Bailey's difficulties. It would mean we can read the *rotas…natantes*, not as "wobbling wheels",[115] but literally as "swimming wheels", as they skim the surface of the water. Likewise the phrase *volucri…axe* should also be read literally, as a "flying axle". The supernatural abilities of the chariot are reinforced by the reminder that it is a gift from Neptune (*Neptunia…/…lora*). In addition, it would help solve a temporal awkwardness in the sentence: why would Pelops be *victor* if the race has not finished yet, and Oenomaus/Myrtilos' chariot not crashed yet? While the literary nature of ekphrases do allow for some temporal flexibility (in the same scene, for example, *iam iamque* indicates that the static image is presently playing out), it would make much more logical sense for Pelops to be *victor*, if this represents a later part of the myth, after he has actually won the race. One further argument to my suggestion is an intertextual one. The Pelops chariot-scene is introduced with the words *parte alia*, which alludes to a section of the first extended ekphrasis in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, the panels depicting scenes from the Trojan War on Juno's temple. The phrase *parte alia* recalls a specific panel from this collection that is introduced with the exact phrase (Verg. *Aen.* 1.474), and which also portrays a chariot-scene. It depicts the death of Troilus at Achilles' hands. The boy's corpse is being dragged along the ground pathetically, still grasping the reins: *lora tenens* (Verg. *Aen.* 1.477), a phrase which Statius' narrator echoes, but reappropriates for the victor in his scene, as he describes Pelops' handling of Neptune's reins (*Neptunia tendit / lora*). The image of the boy's dragging body still clinging to the chariot in the Vergilian scene, is the outline which we should apply to the Statian ekphrasis to understand Myrtilos' pose. The image is to be understood as follows: Myrtilos is cast out of the chariot into the sea; he attempts to cling to the chariot as he is doing so (hence: *prensatque rotas auriga natantes / Myrtilos*); then he watches as Pelops' flying chariot speeds away, leaving him stranded in the sea (*et volucri iam iamque relinquitur axe*).[116]

To return to the argument: as I have discussed, Adrastus stresses the divine associations his family has with the gods. This image is clearly intended to be a powerful

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[115] The word *natare* can refer to boats floating on the surface of water, and can metaphorically refer to flight (cf. Verg. *G.* 4.59, on bees 'swimming' in the 'liquid' air. For the image, cf. Hom. *Il.*13.29-30, for Poseidon's chariot that flies (πέτοντο) over the water; and Ovid *Met.* 10.654-55, where Hippomenes (a *proles Neptunia*) runs so fast that it seems possible that he could run over water and land. The ability to skim over water is a trait associated with Poseidon/Neptune.

[116] Compare the first ekphrasis of the *Thebaid*, where Ganymede watches the lands shrink away as he is carried upwards by the eagle (1.549). In both cases, the narrator describes objects moving away from the perspective of the image's subject.

representation of one of his ancestors: Pelops is a *victor*, on a chariot that has been bestowed on him by a god, and this chariot is currently displaying its supernatural abilities that gives him the edge over other mortals. The murder of Myrtilos too, I suggest, is also supposed to be regarded as a glorifying event. Again, I use the Vergilian chariot-ekphrasis as a comparison. As many scholars have commented, the ekphrastic description of the panels on the temple of Juno are focalised through the lens of Aeneas.[117] It is through the emotional response of the Trojan hero that the narrator colours their description of Troilus with epithets such as *infelix puer* (Verg. *Aen.* 1.475), and makes the reader sympathetic towards the boy. However, this subjective, sympathetic response does not align with the context, since the panels belong to the temple of Juno, an enemy of the Trojans. An objective audience to the panel would probably understand it to be a celebration of the Trojan's defeat. Likewise, the Argive audience is supposed to see this image as celebrating Pelops' victory over Myrtilos. The ethical questions regarding the murder arise only to the external reader, because the narrator stresses the hopelessness of Myrtilos, as he desperately tries to claw his way back on to the chariot, and we see his isolation from his perspective.

Moreover, while Adrastus considers this as a victorious moment for his family member, the external readers would recognise the killing of Myrtilos as the moment that is consistently identified as a sinful act or the cause of the curse that befalls the Tantalid family in tragic plays. For example, the palace of Atreus in Seneca's *Thyestes* (an intertextual perversion of Latinus' palace) recalls the crimes committed against Myrtilos with the displaying of the spoils of his murder (Sen. *Thy.* 659-64). In Euripides' *Orestes*, Electra calls Myrtilos' death the moment that "immediately brought many problems to her family": ὅθεν δόμοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς / ἦλθ᾽ ἀρὰ πολύστονος. Moreover, the presence of the Erinys on the lekythos above suggests that this was an act that would bring retribution. The topos is so reliably well established that Cicero can quote Accius' use of the concept as an amusing foil, and then dismiss it as the kind of rubbish that poets like to make up: *'quinam Tantalidarum internecioni modus paretur aut quaenam umquam ob mortem Myrtili poenis luendis dabitur satias supplici?'* (Cic. *De Natura Deorum*, 90). The external reader is more likely to see Tantalus as a transgressive ancestor rather than an honourable one. Rather than being ancestors, by whose association the family's noble status will be upheld, they are the causes of the misfortune that will soon befall Adrastus.

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[117] E.g. Beck (2007) p539; Putnam (1998) p23-54; esp. 26; Barchiesi (1997) p227.

The marriage of Hippodamia and Pelops that resulted in the death of Oenomaus might also present a particularly foreboding message to the readers regarding the new father-in-law, Adrastus, whose son-in-law is about to participate in a chariot-race.[118]

Earlier in the discussion, we saw how Adrastus presents Tantalus in a more optimistic light by presenting him as a dining-companion to the gods, and not a sinner. However, Tantalus is not the only Argive ancestor that escapes underworld punishment in Adrastus' version of the narrative. Amymone belongs to the notorious group of Danaids, whose punishment, alongside Tantalus', was among the cannonical underworld torments. As the penalty for killing their husbands on their wedding night at the bidding of their father Danaus, the maidens had to collect water in a perforated vessel for eternity.[119] Amymone, however, in some traditions, was one of the few Danaids who did not kill her husband.[120] She was, therefore, also one of the few Danaids who escaped the infamous punishment. Adrastus' particular choice to represent this Danaid (whose name, Amymone, literally means 'blameless', from ἄ-μῶμος) purposefully diverts his audience's attention from the large group of her sinning sisters, focusing instead on the one who is ethically uncompromised. However, like Tantalus' crime, the readers are reminded that the Danaids' sins did actually take place in the world of the *Thebaid*, when the narrator alludes to it through the descriptions of Danaus and his brother Aegyptus that close both ekphrases. Once again, the additional layer of narrative provided by the narrator overwrites the one that Adrastus is trying to present. The closing descriptions depict the brothers at the moment that they are agreeing upon the marriage pact between their children by clasping right hands. Therefore, on the surface, the image is that of a family embrace, which should lead to closer familial and political ties between the royal brothers. But this image reminds the reader of Atreus and Thyestes' sham show of unity in Seneca's *Thyestes*, which gives the artwork a disturbing tone. The narrator uses his omniscient authority to further stress the underlying animosity, declaring that the evil plan was formulating in Danaus' mind at the moment that is captured in the image. The reader further makes a connection between the strife of Aegyptus and Danaus, and Polynices and Eteocles,[121] and also reads it as another ill-omen for Adrastus, the

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[118] Cf. Hunter (1993) p52-9 for an analysis of Pelops and Oenomaus' chariot-race scene in the *Argonautica*.

[119] Cf. e.g. Lucretius 3.1009-11; Horace, *Odes* 3.11.21-9; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.43-4; Lucian, *Timon* 18.

[120] On the literary evidence for Amymone not partaking in her sister's crimes, see Bonner (1900) p29.

[121] Cf. Lovatt (2007) p79 and Harrison (2013) p224-25.

unsuspecting father-in-law. However, this example is one where even the internal viewers can directly see a darker side to the statues. They can 'recognise' (*agnoscere*) the look on Danaus' face and infer what scheme he is planning: *Danai manifestum agnoscere ficto / ore notas pacisque malae noctisque futurae* (6.292-3). But this highlights the difficulty Adrastus has in controlling his family's image. Although Adrastus tries to depict his family in noble ways, salacious gossip will always find its way out. The statues, and the crime they remind the viewers of, can only be 'recognised' if they already know the story. The association between the ancestors and their crimes is not something Adrastus can easily overwrite.

More Lasting in Bronze?

Horace famously stated: *exegi monumentum aere perennius* (*Odes* 3.30.1). He was speaking with reference to his collection of Odes, through which, he confidently announces, he would be remembered throughout the ages. But the statement also sets up a competition between literary and material art. Horace claims that his poetry has superiority over even bronze monuments and other physical constructions. Likewise, Statius' narrator engages in a debate with Adrastus' bronze images; however, there is a shift from declaring which artistic medium bestows immortality better, to which has more authoritative power. Adrastus attempts to pin down the authoritative version of his family history in lasting bronze artworks, but Statius' narrator gets the upper hand. The nature of ekphrases as a literary description of a plastic art form gives his narrator the freedom to add to and alter the meaning of the physical objects for the readers.

But Statius is not just competing with plastic arts here, but also other literary traditions. As Lovatt suggests, the topos of epic games (which the parade of images introduces) is fertile ground for fostering competition among poets too.[122] In particular, Statius seems aptly to have Pindar's first *Olympian* Ode in mind, which celebrates Hieron's victory in a horse race. Pindar's honorand claims his origins in the city of Pelops (Pind. *Ol.* 1.23-4), and so, like Adrastus, Pindar has a duty to rewrite the myths about Hieron's ancestors Pelops and Tantalus, so that they are free from scandal. Pindar explicitly draws attention to the existence of other varying accounts, but denies them all as false reports. He attributes this to Charis, Grace personified, who, like *Fama*, has the

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[122] Lovatt (2005) p12-22.

ability to confound truth and lies (Pind. *Ol*. 1.28-31). According to Pindar, he will set down the only true account of Tantalus and Pelops. As he tells it, Tantalus' participation in filicide and cannibalism is just malicious gossip that has spread from an envious neighbour (Pind. *Ol*. 1.47). Instead, the king was immortalised by the gods, but then later fell foul by the lesser crime of stealing the immortalising ambrosia and nectar from them. Likewise in his telling of Pelops' myth, there is no whiff of any underhand trickery to win his chariot-race against Oenomaus. His favour with Poseidon meant only that he was awarded a golden chariot and winged horses, with which he won a fair race. No sabotage, or murder was involved.

Pindar's version of the family history has a great influence on Adrastus' statues. Tantalus and Pelops, as we have seen, were portrayed with elements that recall Pindar's depiction: *pius* Tantalus was dining with the gods, and Pelops was on Neptune's flying chariot. But Statius reverses the variants in terms of authority. Pindar's tellings of the two heroes are compressed into literalisations of Horace's bronze monuments; however, the accounts of Pindar, now in bronze form, have less authority than Statius' narrator. Instead the scandalous versions in literary form are promoted by the *Thebaid*'s omniscient narrator. This creates a sense of tragic irony: the external readers are granted a higher level of knowledge than the internal viewers. They are able to recognise that the images are actually a sign of past and future misfortune, while the internal viewers can only misunderstand them, since they do not have access to the fuller picture. Statius' blending of a number of varients, and his specfic targetting of Pindar, who attempted to cannonise his particular version of the myth, raises questions about the ownership of myth and narrative. Who gets to define what elements of a myth are "true", when different accounts clash? Nobody and everybody is the answer. Mythic narratives are subject to manipulation.[123] But the same is true for narratives of identity for individuals – even bronze cannot pin down an eternal reputation. These ancestral ekphrases do not only reveal that public image is a carefully constructed identity, but also demonstrate how difficult it is to maintain control over the discourse about oneself.

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[123] Within reason at least. See e.g. Burgess (2006) p156 on a discussion of limitations on altering myths.

Ancestral Monuments and Roman Society

The realism of these ancestral images would have evoked cultural parallels with Statius' Roman audience. Lovatt's analysis of the ekphrasis of Book 6 suggests that they do not correspond to an individual ancient custom, but seem to mingle types of images from various parts of Greek and Roman culture.[124] As we have already seen, the Romans had a culture of emulation. Statues of ancestors and civic heroes were pervasively displayed throughout Rome, as ready examples to the current generation.

Adrastus' images introduced the funeral games for Opheltes, which instituted the tradition of the Greek Nemean games. This makes Statius' games culturally ambiguous: Statius' first event at the games is the Roman chariot race, but set in a Greek institution. Therefore in one respect, the statues are reminiscent of Greek ritual of processions before games, and also the Roman equivalent, the *pompa circensis*. Like Adrastus' images, the Greek parade would include statues of both gods and royal ancestors. Similarly by the Augustan age, statues of members of the imperial family, and later deceased emperors, had become an addition to the parade.[125]

But, assuming the artworks described in Book 6 are the same as those in Adrastus' atria in Book 2, the same group of ancestral images also recall the *imagines* present in Roman atria.[126] They were also associated with a funerary context.[127] They would be taken out of the houses and join the funeral cortèges of a deceased family member, similar to the way that the statues from Adrastus' halls reappear in Book 6 shortly after Opheltes' funeral.[128] These *imagines* were otherwise constantly on display in the public part of the house, with an attached *titulus* listing the individual's public achievements. Each individual *imago* would act as a reminder of the honour that person brought to the family and a source of inspiration to the current family members.

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[124] Lovatt (2007) p74-7; and 83-5: Statius "does not allow the reader the luxury of knowing where they are".

[125] Lovatt (2005) p74-5 objects to directly identifying Adrastus' images with the *pompa circensis* because the latter only included gods and not mortals such as Tantalus, Pelops or Io. However, Arena (2009) gives examples of occasions when members of the imperial family were present.

[126] This is not a feature of Greek culture, for the Greeks neither kept ancestral statues in their homes, nor did they even have atria: *atriis Graeci quia non utuntur, neque aedificant* (Vitr. *De Arch.* 6.7.1).

[127] There is evidence to show that actors donned the masks and imitated the habits of the ancestor. See Flower (1996) p91-127.

[128] Though these processions of *imagines* normally occur before the cremation, Adrastus' images come after. Moreover, there is still the problem that these are not the ancestors of Opheltes, but of Adrastus.

Related to the *imagines* were assemblies of statues on show in public spaces. For example, Augustus' collection of statues in his eponymous forum has been connected with the *imagines*. They display both his "own" ancestors[129] and notable Roman heroes, who had won triumphs, with descriptions of their public careers (although the two groups were carefully distinguished and set in opposite sides of the forum).[130] Augustus' own explanation for choosing these statues was to set a standard for himself and later rulers to be measured against (Suet. *Aug*. 31.5).

Naturally of course, not every ancestor can live up to the ideological expectations of Roman society and become a positive model to be emulated by their descendants. In these situations, there were strategies to deal with the family members who had achieved nothing notable in their career, or whose personal scandals brought embarrassment to the family image. Flower shows that family groups could apply their own memory sanctions, when an ancestor "no longer fit in with the general picture of family history".[131] This was, in effect, a privately decided form of the *damnatio memoriae*, whereby images of problematic ancestors would be removed from public display in the house.[132]

We might wonder why Crotopus, a heartless father who ordered the execution of his own daughter, is missing from the ancestral display, even though Adrastus has already confirmed that he was a past king of Argos in his internal narrative. Coroebus, however, from the same narrative, is present, even though he is not a member of Adrastus' family.[133] Perhaps this replicates the quiet removal of an ancestor's image from display, because Crotopus does not fit in with Adrastus' projected message of family unity. Instead Adrastus replaces him with a general national hero, whose actions are to be admired.

Moreover, there is a discrepancy between the way that Coroebus is portrayed in the artwork and Adrastus' original narrative.[134] On the image, Coroebus is portrayed in a

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[129] Mostly from the Julii family, into which he was adopted, rather than the Octavii family. The ancestors also stretched back into the mythical past.

[130] See Flower (1996) p224-36 on similarities between the statues of Augustus' forum and *imagines*; see Pandey (2014) who links the ancestral parade of *Aeneid* Book 6 (reminiscent of parades of *imagines*) to Augustus' forum statues; see Rosivach (1980) p149-50 on combining statues of ancestors and national heroes outside public temples.

[131] Flower (2006) p55; and 56.

[132] Flower (1996) p55-60.

[133] Shackleton Bailey (2003a) p83 n.62 and p111 n.26 considers this a mistake on Statius' part, and that Crotopus is meant when Statius says Coroebus, but this seems unlikely given that both characters have already featured in the narrative proving that Statius is quite capable of distinguishing between the two characters. See also Gervais (2013) on line 221.

[134] See Heuvel (1932) *ad loc* and Gervais (2017) *ad loc*.

triumphant, heroic pose, bearing the head of the snaky monster, Poene, on his sword: *nudoque ferens caput ense Coroebus* (2.221). But Adrastus had previously claimed that Coroebus had stabbed the monster in the breast (*ferrumque ingens sub pectore duro / condidit*, 1.613-4) and the head of the dead monster was then crushed into a pulp by the angry citizens ([*hi*]…*asprosque molares / deculcare genis*, (1.622-3). The reputations and histories regarding one's ancestors' could be "embellished" in Roman funerary eulogies.[135] Facts could be changed, or sometimes even outright invented, to make an individual's achievements sound more impressive. Coroebus' inconsistent pose as he kills Poene demonstrates the flexibility of facts even between two of Adrastus' own narratives (verbal and visual).[136] What did happen, and what did not? The reader cannot know. Through this, Adrastus' statues draw attention to the artificial nature of narratives of family history. They are constructed in a certain way to demonstrate a particular message about the family. Artworks celebrating an individual become a vehicle of *fama* (as *kleos*), as they attempt to fix down the version of the narrative that they want told, in a lasting, physical form. But the nature of *Fama* means that there can never be a definitive form of a narrative and an individual's reputation is always under threat by other counter-narratives.

I would like to end this section by looking at an artwork from real life. In particular, Relief B of the so-called Cancelleria Reliefs. This relief forms one of a pair,[137] and probably dates to a later part of Domitian's reign.[138] The image on the relief has much in common with Adrastus' ancestral artworks. Like Adrastus' images, it depicts an unfolding scene. As has been generally agreed, the scene commemorates Vespasian's return to Rome after his civil war victory in July 69AD. In the image, Domitian hands over his temporary control over the city back to his father. The scene displays a message of trust between the father and son: the two men face each other in the focal point of the relief, and Vespasian stretches out his right hand towards Domitian. The pair are framed by divinities, and personified abstractions of virtues and of Rome, in a show of divine consent for Vespasian's assumption of control from his son. Their position in a gathering

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[135] Flower (2006) p55-60; See Flower (1996) p145-50 on Cic. *Brut.* 62 and Livy 8.40.3-5.

[136] See O'Hara (2007) on reading inconsistencies in narratives meaninfully, as opposed to mistakes.

[137] Along with Relief A, a depiction of Nerva embarking or returning on a military expedition. This relief is also interesting in terms of our discussion, because the general consensus is that Nerva's face has actually been recarved from Domitian's after his *Damnatio Memoriae*. History is rewritten by editing the artwork.

[138] Simon (1960) dates it to 92AD.

of gods highlights their own divine nature. Moreover, their father-son relationship is emphasised through a similarity in their facial features.[139] Thus we see similarities in theme to Adrastus' statues: successful transference of power, association with the divine, and family unity.

However, as many have noted, the harmonious scene is at odds with the ancient historical narrative.[140] Tacitus records that Vespasian was forced to hurry back to the city and seize control from his son because of reports about Domitian's mismanagement of affairs in Rome and his unnecessary military campaigns, which he had begun because of an apparent youthful compulsion to prove himself (Tac. *Hist*. 4.51-52). Moreover, Dio's version of events shows that upon meeting Domitian again, he reprimanded his son to deflate his growing pride (Dio Cass. 65.9.3-10.1). And Suetonius indicates that Vespasian's heavy-handed parenting after this incident involved publicly degrading Domitian, by separating Domitian's status from Titus' and his own (Suet. *Dom.* 2.1).

It would seem that this representation on the relief, coming late in Domitian's reign, is designed to combat unflattering rumours surrounding the event. Whichever version of the narrative about the event is more accurate, whether it was a harmonious reunion of father and son, or an occasion for censure, is now impossible to answer.[141] Nor is it particularly important. However, it does give us a neat parallel for Adrastus' strategy on dealing with rogue narratives about his family. Domitian and Adrastus both release officially sanctioned versions of events about their family in pictorial form, as they would like their subjects to understand it. However, as the historical record has shown us, there is no guarantee of success in this endeavour.

Parthenopaeus: a Cultural Symbol of Youth and Beauty

Parthenopaeus has always been one of the more popular characters in the *Thebaid*, through antiquity into modern scholarship. The reception of Statius' Parthenopaeus can be found almost immediately in the contemporary literarure. Martial, for example, undoubtedly influenced by the *Thebaid*, refers to Parthenopaeus four times: first, as a kind of proverbial young man (6.77.2); then as a comparison to a beautiful boy about to go to war (9.56.8); then as an example of the type of mythic subject-matter (among

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[139] Varner (2004) p119-120.
[140] Newlands (2002) p14-15, following Richmond (1969) p224 and Simon (1960) p151.
[141] Jones (1992), for instance, argues for a harmonious reunion, p17-18.

others) that he does not write about (10.4.3); and finally he parodies Parthenopaeus, by reassigning the name to a school-boy feigning a cough to get sweets (11.86.2; 11.86.6). The popularity of Parthenopaeus' character-type is also evident through imitation. For example, Silius' young Podaetus, rashly eager for war (14.492-515), as well as Statius' own Achilles from the *Achilleid*, recalls many features of Parthenopaeus.[142]

Elsewhere too, Statius himself shows that he has a particular fondness for Parthenopaeus. The *Thebaid*'s narrative ends with a triple lament to the Arcadian boy (*Arcada*, 12.805-7), which brings a final note of pathos to the poem. In his *Silvae* too, there are two references to his character, both by name (2.6.43) and antonomastically (5.2.122). In fact, these two references to Parthenopaeus are the only mentions of any of the Seven in the *Silvae*.[143]

Parthenopaeus has received much attention in modern scholarship too. More recent contributions have focussed on the intertextual components that make up his character: namely elements modelled on the various doomed Virgilian *Heldenknaben*.[144] I wish to add to the discussion by examining not just how the author constructs Parthenopaeus' character on intertextual models, but how the boy himself tries to construct a heroic identity for himself in the eyes of his peers. Of all the *Thebaid*'s characters, Parthenopaeus is probably the one who most evidently (under)performs his heroic identity. This is because the tough-guy image he creates for himself clearly does not match up to his abilities, and is undermined by his appearance. His distinguishing traits are that he is the youngest and most beautiful member of the Seven (4.251-2), which are consistently reinforced in his three major appearances in the poem.[145] Even the internal characters, who see his performance, regularly fail to recognise him as anything other than a handsome boy, despite his efforts. Moreover, Parthenopaeus is at heart a creature from the pastoral world. His impatience to leave his sylvan roots makes him a hunter in war – always a bad sign.[146] For the external audience, his youthful eagerness for war is translated into a dangerous naivety that leads him to his death.

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[142] On Parthenopaeus' popularity in antiquity see Dewar (1991) pxxxiv-xxxvii.
[143] Aside from the adjectival form of Adrastus, *Adrasteus* (*Silv.* 1.1.52), which describes his horse, Arion, rather than the man himself.
[144] Most recently on Parthenopaeus' "composite" character: Seo (2013); but on Parthenopaeus see also: Vessey (1973) p66, 201-4, 218-9, 298-302; Ahl (1986) p2900, 2905; Hardie (1990a); Dewar (1991) on 9.683-711; Dominik (1994) p102-3, 115, 125; Lovatt (2005) p55-79, 189-90, 235-6; McNelis (2007) p82, 137-40; Coffee (2009a) p236-40.
[145] His first introduction in the catalogue (4.246-308); his participation in the foot-race at the funeral games (6.550-645); his aristeia and death-scene (9.683ff.).
[146] See e.g. Moorton (1989) p115-18.

This discussion will first examine the intratextual evidence for his character: the methods and reasoning behind his own self-presentation; the reactions that he evokes from others; and his mother's undermining of his carefully constructed persona, and usurpation of his warrior image. His heroic identity is further compromised by comparison with some Vergilian examples. Then I will examine an intertextual model for Parthenopaeus' interaction with his mother that has not been recognised before: Telemachus with his parents, Penelope and Odysseus. The contrast between how the two boys interact with their parents will underscore Parthenopaeus' failure to mature into an adult, epic hero.

Mother and Son

Parthenopaeus' status as an immature youth is emphasised by the presence of his mother. But the boy's relationship with his mother is an uncomfortable one. As we have seen, epic idealises the paradigm of sons growing up into capable heroes by learning from the example of their fathers. But Atalanta is the only parent to Parthenopaeus: his father is never mentioned in the poem.[147] His father's absence and his mother's solitary influence is highlighted by Statius' reference to him with the matronymic *Atalantiades* (9.789). This breaks from the expectation of an epic warrior, where the male heroes are identified with their fathers through patronymics. Unlike Polynices, who deliberately avoids announcing his relationship with his father in favour of his mother, Parthenopaeus cannot help but be identified with his mother.[148] We will see that, for the most part, he will strive to create a heroic identity separate from hers. Parthenopaeus is particularly self-conscious of his own image, and of how other characters perceive him. He wishes to present himself as a 'proper' epic hero, and not the boy that he is. But several things hinder him from achieving this: his youthful physical appearance, and his close relationship with his mother makes him seem especially young to the other characters. For example, when his mother comes to publicly tell him off for joining the army without her permissison, his status is immediately reduced to a child. In order to fashion himself as a heroic warrior then, he would have to break off the boyish attachment to his mother.

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[147] See Parkes (2009b) for a discussion on the Statian allusions to Parthenopaeus' different fathers across the various traditions. This single parent motif is shared by Camilla, one of Parthenopaeus' Vergilian models, who was brought up only by her father.
[148] McAuley (2015) p378-83.

However, his mother's influence clings to him in two ways. Firstly, she is present in his physical attributes. As Atalanta states, Parthenopaeus' prepubescent face looks just like her own: *exspecta.../...dum...vultus...recedunt / ore mei* (4.335-7).[149] Here, Statius takes full advantage of possible etymologies for Parthenopaeus' name: maiden-faced or maiden-boy.[150] Parthenopaeus' face looks like his mother's, hence fulfilling the former etymology of his name (maiden-faced). But also by looking like his mother, who has already been portrayed with an androgynous face in her previous literary incarnations,[151] the second possible etymology of his name comes into play (maiden-boy). Parthenopaeus' very name reinforces the fact that he has inherited her likeness. As we will see, much of Parthenopaeus' difficulties in presenting himself as an adult warrior will be negotiated through his ambiguously gendered actions and appearance. *Virtus*, literally 'manliness', is the marker of heroism for a Roman hero. Parthenopaeus' youth and effeminate qualities prevent him from achieving this quality. The very meanings of his name presents Parthenopaeus with a problem of nominative determinism. He cannot be recognised as a *vir* like the other heroes.

In addition to inheriting his mother's face, Parthenopaeus has also clearly inherited his blonde hair from his mother. This is never explicitly stated in the way that Atalanta remarked about the facial features, but the audience is encouraged to make the connection. There are strong verbal resemblances and parallel depictions of Atalanta's and Parthenopaeus' hair. As she runs to chastise her son for joining the war, Atalanta's long blonde hair streams behind her: *fugit.../.../ qualis erat, correpta sinus et **vertice flavum** / **crinem sparsa Noto*** (4.312-5). This picture is reflected in Parthenopaeus when he runs in the footrace: ***flavus** ab intonso pendebat **vertice crinis** / Arcados.../.../.../ tunc **liber nexu lateque in terga solutus** / occursu **Zephyri** retro fugit* (6.607-13). Both characters have their blonde hair sprouting from the top of the head described with the same three words (*vertice flavum / crinem*, 4.315; *flavus...vertice crinis*, 6.607); Parthenopaeus' free flowing hair (*liber nexu lateque in terga solutus*, 6.611) responds to Atalanta's (which is *sparsa*, 4.4.315); and in both cases, the winds that cause the hair to stream are given their poetic names (*Noto*, 4.315; *Zephyri,* 6.613).[152]

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[149] A motif that is repeated for Achilles in the *Achilleid*: *plurima vultu / mater inest* (*Ach*. 1.164-5).

[150] Hardie (1990a) p11; Hardie (1993) p48; Micozzi (2007) on 247-8.

[151] *talis erat cultu, facies, quam dicere vere / virgineam in puero, puerilem in virgine possis* (Ov. *Met.* 8.322-3).

[152] Parthenopaeus' hair appears prominently on several occasions: Idas cheats Parthenopaeus of his victory in the footrace for example, because he pulls Parthenopaeus back by his blonde hair (6.607-

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Parthenopaeus has not just inherited the appearance of his mother as she runs, but also her ability to run fast. This connection between the two is made explicit by the internal characters. Parthenopaeus is forced into the foot-race during the funeral games for Opheltes by the Argive spectators, simply because his mother was also known for her running:

> nota parens cursu; quis Maenaliae Atalantes
>
> nesciat egregium decus et vestigia cunctis
>
> indeprensa procis? Onerat celeberrima natum
>
> mater et ipse procul fama iam notus inermes
>
> narratur cervas pedes inter aperta Lycaei
>
> tollere et emissum cursu deprendere telum.

<div align="center">(6.563-68)</div>

Atalanta has a famous reputation, and her celebrity influences how other characters perceive Parthenopaeus. The narrator emphasises Atalanta's wide-spread fame with the formula, *quis.../ nesciat?* (6.563-4). This phrase recalls the beginning of Vergil's third Book of the *Georgics*, where he laments how well-known the traditional subject-matters for poetry already are.[153] This sentence has obvious meta-literary connotations, and so the internal Argive characters' knowledge of Atalanta parallels the external audience's familiarity with the rich literary past of Atalanta.[154] Both will judge Parthenopaeus using his mother as a standard. But the wording also recalls Jupiter's words from Book 1, as he lists the faults of the Argive race (*quis funera Cadmi / nesciat…*, 1.227-8), as well as Adrastus' response to Polynices' allusive reference to the sins of Oedipus (*quid nota recondis?*, 1.681). While the other heroes are hampered by the crimes of their ancestors, and are trying to supress what is public knowledge, Parthenopaeus is burdened by his mother's positive reputation and tries to dissociate himself from it. He does not benefit from his association with his mother in the way that he wants, but in fact finds it a burden (*onerat*). As we see from the passage, Parthenopaeus has his own reputation (*fama*, 6.566) as a runner, but it comes secondarily to his mother's. Her running ability is used as an implied explanation for his own skills. Parthenopaeus,

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17); and the motif of his hair returns later in the poem at his death, when he asks Dorceus, his attendant, to bring a shorn lock of his hair back to his mother in place of his body (9.900-2). See Seo (2013) p138-41.

[153] *quis aut Eurysthea durum / aut inlaudati nescit Busiridis aras?* (Verg. *Georg*. 3.4-5).

[154] On Atalanta's past literary representations see Lovatt (2005) p77; Parkes (2009b) p24.

however, is more determined on shedding the attachment with his mother, and achieving glory by his own independence than from using her status to bolster his own, as heroes typically do with their fathers.

When Parthenopaeus finally achieves his desire of fighting in the war, Statius compares him to a lion cub, venturing from his den for the first time and enjoying the freedom away from his mother and the chance to hunt on his own:

> ut leo, cui parvo mater Gaetula cruentos
>
> suggerit ipsa cibos, cum primum crescere sensit
>
> colla iubis torvusque novos respexit ad ungues,
>
> indignatur ali, tandemque effusus apertos
>
> liber amat campos et nescit in antra reverti.

<div align="center">(9.739-43)</div>

This simile is in dialogue with Parthenopaeus' first extended description in Book 4. Like the lion, Parthenopaeus had left his native Arcadia while his mother was out hunting (4.246-50). The cub's first signs of a mane, recalls Parthenopaeus whose beard has not yet started to show (4.274), and its desire to hunt for itself represents the boy's desire to kill in the war (4.263-4). The scenes closely interact with each other across the text, and Parthenopaeus' desire to be independent of his mother is a sustained and constant motif throughout his major appearances.

However, his endeavours for independence are complicated by his attachment to his mother. For example, he bears the image of his mother's Calydonian boar-hunt on his shield: *imbelli parma pictus Calydonia matris / proelia* (4.267-8). Why Statius describes the shield as *imbelli* is not entirely clear. Lactantius suggests that it is because the shield has never been used in war before, and Parkes also adds that the hunting motif, though described as *proelia*, is not representative of true warfare.[155] Nonetheless, the 'unwarlike' nature of the shield also acts as a transferred epithet and reflects onto Parthenopaeus himself.[156] Clearly the image of his mother's victory over the Calydonian boar is used in an attempt to suggest to other characters that he too has the same skills as his mother; however, it will be made increasingly clear to the audience that these hunting-skills are the wrong skills required for warfare. In any case, his mother reveals that his hunting-skills are not equal to hers anyway (4.322-4), highlighting how unprepared Parthenopaeus

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[155] Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*
[156] Micozzi (2007) *ad loc*.

is for the expedition. There are similarities with Tydeus, who actually dons the hide of the Calydonian boar, even though, as we have seen, its slaughter had nothing to do with him. Both characters try to present themselves as formidable warriors, by showing off the achievements of their family members.

In Book 9 too, Parthenopaeus reveals his pride in having Atalanta as his mother. He is insulted by Amphion, who accuses him of being too young for warfare (9.779-87), but he retorts with a proud description of his hardy upbringing, and a comparison between his mother's martial nature (with its implied associations of masculinity) and the Thebans' effeminate Bacchic rites (9.790-800).[157] Through these we see the tension between Parthenopaeus and his mother; on one hand he tries to join the war and achieve greatness by his own efforts, independent of his mother, and on the other hand his identity, as perceived both by other characters and himself, is inextricably tied in with his mother's.

Trying to Look the Part of a Hero

Here we will examine the strategies Parthenopaeus takes to cultivate a heroic appearance for his peers. We have seen how Parthenopaeus is hampered in his attempts to present himself as a 'proper' warrior because his physical appearance brings to mind too many associations of his mother. The failure to emerge from his mother's shadow in the eyes of others emphasises the fact that he is still a boy. But just as he was burdened by his mother's appearance, he also happens to be 'burdened' with remarkably good looks. He is the most attractive participant in the war (4.251). Beauty is a feature that is often found in epic warrior-youths more generally, but it often carries with it a sense of fragility.[158] Parthenopaeus' beauty draws the erotic attention of nymphs, both Argive and Theban (4.254-5; 9.709-11), and even Diana forgave Atalanta for the transgression of bearing a child (4.256-9), because she was charmed by the sight of the infant Parthenopaeus (*puerum cum vidit*, 4.255).[159] He also elicits a homoerotic fascination from

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[157] Words which ominously echo Numanus' speech to the Trojans, to which Ascanius responds by killing him. The situation is reversed in the *Thebaid*, and it is the youth Parthenopaeus who makes the accusations of effeminacy, as opposed to the more experienced Amphion, who only taunts Parthenopaeus because of his youth. This intertext is discussed in greater detail below.

[158] See Fowler (1987).

[159] Parkes (2012) on 4.258 notes the surprising aspect of Diana's behaviour. In complete contrast to Statius' approach, the past tradition had made the goddess Artemis hostile to Parthenopaeus, exactly because he was the result of Atalanta's transgression (Eur. *Ph.* 151). Another version of the myth

all the other male warriors in the Argive army, who stare uncontrollably at his naked body as he prepares to run in the foot-race (6.571-3).[160]

However, although such beauty allows him to win favour from both divinities and men, Parthenopaeus repeatedly takes no pleasure from their praise of beauty and actively rejects it: *ipse tamen formae laudem aspernatur et arcet / mirantes* (6.574-5); *nec formae sibi laude placet* (9.704). This is the wrong kind of *laus* he desires: he does not wish to be known as a beautiful boy, but instead he wants to be known for his martial ability. He is insecure over being considered as an object of beauty, in an army of more experienced soldiers.[161]

In order to draw the distinction between his mother and himself, and to make himself look the part of the epic warrior instead of the ephebic youth, Parthenopaeus makes (or at least attempts to make) aesthetic changes to himself and to his horse to alter his own overall appearance. The detailed descriptions of Parthenopaeus in the military parade (4.265-74) and while at war (9.683-711) portray his armour as being overly showy, with plenty of references to gold, purple, and jewels. I suggest that Parthenopaeus overcompensates for his lack of military experience, with a lavish display of external accoutrements, in order to make himself look grand (or, at least, his own naïve idea of grandness). The reader, however, recognises that he is completely inappropriately dressed for battle.[162]

In the catalogue, his gold and purple dress makes him conspicuous: *igneus ante omnes auro micat, igneus ostro* (4.265). Even the ties of his cloak have been dipped in a

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records that Parthenopaeus was given his name, because he was abandoned by his mother on Mount Parthenion, in order to hide from Artemis the fact that she had lost her virginity (Hyg. *Fab*. 99). Statius rejects this account too, through the mouth of Atalanta, as she addresses Diana: *nec mihi secretis culpam occultare sub antris / cura, sed ostendi prolem posuique trementem / ante tuos confessa pedes* (9.617-9); see Micozzi (2007) on 4.247-8. In addition, there are parallels between the myths of Atalanta and Ovid's Callisto (who was also an attendant of Artemis/Diana, but was punished when she lost her chastity and bore a child), which makes Statius' presentation of an intimate relationship with Parthenopaeus all the more surprising. Statius plays on the audience's expectations when he says the words: *ignouisse ferunt comiti* (4.258). She *could have been* that angry goddess that we expect, but Parthenopaeus' charming appearance prevents her from becoming so; which in turn, reveals to us how beautiful Parthenopaeus is.

[160] Lovatt (2005) p62-5. Cf. the beautiful body of Vergil's Euryalus, who also runs in a root-race.

[161] Parkes (2012) on lines 4.246-404, notes the hardiness of the Arcadians, which contrasts sharply with Parthenopaeus' character. Compare also Tydeus, who instead takes pride in physical scars, not a natural beauty, as proof of his martial prowess: *Oeniden, hilarem bello notisque decorum / vulneribus* (4.113-4).

[162] In the *Thebaid*, extravagant dress is a common signal that young warriors are out of place in warfare: see Smolenaars (1994) p293-6, on the character of Eunaeus and other parallels in the *Thebaid* and earlier epics.

luxurious, foreign dye.[163] His quiver too is particularly ornate, made out of the precious materials, electrum and jasper (4.269-70). All this flashy equipment is an attempt to draw attention away from his personal appearance to his armour, the symbols of his warrior status. Yet he fails nonetheless, for no one takes notice of his armour; instead when he blushes sweetly (*dulce rubens*, 4.274), it is his natural youthful cheeks that are 'worthy to be looked at' (*uiridique genas spectabilis aeuo*, 4.274). The unconscious act of blushing is effeminising, and betrays his manly warrior-image.[164]

His later appearance in Book 9 describes his luxurious armour in a similar manner: his cloak has been dipped into purple dye twice (9.690); his tunic (the only piece of clothing his unfeminine mother has woven) is made of gold (9.691-2); he has a gold brooch (9.694-5), the shininess of which is emphasised with the additional detail on its polished teeth, *tereti...morsu* (9.694); and 'the brightness of his helmet is studded with gems', *pictum gemmis galeae iubar* (9.699).[165] Statius makes an effort to reveal the artifice behind these items with the words, *bis*, *tereti*, and *pictum*. The carefully constructed items are parts of the wider construction of Parthenopaeus' image. But a word like *tereti*, with its connotations of softness and effeminacy, undoes Parthenopaeus' intentions of making himself look more warrior-like. The additional epithet in the narration, like those in the ekphrasis of Adrastus' family, subverts Parthenopaeus' idealised image. Moreover, the last piece of description of the overtly shiny helmet comes with ominous overtones: it recalls the death of Euryalus, one of Parthenopaeus' major intertextual models, who was spotted and killed at night, because he had taken a helmet (also a *galea*) for a war-trophy, which betrayed his position to the enemy because of its shininess (*galea.../...radiisque adversa refulsit*, Verg. *Aen.* 9.373-4).

His horse too, which is used to hunting only (4.271), is given a makeover in both scenes. It wears jewellery, a necklace made of snow-coloured ivory, *niveo lunata monilia dente* (9.689).[166] Moreover, matching his master's extravagant armour, the horse is

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[163] See Parkes (2012) on 4.265, who argues against Mozley's and Shackleton Bailey's understanding of *nodis...Hibernis* as metal studs.

[164] See Lateiner (1996) p236, and n19, on the blush as an involuntary act of emotional "leakage". Cf. Horsfall (1979) p327 on blushing as a threat to conventional masculinity.

[165] The odd phrasing seems to imply that the material of the helmet itself is so bright that the gems, instead of adding to the overall brightness of the helmet, create patches which are less brilliant.

[166] The description *niveo...dente* might also have ominous connotations. The necklace bounces on the horse's chest (*pectore*, 9.688). As Parthenopaeus dies, we are told: *ibat pupureus niveo de pectore sanguis* (9.883). The epithet *niveo* is transferred to Parthenopaeus' own breast, and is stained by the purple blood. This is a common image that overlaps with an oft repeated simile of staining pale ivory (usually referred to with *ebur*, but here *dentes*) as a symbol of the loss and violation of virginity (on

covered (*velatum*) by not one but two lynx-hide coverings in the parade (4.272).[167] Similarly in battle, a tiger skin with gilded claws covers (*ambit*) the horse instead (9.685-6). The words *velatum* and *ambit* suggest that the pelts envelope the body of the horse, and therefore becomes a kind of mask for the horse. The inexperienced horse is symbolically transformed into more fearsome creatures. These horse-trappings reflect Parthenopaeus' attempt to cover up his natural appearance with flashy weapons and armour.

Of course, exquisite armour and horse-trappings are not unfamiliar in a martial epic: weapons made of precious material can add an element of grandeur. However, Parthenopaeus misjudges the contextual use of these. They tend to appear in non-combative scenes; a desire for ostentatious armour in battle often leads to tragedy.[168] As Horsfall notes, in reality, equipment made from soft metals, like gold or silver, would be impractical for physical battle, but is more suitable for ceremonial purposes, like parades and as decorative gifts to both gods and men.[169] There seems to be an implicit awareness of this in the *Aeneid*: Aeneas' two hosts in Italy, Latinus and Evander, both cement their friendship with Aeneas and the Trojans by giving gifts of horses. To each of Aeneas' ambassadors, Latinus gives a horse which is equipped with purple, embroidered coverings, and golden trappings:

> omnibus extemplo Teucris iubet ordine duci
>
> instratos **ostro** alipedes pictisque tapetis;
>
> **aurea** pectoribus demissa **monilia** pendent,
>
> tecti **auro fulvum** mandunt sub dentibus **aurum**.
>
> (*Aen*. 7.276-79)

Evander's present to Aeneas, is a horse covered in the pelt of a lion:

> ducunt exsortem Aeneae, quem **fulva leonis**
>
> **pellis obit totum**, praefulgens **unguibus aureis**.

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which, see Fowler (1987). The ivory necklace on the chest of the horse reflects Parthenopaeus' own ephebic and vulnerable nature.

[167] I follow the interpretation of Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*, who cites Wijsman (1996) on Val. Fl.'s *Arg.* 5.348, that *geminae* refers to two separate lynx hides, as opposed to the twin colouring of the fur. See Kitchell Jr. (2014), *s.v.* lynx, for the lynx's association with the pastoral world and hunting.

[168] Divinely made weapons are another matter, e.g. Achilles' amour is made of bronze, tin, gold, and silver (Hom. *Il.* 18.474-5), and Aeneas' greaves are made from electrum and gold (Verg. *Aen.* 8.624).

[169] Horsfall (2000): on 7.278-9, 7.634, 7.639, 7.790.

Here we see the similar motifs of eye-catching gold and purple associated with Parthenopaeus and his horse in the *Thebaid*, as well as the ornaments, the *monilia*, and the animal hide covering (a lion here, but also with gilded claws). However, when battle commences in the *Aeneid*, there is little mention of trappings on horses. Decorative pieces for horses should be limited to ceremonial events and not used in battle.

But as well as horses, the *Aeneid* warns that people should wear appropriate dress in battle. In the cavalry-battle in Book 11, the only references to overly flashy equipment for either horses or men are localised to the character of Chloreus and his horse (11.768-77).[171] The emphasis on his outfit marks it out as unusual to what the other warriors are wearing.[172] Chloreus himself wears exotically dyed, or patterned clothes, and all kinds of golden equipment (11.768-777). His horse too wears a covering of bronze and gold armour (*equum, quem pellis aënis / in plumam squamis auro conserta tegebat*, 11.770-1), by which Hardie has identified him as an oriental cataphract, a type of armoured heavy cavalry.[173] But instead of keeping him safe, the splendour of Chloreus and his horses' outfit attracts the attention of Camilla, putting him in danger.

Parthenopaeus' flashy clothing is just as unfitting in battle as Chloreus'. His usually nimble horse must readapt: it is forced to act more like Chloreus' heavily armoured war horse, dressed in flashy coverings and putting up with the heavier weight of its master's armour (4.273). He has chosen a poor model for himself. But Parthenopaeus' appearance also reminds us of another 'hunter'. It recalls Dido's hunting outfit: in Book 4 of the *Aeneid* she was dressed in an embroidered cloak, a gold quiver, a gold hairband, and a gold clasp on her purple tunic (4.136-39), who, like Chloreus, ended up being 'hunted' herself, in a deer simile (4.69-73).[174] Everything about Parthenopaeus' appearance seems unnatural in a war-setting. While Parthenopaeus' choice of outfit might be suitable for the ceremonial parade in Book 4, certainly he should have switched to

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[170] Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*

[171] Thus, like Camilla (also a main player in the cavalry-battle), he forms yet another model for Parthenopaeus. See Vessey (1973) p298; Hardie (1990a) p12; Dewar (1991) pxxxi; Micozzi (2007) p212.

[172] See West (1959) p27-8, on Chloreus' as a display of Trojan "weakness". See Fratantuono (2007) p345-6, on Chloreus as "the worst Troy has to offer", and his being out of place on the battlefield (along with Camilla).

[173] Hardie (1997) p50.

[174] Though her critics have said that her dress was inappropriate even for hunting, a far more casual engagement than battle. See e.g. Gildenhard (2012) *ad loc.*

some more practical equipment for the battle in Book 9. He wants people to recognise him as a hero, but, lacking in actualy heroic experience, he overcompensates through his appearance and sacrifices practicalities for it.

Parthenopaeus hopes that entering battle will also provide further opportunities to make himself look more warrior-like. The narrator reveals his internal desires to hear the war-trumpets, to dirty his blonde hair in the dust, and to bring back a horse taken from an enemy: *tubas audire calens et pulvere belli / flaventem sordere comam captoque referri / hostis equo* (4.261-3). Parthenopaeus remains hopeful that he can disguise his youthful appearance and hide his lack of experience. By dirtying his hair with dust, he covers up the blonde colour of his hair. We have already seen how his own blonde hair is a cause for anxiety for him, because of its association with his mother. This act would disguise the similarity in their appearance and distance himself from her. Dirtied hair is part of the heroic costume to Parthenopaeus, and so it would make him look like a more capable warrior.[175] But Parthenopaeus' horse too, whose appearance he also puts effort into changing,[176] is a source of embarrassment for him, since it too had never been in battle (4.271-4), just as he feels ashamed of his arrows, which likewise have not been used to kill in battle (4.263-4).

Atalanta: Undermining the Heroic Look

However, despite these different methods to appear as a fierce warrior, it is his mother who undermines his performance. She completely deflates Parthenopaeus' attempts to make himself look impressive by running into the military parade unexpectedly and berating her son in front of all his men (4.309ff.).

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[175] However, Parthenopaeus' desire to dirty his hair with dust shows a naïve misunderstanding of what the act represents: while the act can confer honour on a warrior as proof of battle or physical activity (e.g. Horace *Odes* 1.8.4), it is also has negative associations of a warrior's death (e.g. Hector's hair is dragged through the dust as he is pulled behind Achilles' chariot, *Il.* 22.401-5), and mourning (e.g. Menzetius dirties his hair upon hearing of the death of Lausus, *Aen.* 10.844). See Sanna (2008) p204; and Parkes (2012) on 4.261-2. In these two examples, the dead warrior causes great grief to their parents: Priam and Hecuba lament as they watch Achilles' abuse of Hector's body (*Il.* 22.405-8), and Menzetius mouns his son. Atalanta will soon have to suffer at the death of her son too. The hopes of returning on a captured horse also has negative associations: Hector had also expressed a wish that Astyanax would return with captured spoils that would never come true. See Micozzi (2007) on 4.261-3.

[176] Despite wishing to exchange it, Parthenopaeus does care deeply for his horse. This is made apparent when the dying Parthenopaeus, in his boyish innocence, is initially more concerned for his horse than for himself (*heu simplex aetas*, *moriensque iacentem / flebat equum*, 9.878-9).

Her perspective of her son is very different from the one he has of himself. Acting as an earlier counterpart to the lion-cub simile describing Parthenopaeus venturing into war for the first time (9.739-43),[177] was a tigress simile describing Atalanta as she chases after Parthenopaeus (4.315-6). In the eyes of the concerned mother, her son has not left of his own will, as in the latter simile, but because he has been passively stolen, *raptis...natis* (4.315) by a 'robber-horse', *praedatoris equi* (4.316). However, when Parthenopaeus and his contingent were introduced into the catalogue, the narrative is focalised through Parthenopaeus' perspective: he saw himself as the active participant, *tu quoque Parrhasias...catervas / ... / Parthenopaee, rapis* (4.246-8). But the mother's fear is proved true, and the horse 'steals' Parthenopaeus, as it later sweeps him through the enemy battle-lines: *illum* [*Parthenopaeum*]*.../.../venator raptabat equus* (9.683-5). The reference to the horse as *venator...equus* looks back to the phrase *praedatoris equi* from the simile.[178] Atalanta's perspective of Parthenopaeus seems to be the more legitimate one: he does not belong in the war. Agency is taken away from Parthenopaeus in Atalanta and the narrator's perspective, making him seem more helpless. But Parthenopaeus himself does not recognise his own vulnerability until it is far too late, only at the moment of his death, *puerque videtur / et sibi* (9.855-6).

Atalanta also shows up Parthenopaeus with her stern aspect. Though mother and son share common physical features, these produce different effects in the two figures. His mother, in the tigress simile, is compared to an *aspera...tigris* (4.315-6). Additionally, the similar epithet *torva* (4.249; and again in 9.571) is also associated with the warrior-maiden. Atalanta naturally bears a grim and harsh-looking appearance; but Parthenopaeus relies on using external equipment, and has to make a conscious effort to change his facial features to achieve this. Like his mother, Parthenopaeus is also associated with the epithet, *aspera*. But there is a difference in the way that Parthenopaeus' and his mother's epithets are used: the adjective *asper* is never used to describe Parthenopaeus himself, but only in respect to his weapons and armour. The scales of his armour are described as *aspera* in 4.268 and again in 9.695, as well as his arrows, which were given to him by Diana (9.763). However, while in battle, Parthenopaeus furrows his own brow to make his own aspect look 'harsher' (as a way of avoiding the wrong kind of praise for his beauty rather than his military ability): *nec formae sibi laude placet multumque severis /*

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[177] See above.
[178] The description of Parthenopaeus' horse as *venator* again emphasises that Parthenopaeus is an ill-placed hunter in war. Cf. Camilla as *venatrix* (*Aen*. 11.780).

asperat ora minis (9.704-5). However, this works against his wishes instead, and makes him look even more attractive than before: *sed frontis servat honorem / ira decens* (9.705-6). It is only when Parthenopaeus makes an explicit attempt to change his natural appearance that we see the verbal form, *asperat*, used of Parthenopaeus himself.[179] The contrast between his mother's natural sternness and his artificial kind reveals the gap between himself and his mother. While Parthenopaeus has inherited all the features of her beauty, he has inherited nothing of her natural warrior-look, and so has to manufacture a heroic appearance with external paraphernalia.

After arriving at the Argive parade, Atalanta has no qualms about putting down her son, which she does by pointing out his youth (4.319), questioning his ability to lead men to war (4.320-2), and telling an embarrassing story about a past encounter of his with a boar (4.322-7). She rapidly deconstructs Parthenopaeus' self-constructed image, drawing attention first to the fact that Parthenopaeus still looks like her (4.336-7), and secondly to the horses' true nature by going into oddly specific detail about the horse's skin-tone (*maculis...discolor atris / hic...equus*, 4.327-8), when she makes her point that the horse can only do so much to keep him safe. I say 'oddly specific' because, even though such descriptions of mottled horses are not unheard of in epic, such description usually comes from the narrator for descriptive scene-setting purposes.[180] However, Atalanta is not narrating, but an internal character in the scene, and so there is no need for her to scene-set. Instead, Atalanta's detail about the horse's mottled skin is to restore the image of the horse to that of a normal horse, stripping away the pelts of the fierce animals and returning the horse's own to it. This statement therefore supports the point she is trying to make, that her son is not actually ready for war, and brings Parthenopaeus' fantasies back down to reality.

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[179] While *asper* is never used of Parthenopaeus, the adjectives *torvus* and *trux* are. *Torvus* is found in the simile comparing Parthenopaeus to a lion-cub (9.739-43). The cub is *torvus* because it has just reached a stage of physical maturation, and it is revelling in its newfound mane and claws, *cum primum crescere sensit / colla iubis torvusque novos respexit ad ungues* (9.740-1). However, the lion-cub simile is a little mismatched with Parthenopaeus' state, because Parthenopaeus has not yet reached adolescence, for he has explicitly not yet grown facial hair (4.273; 9.701-3), unlike the lion. Thus while the lion can be aptly described as looking *torvus*, Parthenopaeus cannot. With regards to *trux*, the first occasion that we find this word associated with Parthenopaeus is when it is used to describe his arrows (much like how *aspera* is used to describe his armour), but not the boy himself. The second time that Statius uses the word in the context of Parthenopaeus is actually used of Parthenopaeus himself, *trux Atalantiades* (9.789). But intriguingly, even then the word only occurs at a moment when Parthenopaeus' relationship with his mother is made to stand out with the matronymic, suggesting that even here this adjective is only applicable to the boy because of his relationship with his mother.
[180] Cf. 6.336; Verg. *Aen*. 5.565-6; Verg. *Aen*. 9.49-50; see Parkes (2012) on 4.327-8.

Parthenopaeus can only make superficial changes in his appearance, but behind such concealments he is still very much a boy, and Atalanta helps us to recognise this when she comes on the scene to berate her son for joining the army. In the course of her speech, she draws attention to and strips away the various layers of his disguise.

Parthenopaeus and the *Lusus Troiae*

Here I will linger on the descriptions of Parthenopaeus and his well-dressed horse (4.271-3; 9.683-9) and set it against some intertextual examples from the *Aeneid*. The comparison will demonstrate, not only that Parthenopaeus is dressed inappropriately in battle, but also that he fails to mature into a *vir* – the quality of which (*virtus*) is necessary for a hero.

We have already seen from some examples in the *Aeneid* that ornaments are appropriate on gift-horses. But there is another ceremonial occasion in the *Aeneid*, where horses and their riders can wear decorative pieces appropriately. This again is found in a non-combative context, the horse parade that ends the games and serves as an aetiology for the *lusus Troiae*. Necklaces feature again, *flexilis obtorti per collum circulus auri* (5.559), though this time they are made of gold, and belong to the boys rather than the horses. Their dress is eye-catching since they shine (*lucent*, 5.554) and gleam (*fulgent*, 5.562). Aside from the parallels of being well-dressed youths on horseback, Atalanta also directs us to this passage when she draws attention to the mottled skin-tone of Parthenopaeus' horse. The language which she uses (*maculis...discolor atris / ...equus*) strongly alludes to Vergil's phrase, *albis/...equus bicolor maculis* (5.565-6), which was used to describe the first of the three leaders in the parade. This closing event of the games in honour of Anchises has been understood as a symbol of successful generational continuity that is promoted in epic.[181] The scene looks both to the past and the future, as the boys, performing in front of their fathers (*ante ora parentum*, 5.553), remind their parents of their own ancestors and thus the past (*veterumque adgnoscunt ora parentum*, 5.576). At the same time, they act as guarantees of the future, for the author tells us that these rites will be passed down from generation to generation down to his own times (5.596-602).

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[181] See Bertram (1971); Holt (1979) p116-9; Rogerson (2017) p78-81.

Statius makes the allusion to the *lusus Troiae* using Parthenopaeus' mother as a mouth-piece, which makes the association more poignant.[182] Atalanta can only have one child: Diana's forgiveness of her companion for losing her virginity is a rare privilege (9.617-8), and Atalanta swears that her experience of sex was a one-off (9.616). Her desperation is enhanced because he will ever be her only child. Much of the pathos in his death is due to his unfulfilled potential. When Atalanta rebukes her son, she stresses that he is not yet ready even for an erotic attachment (4.329-30). He is too young for sex and thus fatherhood. He should have been a symbol of hope for the future like the boys performing in Vergil's *lusus Troiae;* however, with his untimely death, he breaks this chain and extinguishes his family-line.

But the reference to the *lusus Troiae* also hints at Parthenopaeus' failure to mature into adult male warrior. The *lusus Troiae* and the other events at the funeral games, can be considered practice for war, like hunting.[183] The event displays martial manoeuvres, but in a safe space where there is no danger of death.[184] Connections between the games of Book 5 in the *Aeneid* and the martial narrative of Book 9 have been recognised:[185] in Book 5, Nisus and Euryalus take part in the funeral games, and Ascanius takes part in the *lusus Troiae*. But in Book 9, these youths carry out duties in a real military setting. The former pair are examples youths entering warfare, when they are still unprepared for the real event. Misfortune inevitably follows. Ascanius, however, does begin to show encouraging signs in Book 9 that he is on the right track to successfully transition from childhood to adulthood. He conducts the nocturnal war council in place of his father, which allowed Ascanius to engage in adult duties: *pulcher Iulus, / **ante annos animum**que gerens curamque **virilem*** (9.310-11).[186] Later on he strikes down the garrulous Numanus with an arrow – his first kill in actual warfare (9.621ff.). Apollo (disguised as Butes) approves of this, regarding it as positive steps towards his great destiny; but nonetheless the god forbids him from participating further in the war. It

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[182] Putnam (1965) p85-88 connects the *lusus Troiae* to scenes where ties of parent and child are severed through violent death. Atalanta's allusion to this Vergilian scene also foreshadows the grief that she too will be forced to feel, when she too has to mourn the death of her son.
[183] Hardie (1994) p15-6.
[184] Putnam (1965) p88.
[185] On which see Holt (1979) p110-4, arguing for a tripartite structure of the *Aeneid*, connecting Books 1, 5 and 9 together; Glazewski (1972) p92; and Otis (1964) p273-4.
[186] Iulus' epithet *pulcher* is another point of similarity between Parthenopaeus and Ascanius; Hardie (1990a) p11-12.

seems he is not quite ready to leave childhood behind.[187] The games, then, are the location where these youths should be active. They are not yet prepared for the true affairs of war.

Parthenopaeus' first appearance shows him in a similar ceremonial parade as the Trojan boys in the *lusus Troiae*: he too will be shown that he has not matured for war yet. We find that Parthenopaeus does in fact treat the war as a game. At his first appearance, he is in love with the idea of war, and longs to be part of it (4.260-3), and when he is finally in battle (also in Book 9),[188] he is amused by his own superficial warrior-like appearance and the sounds he produces (*iuvat*, 9.694; *hilaris*, 9.698). Later Amphion stresses to Parthenopaeus that he should not be in war, but that he should 'play war at home', *proelia lude domi* (9.786). *Ludus* is the term used by Statius for the games, the connotation of which Lovatt suggests is "a dis*play* less serious than the war to come, and also a preparation, a training for heroes and readers in the realities of epic and war".[189] Amphion calls for Parthenopaeus to return to the safe space of the arena to practice fighting: he is not yet ready for real battle. His words are not empty: though Ascanius struck Numanus down and so simultaneously disproved Numanus' accusations of effeminacy while proving his own progression towards manhood, Parthenopaeus fails to kill Amphion, and instead has to be saved through the intervention of Diana (9.9.805-7). He continues to fall short of his intertextual model, for when Diana (Apollo's sister and divine counterpart) attempts to persuade Parthenopaeus to leave the battlefield in the guise of Dorceus (9.812-4), just as Apollo appeared to Ascanius in the guise of Butes, Parthenopaeus rejects her advice, where Ascanius sensibly took Apollo's, and stubbornly stays in the battle – a decision that leads to his death.[190] This shows in Parthenopaeus an inability to recognise his own youthful vulnerability. It is only when it is too late that even he finally realises that he is a boy, *puerque videtur / et sibi* (9.855-6). For Parthenopaeus, his avoidance of erotic affairs means that he skips a crucial step in the maturing process. Moreover his inability to separate games from real war prevents him from being able to grow into an adult.

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[187] See Hardie (1994) on 9.641 and 9.656.

[188] The book choice may be more than coincidence. Statius seems to keep a close eye on Vergi's structure, down to the line numbers (cf. Hinds (1998) p92 n80 on "stichometric intertextuality"). It may be that Statius is influenced by Vergil's use of Book 9 to explore the theme of youth and adulthood in war.

[189] Lovatt (2005) p6.

[190] See Hardie (1990a) for a discussion of intertextual links between Parthenopaeus and Ascanius p9-14.

The Final Position in the Catalogue

Parthenopaeus and his contingent make up the final catalogue entry. The attentive reader would notice that six of the Seven heroes have passed by (with a surprising Herculean contingent between the third and fourth). Parthenopaeus then is the last leader we expect. The audience's expectation of his final position in the catalogue is also partially prompted by prior catalogue scenes. One of Parthenopaeus' commonly recognised models is Vergil's Camilla. She comes as a surprising appendix to a catalogue of otherwise entirely male Italian troops (11.7.803ff.). Her final position in the catalogue makes her first appearance in the poem parallel that of Parthenopaeus. She shares a similar sylvan background to Parthenopaeus, a similar set of skills and weaponry and an analogous gender ambiguity. But Camilla herself follows a long convention of female (or effeminate) characters that come at the end of a catalogue:[191] Homer's effeminate Carians (*Il.* 2.867),[192] Herodotus' Artemesia (Herod. 7.99), Vergil's own Penthesilea (*Aen.* 1.490-3),[193] and Ovid's Atalanta (Ov. *Met.* 8.317-21), whose character Statius appropriates as the mother of Parthenopaeus.[194] The 'surprising' addition of these women at the end of catalogues is fairly traditional in itself. Perhaps the associations of femininity inherent in the name Parthenopaeus also makes the audience expect to see him in the final position.

All the literary models after Homer's Carians are exceptional women, both in the sense that they are all formidable warriors who cause a great deal of trouble to their enemies; but also in the sense that they stand out from both the male members of the catalogue and the expected roles of more traditional women. They are anomalous marvels to be looked at.[195] Thus their presence, appended on to lists of otherwise male-dominated warriors, gives the sense that they do not belong to the catalogue. However, aside from Atalanta, despite their martial ability they all fall in war, and they are always found on the losing side.[196] Only Atalanta manages to both play a significant role in her 'battle'

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[191] Courtney (1988) p3; Boyd (1992) p213-5.

[192] The Carians are not quite at the end of the catalogue, but they make up the last detailed ethnographical description.

[193] She is not found in a military catalogue, but an ekphrasis. Nonetheless, there are similarities between the two modes of narrative. She is the only female portrayed in the ekphrasis, and her image is the last described pre-empting Dido's own arrival on the scene. See Boyd (1992).

[194] See Fratantuono (2005) p187-90 for parallels between Camilla and Atalanta.

[195] See Boyd (1992) for Artemisia and Camilla as spectacles p222-3. Though Atalanta is not explicitly observed by any audience other than Meleager, the narrator focuses on her physical appearance, which does not happen with any of the other members in the hunt, and gives her the longest catalogue entry.

[196] I.e. Artemisia fights for the Persians; Penthesilea for the Trojans; and Camilla for the Italians.

against the Calydonian boar, for she is the first of all the warriors to wound the beast,[197] *and* survive the encounter. Perhaps the reason for this is that Atalanta is fighting in her natural element, as opposed to all the other women who are out of place. Parthenopaeus wants to imitate his mother's successful Ovidian example as we can tell from the motif on his shield (4.267-8). But because he chooses to go to war instead of remaining in the forests, he too puts himself in the same position as his doomed models.

However, while Parthenopaeus and his troops make up the final official catalogue entry, they do not bring an end to the catalogue scene. Atalanta unexpectedly interrupts the scene, breaking the formal ekphrastic-style description of the catalogue into full-blown narrative.[198] Her sudden appearance makes her seem a more appropriate comparison to the capable female warrior-models, and the rightful holder of the honoured final position in the catalogue.

Aside from both being adult warrior-women, Atalanta's innate abilities recall and even surpass Camilla's.[199] Camilla was rumoured to be able to run so fast that she could run over the ears of corn and the waves of the sea, and when in battle, she is actually able to outstrip a galloping horse (11.718-20).[200] Parthenopaeus, as we have seen is also fast: he is similarly alleged (*narrabatur*) to be able to catch deer and even a flying arrow on foot (6.566-8); however, as we have seen, he is associated with such running-skills only because of his mother's own reputation. Atalanta's speed, in contrast, is not just rumoured but is actually displayed when she gate-crashes the Argive mustering. Like Camilla, she has the ability to run over natural features such as rocks and rivers (4.312-3). Her appearance bumps Parthenopaeus out of the final position in the catalogue, and usurps the model with which the reader originally identified Parthenopaeus. Not only does Atalanta's arrival undermine Parthenopaeus' desire to be independent of her, but she also indicates that she is a more capable warrior than him. However, she still chooses not to join the war, but she returns to her woodland home. By opting not to join the war, she draws attention to the fact that Parthenopaeus is not in the pastoral world where he belongs. Instead, by going to war, he will end up sharing the same disastrous fate of all his attempted models.

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[197] Even though superficially.
[198] Micozzi (2007) on 4.309.
[199] See Fratantuono (2005) on Vergil's Camilla as a model for Ovid's Atalanta.
[200] On the potential of Camilla's speed, see Boyd (1992) p229-34.

Parthenopaeus' 'Odyssey'

When Parthenopaeus enters the narrative, before he is even named, the narrator announces that he has left without his mother's knowledge: *ignara matre* (4.246). Commentators have recognised that this recalls Vergil's Euryalus, who embarks on the night raid without telling his mother.[201] But behind the model of Euryalus and others, there is the prototype of Telemachus, whose influence on Statius' Parthenopaeus has been under-explored. When the boy-hero stealthily leaves his home island of Ithaca to search for his father, Odysseus, he makes it clear that his mother, Penelope, should not be told about his departure (Hom. *Od.* 2.371-6).[202] It is not until well into Book 4 that Penelope finally finds out that he has left, after the suitors stir up rumour about it (*Od.* 6.675-766). In between Telemachus' departure and Penelope's realisation, Telemachus visits his father's fellow warriors from the Trojan War, Nestor and Menelaus, hoping for news about Odysseus.

Telemachus' journey (the so-called *Telemacheia*) symbolises a process of his transition from his childhood to adulthood. He leaves behind the intimacy he has with his mother, and moves towards reaching an equal status with his father. The process culminates with father and son fighting side-by-side, when Telemachus can be considered a man in his own right.[203] His trips to his father's friends are part of his education in the heroic world, and the friends confirm his progress by remarking on Telemachus' likeness to his father in sound and appearance. However, this process is never completely finalised within the confines of the *Odyssey*: Odysseus forbids Telemachus from successfully firing his bow in the suitors' contest for Penelope's hand, an act that would have proven the transition's successful completion, but also risks setting him up as a rival (21.125ff.).[204] Nonetheless, Telemachus' experiences, and the narrator's assertion that if he were allowed, he would have been able to wield Odysseus' bow, shows that

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[201] See Micozzi (2007), and Parkes (2012) *ad loc.* Parkes also notes Valerius' Acastus, who joins Jason's expedition secretly (V. Fl. 1.484-93).

[202] Or at least until enough time has passed or she works it out for herself.

[203] On Telemachus, the '*Telemacheia*', and the process of transition from childhood to adulthood, see: Thornton (1970) p68-77; Alden (1987); Beck (1998); Heath (2001); Petropoulos (2011). Petropoulos (2011), p96-101, sees Telemachus' lack of a father figure as damaging to his male identity. His close relationship with his mother keeps him in a state of infancy, which needs to be sundered for him to be able to begin developing into an adult warrior.

[204] Odysseus' act of forbidding Telemachus to wield the bow has been read as an antagonistic tension between father and son; Goldhill (1984) p189-91.

Telemachus is on the right track. The act of leaving the safety of his home and his mother's influence is an integral part of this process.

Parthenopaeus' appearance in the catalogue and his mother's surprising intervention replay a condensed version of various scenes from the the 'Telemacheia': as we have seen, Parthenopaeus leading his troops without his mother's knowledge recalls Telemachus, as he sneaks away from home with his own band of men. But, moreover, Atalanta's chastisement of her son (as we will see) recalls some of the statements made by Nestor and Menelaus; Penelope and Atalanta both react similarly with wavering knees or steps, when they find out about their respective son's departure (4.311-2; *Od*. 4.704-6); and the animal-simile describing Atalanta running to stop Parthenopaeus (4.315-6) reflects the famous animal-simile describing Telemachus' reunion with his father (*Od*. 16.216-9).

However, Parthenopaeus falls short of this more successful intertextual model on numerous counts. Parthenopaeus' youth and dependence on his mother contrasts with Telemachus' maturity and independence. Telemachus' development from a youth to a man was negotiated by a shift in his relationships between his two parents. Parthenopaeus, however, without a male role-model and unable to detach himself from his mother, is unable to grow up as Telemachus does.

While Telemachus successfully manages to embark on his expedition without his mother's knowledge, Parthenopaeus is caught by his mother before the army even leaves. Penelope states that had she known of Telemachus' plans to leave, she would never have allowed him to do so,[205] but Parthenopaeus is only eventually allowed to join the expedition, because Atalanta gives her reluctant consent. Therefore, Telemachus has the capability to remove himself from the influence of his mother on his own accord, and so begins the process of becoming an independent man; however, Parthenopaeus fails to leave his mother's domain. Her permission for him to join the war undermines his own authority: she shows that she still holds sway over his actions. For as long as he is still under her control, Parthenopaeus is stuck in a stage of childhood. The differences between Parthenopaeus and Telemachus underscore Parthenopaeus' identity as a youth. In the reader's minds, his hasty attempt to make himself look and act like an adult male warrior is compromised.

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[205] Echoed by Statius as narrator: if Atalanta had not been out hunting, then the boy would not have been able to go, '*neque enim haec iuveni foret ire potestas*' (4.249).

Telemachus' independent journey to Nestor and Menelaus allows him to reveal his own innate abilities, separate from the influence of both his mother and his father. The fact that he strongly reminds his hosts of his father shows that masculine heroism is inherent in the boy, and that he is on the right path to becoming an adult male. As he meets his hosts, he surprises them with his maturity and his ability to navigate the social customs expected from him. Parthenopaeus, in contrast, is marked by his immaturity, sustained across his various appearances throughout the narrative. When his mother tells him off for joining the war, for example, Parthenopaeus does not act as a mature member of society, but perfoms the classic image of a guilty child: *ille ad humum pallens* (4.318).

Both Nestor and Menelaus recognise elements of Odysseus in Telemachus (Nestor by his speech and Menelaus by his appearance). However, for Parthenopaeus, it is Atalanta who connects her son's appearance to her own: he has not yet matured to look like a male father, but still looks like his female mother.

We also think of Telemachus' meeting with Odysseus when Atalanta runs to catch Parthenopaeus. As we have seen, she is compared to a tigress, pursuing her cub stolen by a 'robber-horse',[206] *raptis velut aspera natis / praedatoris equi sequitur vestigia tigris* (4.315-6). At a crucial point of the *Telemacheia*, Odysseus reveals himself to Telemachus, where they embrace and weep for joy. Oddly their crying is compared to birds, whose young have also been taken away (ἐξείλοντο) by country-folk (*Od*. 16.216-8). In both similes, a parent animal is distressed by a hunters' theft of their young. It has been noted that the image the Homeric simile creates is completely the opposite from the context to which it is being compared.[207] Telemachus and Odysseus represent the reunion of parent and child, not their separation, as the birds-simile describes. Similarly, Atalanta is just about to reunite with her son after this simile. But the comparison of the similes undermines again Parthenopaeus' self-constructed image of independence. For Telemachus had left his mother with the intention of finding his father, and so the simile recalls the exact moment when his mission has been fulfilled. For Parthenopaeus, the simile occurs before he can even properly join the war and emphasises his failure to remove himself away from his mother's presence.

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[206] I.e. the horse, on which a hunter has absconded with the tiger cub.
[207] Hoekstra (1984) on 16.216-8; Beck (1998) p130, makes the separation of the birds in the simile correspond to the human characters' lament at the lost years of being father and son.

Parthenopaeus, Odysseus, and Boar-Hunting

If we accept that Parthenopaeus is, in some sense, trying to be a version of Telemachus, and Telemachus is trying to become his father, then one further step in logic will allow us to make a comparison between Parthenopaeus and Odysseus too.

As well as the *Telemacheia*, there is a flashback to Odysseus' own coming-of-age moment. Homer's narration of the successful maturation of both the father and son creates a sense of a long chain of generational continuity. Telemachus' own growth fits him in to a long-standing tradition, as he proves himself ready for adulthood, just as his father once did. Odysseus' own rite of passage came in the form of a boar-hunt (19.392-466) – a famous scene in the *Odyssey* that explains how Odysseus gained the scar above his knee, by which the servant, Eurycleia, recognises him.

Petropoulos reads Homeric rites of passage as multi-step progressions that systematically get more difficult.[208] Odysseus' first test is to visit his maternal grandfather's house, when he reaches puberty (ἡβήσας, *Od.* 19.410), and participate in a boar-hunt, which Petropoulos considers a ritual first blooding. Odysseus runs into trouble when he is gored by the boar above the knee (*Od.* 19.447-51). However, this only wounds the young Odysseus and he still successfully kills the boar by himself (*Od.* 19.452-4), thereby passing the rite of passage and is now considered ready for real fighting. Odysseus' second step is to be sent by his father and elders (*Od.* 21.11-41) on an expedition abroad, where he takes on 'light' fighting in a debt-collecting mission. Once he has achieved that, his development into an adult male warrior is complete.

Parthenopaeus also has a boar-encounter that is told in retrospect, though this time by his mother rather than the narrator (4.322-6). He too got into difficulty and was forced to his knees by the boar. Parallels in the language and word-positioning point towards the Odyssean scene: *apro, / poplite succiduo* (4.323-4) echoes σῦς / γουνὸς ὕπερ (*Ody.* 19.449-50). Both phrases describe the moment that the boys are gored by the boar. The words for 'boar' and 'knee' are found in the same line-positions and are then followed by a word indicating direction. But, unlike Odysseus, Parthenopaeus never manages to pass the first stage of his maturation process: his mother steps in to save him. On the Odyssean scene, Petropoulos argues that Odysseus' first test of manhood occurred in a

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[208] See Petropoulos (2011) p115-27, for discussions on Nestor's and Odysseus' successful first missions that prove their transtition to manhood.

relatively safe space, because he was supervised by his uncles and "the other hunters would have stepped in if anything untoward had happened".[209] However, despite Odysseus being wounded, they did not intervene, which allowed Odysseus to pass the test by himself and prove his own strength. We do not know whether Parthenopaeus could have recovered after being forced to his knees to fend off the boar, or whether his life was actually in danger, as his mother claims (4.325-6). Atalanta, always seeing her son as most vulnerable, steps in and kills the boar for him. But Atalanta's intervention means that Parthenopaeus fails in this first test for adulthood, where Odysseus had suceeded. Nonetheless, Parthenopaeus still heads off to the second 'going-abroad' test[210] – a far more dangerous expedition than Odysseus' second test of simple money-collection. These differences we see from the Odyssean parallels, which are again suggested by his mother, forces the audience to regard Parthenopaeus still as a young boy, unprepared for warfare.

Parthenopaeus: Conclusion

Statius makes his Parthenopaeus a character that is enormously concerned about his reputation and how other characters perceive him. In particular, he has difficulty controlling his heroic image because of the unusual circumstances of his parentage: the absence of a father, and an over-dominating mother means that he lacks a traditional model of masculine *virtus*, on which he can base his own identity. In his efforts to find this masculine *virtus*, he joins other male warriors and rejects his mother's example of *virtus*, which she demonstrated in the pastoral world of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8.387). But his ephebic appearance deters others from taking him seriously as a warrior. His strategy to counter his natural appearance is to add artificial elements to his outfit, but these too only prove his youthful naivety: they are only for show and add no practical advantage to fighting in war. His mother's overwhelming influence over him in both physical features and reputation prevents him from creating his own independent heroic identity. Atalanta plays a similar role to the narrator in the ekphrasis of Adrastus' statues. She undermines Parthenopaeus' carefully cultivated narrative about himself by adding her own embarrassing narratives about him. Her sudden appearance and her comments

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[209] Petropoulos (2011) p120.
[210] *Ibid.*

create a complicated, intertextual network, the associations of which serve to remind us that Parthenopaeus does not belong in the adult world of warfare. In particular, Parthenopaeus' contrast with the figure of Telemachus emphasises his inability to separate himself from his mother, and thus he will be unable to mature into the warrior he wishes to be, as Telemachus does. In the end, he will die acknowledging that he himself is a boy, *arma puer rapui* (9.892). As Hardie as shown, the words cynically pun on the *Aeneid*'s opening words: *arma virumque cano*.[211] Aeneas' *fama* made him worthy to be commemorated in epic. No one will remember Parthenopaeus as a *vir*. His reputation will only be that of a boy.

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[211] Hardie (1990a) p12.

Chapter 2 – Monster-Slayers

Introduction

This chapter will investigate how the heroes of the *Thebaid* use the rhetoric of monster-slaying to define their own heroic identities. Often, this relies on publicly adopting past heroes as their models, who themselves became famous for slaying monsters and liberating cities. The current heroes try to foster an association with these past heroes, as a way of declaring to the public that they themselves are capable of matching their model's achievements, and that they stand for the same civilising values. Heroes, as we have seen in the introduction, strive for immortality, either in a literal sense when they are apotheosised, or metaphorically, when they are widely commemorated by posterity, and thus remain 'alive' through them. These past heroes have achieved this because of their ability to kill monsters, and so become successful examples of heroes, by being remembered by posterity and in some cases being literally deified. But in order for these past heroes to be effective for enhancing a current hero's reputation, the depiction must inevitably be idealised and fragmentary reflections of them.

As with the ancestors, past heroes can be evoked as models in various ways. For example, this can be done verbally, such as Adrastus' commemoration of Coroebus killing Poene, which enacts the oral tradition of epic. But they might also provoke an association through visual means, such as dress or artwork: for example, many of the heroes dress in lion pelts simulating Hercules' Nemean lion. Polynices' lion hide is explicitly reminiscent of Hercules' early kills (1.483-7),[1] and the Tirynthians wear the lion pelt because of its association with Hercules (4.153-5), as celebration of the hero's defeat of the monster. But the main focus in this chapter will be on the heroes' habit of displaying past heroes fighting monsters on their artefacts. However, while the current heroes want to inspire an audience's confidence in their abilities by associating themselves with successful examples of past heroes, these ekphrases of the heroes throw up multiple possible interpretations for the reader. I suggest that these images hint at the

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[1] Oddly the narrator specifies that it looks like the skin of some apparent generic mountain lion, which Hercules used to practise on as a youth (*iuuenalibus annis*, 1.486), before battling the monstrous Nemean lion (*Cleonaei…monstri*, 1.487). The implication is that even when dressed like the hero, Polynices only manages to look like a junior version of him, and cannot match up to the hero's full potential.

dehumanising risks of performing actions to achieve the immortal fame the heroes' desire.

This chapter will start with a general explanation of the ways that the *Thebaid*'s characters manipulate the rhetoric of monstrosity to create their heroic identities. Following this, I willl examine one of the poem's central figures: Oedipus. Here, I will explore his status, not as an ancestor, but as a monster-slayer. He ought to be a civilising hero for freeing Thebes from the evil of the Sphinx; but just as he is a poor ancestral model of emulation, so he is a poor national one. Oedipus' existence, I suggest, devalues the use of monster-rhetoric as a mode of heroic self-representation. From there, I will explore a set of three ekphrases, depicting Perseus, Hercules and Theseus. The final of these is not a past hero in the world of the *Thebaid*. Instead we will see that it is his own past literary representations and his own history that he relies on in forming his heroic identity.

These ekphrases are located respectively as the first ekphrasis of the poem in Book 1, centrally in Book 6, and as the poem's last ekphrasis in Book 12, and so seem to have some structural significance. Each of the ekphrases depicts a hero killing a hybrid-monster: firstly, Perseus with Medusa's recently shorn head on Adrastus' ancestral *patera*; the second is on a *cratera*, which Amphiaraus wins after the chariot-race, showing Hercules killing a Centaur (6.531-9); and finally the shield that Theseus carries into battle bears an image of himself wrestling the Minotaur (12.665-76).[2] All three display an idealised version of the hero whose achievements should be striven for.

But, as with the ekphrasis of Adrastus' statues, the perspective of the external readers do not necessarily overlap neatly with the internal characters' perspectives towards the images of these past heroes. The first two of these, as we will see, have achieved the honour of apotheosis for their activities in life; however, the characters of the *Thebaid* frequently fail to imitate the past heroes' civilising aspects and instead of becoming a god, end up mimicking the monsters that their models slay instead. In addition, I suggest that the earlier heroes themselves shared beastly qualities with their monstrous opponents and played a part in adding to the world's problems and contributed to the spreading of evil. Repetition of sins and its exacerbation through time will continue

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[2] No ekphrasis of Jason is present, though one may be implied when the sons of Jason and Hypsipyle reunite with their mother and prove their birth to her through various artefacts, including their cloaks which depict Jason: *umeris amborum intextus Iason* (5.726). However, Mozley and Shackleton-Bailey both translate *Iason* as "Jason's name", which I think is unlikely. The suppressed ekphrasis might be a competitive act of Statius, given the strong association of Jason with ekphrastic cloaks.

to be a major focus of this chapter. History will continue to repeat itself when the current heroes continue to look to the past and idealise it.

As we will see, ekphrases are useful narrative devices to examine the slippage between the status of god, hero, and beast. As narratives embedded within a narrative, they are zones of narrative instability. They are rarely neatly contained descriptions within a confined space, but have the potential energy to break out into the main narrative, to mingle artwork with reality, and to influence or foreshadow the poem's course. The very nature of ekphrasis threatens to overcome boundaries of a narrative kind. The themes conveyed by an ekphrasis spills out into our reading of the wider themes of the poem,[3] and therefore becomes fertile ground to study the impact of boundary-transgressions on the *Thebaid*'s heroes.

It will become apparent that the heroes walk a narrow line between the seemingly antithetical states of god and beast. The past heroes, though showing some worrying monstrous qualities, nonetheless managed to be more god than beast. The ekphrases celebrate them in this way; but being a narrative of a narrative, the *Thebaid*'s narrator is able to reveal to the reader the risky nature of this tightrope. The current heroes, however, walking the same thin line, are doomed to fall on the side of monstrosity.

Heroes and Monsters: Perspective and Rhetoric

The heroes in the *Thebaid* greatly value the status of being a monster-slayer. Theories on 'Monsters' have recognised that the monstrous are, among many things, representations of deviant behaviour in society.[4] Their physical deformity or savageness stands for their perceived perverted habits. Those who do not conform to the rules of the dominant section of society are imagined to be geographically marginalised to the wilderness between cities or the peripheries of the world. They do not really belong to a civilised society. They are 'Othered' and demonised as a way of reinforcing 'correct' modes of behaviour. The act of killing monsters then, removing those who flout the laws of humanity, is an act of enforcing a civilisation with a unified set of values in the world, and so creating order.

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[3] For ekphrastic depictions as a microcosm or reflections of the world, see e.g. Putnam (1998) p2; Zeitlin (2009) p129-36; though also see Fowler (1991) p33-5, on seeing ekphrases as adding something to the narrative too than simply reflecting its themes.
[4] Cohen (1996); Weiss (2004).

And so, slaying an evil monster is a heroic service to the world, and for that reason to be recognised as one is greatly valued by the aspiring heroes of the *Thebaid*. It also sets individuals up for candidature to join the gods, by proving their warrior ability – a paradigm set by the archetypical hero Hercules, both monster-slayer and god-to-be. We can see this in the way that Perseus and Hercules, are both commemorated at the moment of slaying a monster. They are also two past heroes who have successfully been deified for their achievements. Accordingly, the heroes who want to follow in their footsteps also try to portray themselves as monster-killers, and so turn their opponents into monsters that need to be killed. This happens, especially, on a rhetorical level: demonization of the other becomes as much a part of self-construction as self-heroization.

The rhetoric of monstrosity is very flexible. In general, anything that is disapproved of can be described in monstrous terms. In Roman literature, it occurs across the genres. Among many varied uses, monster-metaphors can be used to attack different attitudes in a multitude of contexts. These might include the political, for example Suetonius' discussion about Caligula 'the monster' (*de monstro*, *Calig.* 22); the philosophical or religious, like Lucretius' Epicurus battle with the god/monster Religio (1.62-79); the cultural, such as the monstrous beast-gods of Egypt against the anthropomorphic gods of Rome (Vergil *Aen.* 8.698-700). It can be used as vilifying comments about social mores, as when Catullus' sexually aggressive Lesbia is figured as a kind of Scylla (Catull. 11),[5] or when Ovid's Minos calls Scylla a *monstrum* for betraying her father (Ov. *Met.* 8.100). In addition, monstrous language can even be used to describe artistic styles, as, for example, Horace does with his comical, monstrous hybrid (*Ars poetica* 1-9).[6] The rhetorical tactic lies in demonising the other, as a way of reinforcing what is perceived as one's own 'correct' form of behaviour.

But the morality of the *Thebaid* is a murky business. Culpability and agency for the poem's actions can be ascribed to any number of characters, divine or mortal. If there is a design of fate working in the background, the reader is not fully privy to its secrets. But the narrator certainly treats his subject-matter as a kind of *nefas*, paradoxically narrating but condemning the memory of the actions of the poem's heroes in a Lucanian style (11.574-9).[7] To him, everyone is in the wrong. However, when the heroes of the

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[5] Scott (1983) p41; and Greene (2007) p144 with notes.
[6] Lowe (2015) p15-27.
[7] See Masters (1992) on the struggle between Lucan's narrator and the 'unspeakable' subject matter, which he narrates.

Thebaid make speeches, they tend to simplify matters: the speaker is on the side of the right; the other side is wrong. Rhetorically, they paint the other side as a monstrous entity, while they are the monster-slayer that must vanquish it.

I will provide two examples of this here. The first involves Capaneus' encounter with the giant serpent of Jupiter. After the snake kills Opheltes, the heroes leap into action, at the sound of the boy's dying wail. Parthenopaeus dashes off to report the news, Hippomedon hurls a boulder at the snake, and finally Capaneus kills the beast by spearing it through the mouth.[8] Capaneus has proud words for the snake before he strikes it:

> 'at non mea uulnera,' clamat
> et trabe fraxinea Capaneus subit obuius, 'umquam
> effugies, seu tu pauidi ferus incola luci,
> siue deis, utinamque deis, concessa uoluptas,
> non, si consertum super haec mihi membra Giganta
> subueheres.'
>
> (5.565-70)

Capaneus never allows an opportunity to insult the gods slide, and he takes joy in correctly imagining the snake as a source of pleasure to the gods. His slaying of the snake is then an attack on the gods by proxy. If a repetitive performance is necessary to produce a consistent sense of identity, then Capaneus achieves this by constantly reminding others that he sees himself as a *superum contemptor*. It is not only the narrator who describes the hero with this phrase (3.602), but Capaneus self-consciously uses it of himself too (9.550).[9]

However, what is significant for our purposes, is Capaneus' second fantasy in this speech: he imagines the snake as the serpentine legs which support a giant, in accordance with the conventional depiction of giants from the Hellenistic age onwards.[10] The huge snake, already a *monstrum* anyway (5.570), is transformed by Capaneus' rhetoric into an even more fearsome monster – one of the giants, famed for their status as a threat to the

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[8] This scene is in a continuous intertextual dialogue with Ovid's account of Cadmus' killing of the snake of Mars. Soerink (2013) makes a start on deciphering these connections, but there is much more to be explored.

[9] See Dewar (1991) *ad loc.* and Ganiban (2007) p59-60.

[10] See Lowe (2015) p52, on possible zoological inspirations for the image of the snake-footed Giants; Ogden (2013) p82-3.

Olympian gods, and therefore a traditional symbol of cosmic disorder.[11] By setting the idea that the snake is a giant (an enemy of the gods), alongside the idea that the snake is a pet of the gods, Capaneus collapses the distinction between gods and monsters: whichever kind the snake is, it equally deserves to be struck down.[12] By figuring the snake as a giant, Capaneus makes himself a heroic monster-slayer.

But this first example is an unsual one: Capaneus is not interested in portraying himself as a civilising force. Being *aequi / impatiens* (3.602-3), he does not care about bringing about natural order or morality. He has that recklessness with his life (*largusque animae*, 3.603), which we have seen in Coroebus' men, for obtaining glory. And he is driven only by his desire to prove his *virtus*, which for Capaneus is solely his own and incompatible with the divine, the usual representatives for cosmic order: *virtus mihi numen et ensis / quem teneo!* (12.615-6).[13] His imagining of the snake as either a favourite of the gods, or then as an enemy of the gods, suggests that monster-slaying for him is not intended to be a beneficial act for the world (though we will see other heroes taking advantage of this), but a conscious self-motivated opportunity to big himself up by removing any supernatural entity, and thus gain renown for displaying his *virtus*.

But Capaneus' use of giant imagery to describe his serpent opponent is particularly striking, for he is the character who is most consistently associated with giant imagery. His hatred of the gods makes him a prime candidate to take the place of their greatest threat. His parallels with the giants have been well-studied,[14] so as a few examples: he himself is a giant, towering over everyone else in the Argive army (4.165); in his first appearance he is compared to monsters like centaurs and giants (3.604-5); as he climbs the towers of Thebes, he is compared to the giants' preparation for their ascent towards heaven. Remarkably too, Capaneus' helmet sports a Giant rising from its crest (*galeaeque corusca / prominet arce Gigans*, 4.175-6). Thus, Capaneus, in a sense, represents the snaky component that makes the lower half of a Giant – a neat reversal of the image he projects onto the Nemean serpent. Furthermore, as Chaudhuri has demonstrated, Capaneus styles himself as an Epicurean theomach, who is depicted by Lucretius as striking down *Religio* who oppresses the fearful populace from on high

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[11] Hardie (1986) p85-156.

[12] The rhetoric is reminiscent of Lucretius' Epicurus, who must strike down the god/monster Religio. Although Epicurus acts for the sake of humanity, whereas Capaneus does not.

[13] Cf. also 10.845-6: *'hac' ait 'in Thebas, hac me iubet ardua virtus / ire, Menoeceo qua lubrica sanguine turris'*.

[14] Delarue (2000) p83-5; Leigh (2006) p225-233; Chaudhuri (2014) p226.

(Lucr. 1.62-79).[15] But when Capaneus towers over Thebes and terrifies the people within with his looming shadow (10.871-3), he becomes more reminiscent of Lucretius' god/giant than its vanquisher.[16]

One final point of interest is when even Jupiter makes a connection between this image of Capaneus and his old giant enemies: *'quaenam spes hominum tumidae post proelia Phlegrae? / tune etiam feriendus?'* (10.909-10). Significantly, however, he plays down the hero's power in the comparison, making Capaneus *less* of a monster. Here, Jupiter also engages in a rhetoric of monstrosity. But as the supreme god at the top of the cosmic hierarchy, his technique is the opposite of that of human heroes: his position is made to seem more stable if his opponent is made to seem less monstrous. In reality, Capaneus' fury makes the other gods begin to doubt Jupiter's strength, and so threatens his ultimate authority (10.920). And so Capaneus is a nuisance to him and the world order he has established, and, therefore, he 'must be struck down' (*feriendus*) as the monstrous giants were.[17]

By claiming the snake as a pet of the gods, and then by exaggerating the snake's monstrous qualities so that it becomes part-giant, Capaneus styles himself as both a theomach and a heroic giant-slayer. However, his behaviour means that he himself becomes a monstrous version of a giant and oppressive deity. Capaneus is an unusual hero among the Seven. His heroic self-presentation does not rely on making himself appear as a benefactor of the world to the others. Instead, he bases it on his ability to destroy powerful beings like monsters or gods, which demonstrates his warrior skills. In this way, he is one of the few characters, whose own rhetoric matches up with the narrator's presentation of him.

However, my second example does show how the rhetoric of monsters can also be used to demonstrate moral superiority. As we have seen earlier, the tragic Thebes, though a city that follows Greek (or rather Athenian, and then Roman) 'civilised' values, is an area where the transgression of social taboos could be safely imagined and explored. Though humans reside in the city, the acts that they commit are described as monstrous.

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[15] Chaudhuri (2014) p256-97.
[16] Lovatt (2013b) p110.
[17] See Fucecchi (2013b) p113-7, for Jupiter's slaying of Capaneus as an astute political strategy.

When Theseus decides to help the Argive women, he makes two statements explaining his intention, first to the women, then shortly afterwards to his own army, as they prepare to march:

> quaenam ista nouos induxit Erinys
> regnorum mores? non haec ego pectora liqui
> Graiorum abscedens, Scythiam Pontumque niualem
> cum peterem; nouus unde furor?
>
> (12.590-3)

> terrarum leges et mundi foedera mecum
> defensura cohors, dignas insumite mentes
> coeptibus: hac omnem diuumque hominumque fauorem
> Naturamque ducem coetusque silentis Auerni
> stare palam est; illic Poenarum exercita Thebis
> agmina et anguicomae ducent uexilla sorores.
> ite alacres tantaeque, precor, confidite causae.
>
> (12.642-48)

In the first passage, Theseus claims that when he left Greece for barbaric lands, Greeks did not do this kind of thing. His accusation marks the Thebans' behaviour as un-Greek. The hero's worldview is that Greeks are the ones that act 'correctly'. He sees the values of his own culture as universal for humans. Following Greek culture establishes order in the world. When the Thebans refuse the right of burial to their enemy, they transgress these laws of humanity, and so put themselves outside the closed circle of what is considered humanity. These actions are out of the natural order of the world, and hence they can be described in the language of monstrosity. Theseus literally demonises these actions: he characterises them as *furor*, and attributes them to the Furies, whose allegorical function as sources of inspiration for evil actions has been well established by Vergil.[18]

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[18] Feeney (1991) p162-171, on the blurry functions of Allecto as a character in the *Aeneid*, rather than just as an instinct; but see p376-389 for the Furies in the *Thebaid*, who "demand to be read allegorically", while also remaining characters.

In his rallying speech to his own men, these ideas are pressed even further. He makes himself a heroic figure that must restore natural order to Thebes' disorder. He calls his men to defend the 'laws of the land and pacts of the world' (*terrarum leges et mundi foedera*). Greek laws have become equated to world laws. Their cause is considered 'worthy' (*dignas…mentes*). And, according to the king, their intervention is supported by gods, men, Nature, and the dead Argives themselves. Theseus puts the actions of himself and his men firmly in the right, as a civilising force.[19] In contrast, the Thebans are backed by the monstrous Furies, who are imagined in their horrifying snake-haired appearance, as physically leading the Theban standards. The Athenians' just cause for war, he implies, assures their victory (*confidite causae!*).[20]

Scholars have used Theseus' words as evidence that he functions as restorer of natural order to the world.[21] However, the rhetorical nature of Theseus' speeches must be taken into account. Theseus correctly states that Thebes is under the influence of the Furies, but there is no reason for him to suspect this. Rather the Furies in the poem, even if they are responsible for much of the poem's *nefas*, are also easy figures to blame. Oedipus, for example, is struck with remorse after the death of his sons, and tries to shift the blame onto the Furies and his circumstances for making him curse his sons at the outset of the poem (11.619-21). However, the reader will remember that the Fury did not take any action until after she had heard Oedipus' prayer. Oedipus switches around the cause and effect to alleviate himself from blame. I suggest that the reader should take Theseus' description of the snaky-headed sisters similarly: it is not so much a correct assessment on Theseus' part, but a conventional rhetorical manoeuvre.

Moreover, Theseus' claims that he is backed by the Olympian gods (*omnem divum…favorem*) are equally unfounded. As many commentators have noted, the divine forces are strikingly absent in Book 12, since their emphatic departure in the previous Book (11.122-33).[22] In addition, even when they were still present, they were not uninvolved in driving the *nefas* of the poem. Theseus' confident assertions about which gods support which team seems tenuous. However, a brief appearance of Minerva supports his statement – one of the few mentions of the Olympians in Book 12:

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[19] A familiar rhetorical strategy in Latin epic; see Fucecchi (2013a).

[20] The contrast here is reminiscent of the kind of rhetoric about Cleopatra and Egypt, by the Augustans, such as my Vergilian example above, which set the anthropomorphic Roman gods against the beast-gods of Egypt (Verg. *Aen*. 8.698-700).

[21] Vessey (1973) p314-5.

[22] Feeney (1991) p356; Bernstein (2004) p63-71.

ipsa metus Libycos seruatricemque Medusam

pectoris incussa mouit Tritonia parma.

protinus erecti toto simul agmine Thebas

respexere angues.

(12.606-9)

Minerva's actions back up Theseus' claims. It does seem as if the Athenian Olympians are pitted against the Theban Furies. However, the imagery of her support is problematic. Far more attention is paid to the description of the monster on Minerva's aegis, Medusa, than the goddess. Her presence is double-edged: she protects the goddess (*servatricem*), but she is also a source of terror (*metus*). Though decapitated, her head seems to come alive again. Her snaky aspect is emphasised by the description of the snakes on her head turning as one, like a 'whole army' (*toto…agmine*), towards the direction of Thebes. The phrase recalls Laocoon's monstrous snakes as a 'determined army' (*agmine certo*, Verg. *Aen.* 2.212). In Aeneas' narrative, serpents and violent city-destruction were already associated through a combination of metaphor and parallel situations.[23] Statius' metaphor creates an overlap with the real Athenian army, who are equally unanimous when they muster in the catalogue immediately following (12.611-38). This causes Theseus' clear cut distinction between the Theban and Athenian armies to be dissolved: Theseus' army is led by a snake-headed monster (*angues*, 12.609) with a serpentine army (*toto…agmine*, 12.608), which parallels his own rhetoric about the Thebans, who were led by the armies of the Furies (*Poenarum…/ agmina*, 12.646-7), in their snake-headed appearance (*anguicomae ducent uexilla sorores*, 12.647).[24] While Theseus' presentation of himself and his army is as a heroic force, with a duty to slay the monsters that terrorise Thebes, his own association with monster imagery makes the issue much less distinct. Thus a gap opens up between Theseus' rhetoric and the narrator's assessment of the situation, which again indicates to the reader the constructed nature of Theseus' self-portrayal.

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[23] Knox (1950).

[24] Cf. Jupiter's use of the Dira towards the end of the *Aeneid* (12.843-52), which complicated the use of heavenly and hellish forces, see Hardie (1993) p73-4. Statius' *Minerva* reflects her Vergilian father towards the end of the *Thebaid* too. See Criado (2000) p196-204 for a discussion on the dissemination of evil from both Jupiter as well as the underworld gods in the *Thebaid*.

Boundaries of Hybridity, Humanity, Divinity

In this section, I will briefly survey the theme of boundary transgressions in the *Thebaid* and what it might represent for the humans characters. Scholars have recognised that the violation of boundaries, both in a literal and metaphorical sense, is a key feature of the *Thebaid*. For example, Newlands has shown how the theme appears in a textual sense, right from the prologue: the authorial voice tries to limit his narrative scope from all the Theban myths to the 'confused house of Oedipus': *limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus* (1.16-7). Then excusing himself from honouring Domitian and Roman affairs (1.17-33), he limits himself once again to the Theban mythic narrative: *satis arma referre / Aonia* (1.33).[25] But, as we have seen, the Theban past keeps intruding into the narration of present events in various ways, merging with and influencing current events. Similarly, McNelis has explored the flexibility in the generic boundaries of the poem. The 'traditional' epic style clashes with Callimachean poetics. McNelis sees the unstable tensions within this hybrid style of epic poetics as a metaphor for the poem's subject-matter of civil war.[26]

For both Newlands and McNelis, the chaotic state of the world is conveyed through the theme of boundary transgression. The breaking of literary limits correspond to the failing of social and moral expectations. The heroes' inclinations to exceed what are acceptable limits in their mission to achieve immortal renown are therefore dangerous and contribute to the world's disorder. The transgressions of physical boundaries too, I suggest, reinforce this idea. So, both horizontal and vertical geographical intrusions also spread moral contamination: Polynices' migration to Argos brings with it the pollution of Thebes;[27] and in the other direction, the Argives' march to Thebes involves a symbolic crossing into Theban territory over a river (7.424-440) – a scene that repurposes Lucan's Caesar crossing the Rubicon, a highly symbolic moment of transgression that locks the Romans into the sinful civil war.[28]

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[25] Newlands (2012) p47-50.
[26] McNelis (2007) p5-8. He also sees it as a reflection of Roman anxieties over civil war.
[27] Vessey (1973) p92-3.
[28] I will not explore their similarities in detail here, but as a quick overview on the two scenes: both scenes share an army's initial hesitation at crossing an unusually swollen river, and an eventual crossing inspired by a military leader. It says much about Polynices that unlike Caesar in the Lucanian scene, Polynices is not the one at the forefront, leading the army into territory that is familiar to him, and also conversely that he does not hesitate at leading a foreign army into his homeland. However, the Statian scene is toned down in drama compared to the Lucanian scene. No river deity arises to avert Hippomedon. Statius holds this back for Hippomedon's later duel with Ismenos.

In a vertical sense too, the borders between heaven, earth, and the underworld are equally fluid. Deities and mortals frequently travel from one realm to another. For example, we have seen Mercury enter the underworld to bring Laius' ghost to earth, and Tisiphone rise up from the underworld to stir up conflict. As the personification of the moral disorder in the *Thebaid*, it is significant that when she unleashes her powers for the first time in the poem, she does so in a way that threatens horizontal and vertical geographical boundaries:

> ut stetit, abrupta qua plurimus arce Cithaeron
> occurrit caelo, fera sibila crine uirenti
> congeminat, signum terris, unde omnis Achaei
> ora maris late Pelopeaque regna resultant.
> audiit et medius caeli Parnasos et asper
> Eurotas, dubiamque iugo fragor impulit Oeten
> in latus, et geminis uix fluctibus obstitit Isthmos.

<div align="center">(1.114-20)</div>

She herself stands in a liminal position where heaven and earth meet, on the peak of Mount Cithaeron, where the mountain itself seems to be invading the sky, in language reminiscent of gigantomachy (*occurrit caelo*). The ominous hisses from her hair disturb several landmarks all around Greece that serve as natural boundary lines: Parnassos, another mountain range that is depicted like Cithaeron in a liminal position, *medius caeli*; the river Eurotas, which marks out Sparta's territory, and is known for being difficult to cross;[29] Oeta, another mountainous border seems to be weakened (*dubiam*);[30] and finally the Isthmus of Corinth, which alludes to a Lucanian simile. Lucan saw the potential in

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[29] E.g. see Polybius (5.22.2); Shackleton-Bailey (2003a) p49, n.20, comments that the epithet *asper* denotes Spartan discipline, though I think it more naturally denotes the river famed for its turbulent nature.

[30] Taken proleptically, as Shackleton-Bailey (2003a) p51, n.21. Perhaps the mountain's significance as the famous site of Hercules' living cremation and apotheosis may have symbolical overtones of the liminal state between life and death, mortality and immortality. We might be encouraged to think of Hercules and Oeta because of an intertext with Pseudo-Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*, probably published shortly after Seneca's death (see Braund (2016) p84. In the play's climactic moment, the deified Hercules' crashing voice (also a *fragor*, like the noise of Tisiphone's snakes) falls upon Oeta, which Alcmena recognises as a sign of his victorious transition to heaven: '*agnosco agnosco victum est chaos*' (Pseud-Sen., *Her. O*. 1944-6). If Statius is responding to this, he turns it around so that the voices of the snakes ensure the breakout of chaos instead. The image of Oeta is followed up by the Isthmus, a symbolic geographical feature favoured by Seneca.

using the Isthmus, a natural barrier that prevents an otherwise inevitable clash between the Ionian and Aegean Sea, as a comparison to Crassus, who while alive, managed to deter Caesar and Pompey's open conflict (Luc. 100-103).[31] Similarly, Tisiphone's threat to the Isthmus' ability to keep apart the two seas foreshadows her ability to remove obstacles for the brothers' conflict and the civil war.[32]

But the easy transitions between heaven, earth, and the underworld also correspond to the potential of the human characters to ascend to a state of divinity – or to become a monster: successful champions of order are deified; but agents of chaos are metaphorically mutated into beasts. As we have seen, deification is a real possibility for the heroes in the *Thebaid*: Opheltes and Amphiaraus are respectively hailed as *deus* after their deaths; Tydeus fails to receive immortality at the last moment when he disgusts Minerva with his gory cannibalism; but Menoeceus is deified by the abstractions *Virtus* and *Pietas* for his heroic self-sacrifice. These human characters aim for godhood,[33] following in the footsteps of the earlier heroes, Perseus and Hercules, who are both deified in the narrative, and commemorated by the current heroes. But as Tydeus' example shows, there is slippage between the categories of god, man, and beast. Rather than become a god, Tydeus' humanity fades to monstrosity – a behavioural change that visually manifests in his appearance, when the identity of the man blurs with his monstrous boar hide. The heroes frequently fail or overreach in their attempts to achieve the recognition of the *virtus* that will make them divine, and instead metaphorically transform into bestial forms.

It is therefore significant that the three ekphrases to be examined all depict humans killing hybrid monsters. Hybrid monsters, as combinations of man and beast(s), are physical representations of the idea of boundary transgressions. As we will see, in the *Thebaid*, their corporeal fluidity is often emphasised by the lack of specific description of these monsters: body parts from one creature conceptually blurs in with the parts of another. My discussions of the following descriptions of men fighting their respective hybrid monsters rely on a reading that the hybrids, with their boundary-breaking bodies,

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[31] Cf. also Sen. *Thy.* 111-114 for the Isthmus of Corinth as an image of fraternal strife.

[32] Silius, roughly contemporaneously, also develops Lucan's comparison in a similar way. The Ionian Sea, with the help of the winds, crashes over the Isthmus into the Aegean Sea, representing Scipio's movement of Italian troops to Spain and another step towards conflict (Sil. 15.154-7). See Roche (2009) on Lucan 1.100.

[33] An exception to this is Capaneus, who, as self-styled *superum contemptor*, is more at home as a celebrity among the underworld gods than the heavenly ones, after his death (*dum coetu Capaneus laudatur ab omni / Ditis et insignem Stygiis fouet amnibus umbram*, 11.70-1).

are symbolic of the breaking of social taboos in the *Thebaid*. Their warped human bodies are physical manifestations of the warped humanity in the *Thebaid*. Therefore the heroes try to present themselves as monster-slayers, so that they are recognised as restorers of social propriety and be deified for their efforts; but more often instead they reveal the similarities between the monsters and themselves, and so indicate the potential for mankind to slide into monstrosity.

The family of Oedipus is one that breaks social boundaries: incest and familial violence are their trademarks. The hostility and violence between the male family members is perversely balanced by incestuous love between the male and female characters.[34] Their unnatural crimes are often described with the language of monstrosity. In the *Thebaid*, the word *monstrum* is overwhelmingly used twenty-four times to describe a 'monster', in the sense of a supernatural creature or wild beast.[35] Its original sense as an ill-omen is also used, but more mutedly.[36] However, the actions of the characters of the *Thebaid* are also often declared as *monstrum* – in particular, the actions of the members of Oedipus' family. So, from its first occurrence in the poem, Jupiter uses the word *monstrum* to describe Oedipus' incest (1.235), and it later becomes a term for the brothers' enmity and fratricide (4.395; 11.420; 11.578; 12.422), or general actions committed in the war fought between them (7.402). The monstrous imagery of the poem corresponds to the monstrous language and represents the disorder created by the Oedipal family – *monstra* created by familial violence and unnatural sexual union. The hybrid monsters depicted in the ekphrases are therefore perfect symbols of these acts of *nefas*: violent creatures who are themselves formed by unnatural combinations.

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[34] Aside from Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta, Jocasta's encounter with Polynices also smacks disconcertingly of eroticism. She presses her breasts against the barred doors of the Argive camp in order to gain admittance to her son to convince him to stop the war (7.481-3) – certainly a maternal gesture, similar to that of Atalanta, who presses her breasts against Parthenopaeus' horse as she attempts to withdraw him from the war (4.317); but these are complicated by Venus' entreaties to Mars, also pleading for him to hinder the war, presses her breasts against his chariot (3.265-7). Unlike the other two examples, she styles her address to a lover, and her breasts are used for erotic manipulation. The overlap of maternal and erotic gestures will inevitably be particularly poignant for the Oedipal family. Moreover, Argia and Antigone's competition over their devotion to Polynices confuses sisterly and spousal distinctions, on which see Manioti (2016).

[35] 1.459 (Centaurs and Cyclopes); 1.487, and 4.834 (Nemean lion); 1.562 (Python); 1.598, 1.615, 1.637 and 1.648 (Poene); 2.112 (Fama); 3.225, 3,510, 4.157, 4.533, 6.534; 9.11; 9.102; 9.300; 12.236; 12.554; and 12.576 (unspecified groups of monsters or wild animals); 5.520 (Jupiter's sacred snake); 6.495 (Apollo's snake-headed phantom); 7.111 (Pavor); 12.668 (the Minotaur's cave – probably a transferred epithet).

[36] 1.395; 4.406; 4.639; 7.402; 10.205; 11.143.

Oedipus and the Sphinx

But first we should examine the first monster-slayer in the poem – Oedipus himself, the killer of the Sphinx. In Seneca's *Oedipus*, before Oedipus finds out the truth about his heritage, he holds up the killing of the Sphinx as proof of his *virtus*, and as justification for his rule over Thebes.[37] He claims that, because he has already killed the Sphinx, he would even able to fend off giants, those symbols of cosmic disruption (Sen. *Oed.* 87-102). But the situation has changed by the time of the events in the *Thebaid*. It is now a source of shame to the old man, which he considers as part of the result of the Furies' influence on him. For Oedipus, it is among the sins he has committed, and he sees a causal connection between the Sphinx's killing, the murder of his father, and the begetting of children with his mother (1.65-70), which is corroborated by Tisiphone later in the poem (11.490-2). Despite being a monster-slayer, no one would describe Oedipus as a hero in this poem. Oedipus, therefore, should become a warning to the rest of the aspiring monster-killers of the *Thebaid*. As we will see, in this world, rather than maintaining world order, monster-killing may actually be a cause for more *nefas*.

The encounter with the Sphinx is a pivotal plot point in the Oedipus myth: it grants him the rule of Thebes and so paves the way to his marriage to his own mother. As has been suggested before with regards to the earlier tragic versions of the Oedipus myth, it is also a highly symbolic moment of liminality that ties Oedipus with the hybrid Sphinx.[38] Their meeting occurs on the threshold of the city, between civilisation and the wild, when Oedipus is both a foreigner to the city and a native,[39] and he becomes a riddle-solver, while remaining a riddle to himself.[40] Oedipus himself becomes a hybrid figure that mirrors the Sphinx. Statius' reuses these themes and draws similarities between monster and man in his own version of Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx.

Statius' Sphinx is portrayed as a confusing hybrid patchwork monster. The only detailed description of the monster is found as part of the scene-setting for the location of Tydeus' ambush:

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[37] The encounter between Oedipus and the Sphinx is suppressed in Sophocles' play.
[38] See Renger (2013) p23-44 for a useful analysis of the interests of various theorists on this scene.
[39] Having been adopted as a baby by Polybus, king of Corinth, Oedipus thinks he is Corinthian, whereas in reality he is Theban by birth.
[40] Vernant and duBois (1978) p477; Renger (2013) p37-41.

> contra importuna crepido,
> Oedipodioniae domus alitis; hic fera quondam
> pallentes erecta genas suffusaque tabo
> lumina, concretis infando sanguine plumis
> relliquias amplexa virum semesaque nudis
> pectoribus stetit ossa premens visuque tremendo
> conlustrat campos, si quis concurrere dictis
> hospes inexplicitis aut comminus ire viator
> audeat et dirae commercia iungere linguae;
> nec mora, quin acuens exsertos protinus ungues
> liventesque manus strictosque in vulnera dentes
> terribili applausu circum hospita surgeret ora;
> et latuere doli, donec de rupe cruenta
> heu! simili deprensa viro, cessantibus alis,
> tristis inexpletam scopulis adfligeret alvum.
> monstrat silva nefas: horrent vicina iuvenci
> gramina, damnatis avidum pecus abstinet herbis;
> non Dryadum placet umbra choris, non commoda sacris
> Faunorum, diraeque etiam fugere volucres
> prodigiale nemus.

(2.504-23)

Traditional iconography depicted the Sphinx as a lion-human hybrid, sometimes with attachments like wings or horns.[41] Similarly, in the *Thebaid*, the Sphinx is also some combination of creatures. But we are only offered glimpses of its component parts, while the exact form of the Sphinx is left to the reader's imagination to assemble. Unusually, the traditional lion-part of its makeup is suppressed; its base form seems to be that of a bird (*alitis*), with feathers (*plumis*) which she flaps in the face of her victims (*terribili applausu*). As she commits suicide, she lets her wings fall down (*cessantibus alis*). But she has human features too, such as cheeks (*genas*), breasts (*pectoribus*), nails (*ungues*), hands (*manus*) and teeth (*dentes*).[42] She also has the ability of human speech with a

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[41] See e.g. Dessenne (1957) p11.
[42] Some of these features could be lion features, but they are not specified as such. See Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

dreadful tongue (*dirae…linguae*), an ability generally restricted to monsters with a human component, with which she harasses the unfortunate passers-by with her riddles.[43]

Animalistic features are merged with human ones, which allows the creature as a whole to be read as a fragmented reflection of human nature. She becomes a mirror to read Oedipus, and the two become parallels of each other.[44] Physically, as I have suggested, her indistinct form and her lack of bodily boundaries represent Oedipus' broken social boundaries at Thebes. Gervais has also drawn physical connections between the Sphinx's 'eyes soaked with gore' (*suffusaque tabo / lumina*) and Oedipus' self-blinding.[45] Her mode of attack too, as it harasses the face of its victim (*terribili applausu circum hospita surgeret ora*), recalls Oedipus' admission of patricide, which involved (almost) beheading his father (*secuique trementis / ora senis*, 1.65-6).[46] Moreover, the narrator links the two beings together, with the phrase *Oedipodioniae…alitis* ('the Oedipal bird'). The rare adjectival form[47] creates a strong connection between the man and the monster, whether it is understood possessively ('the bird of Oedipus'), or, more attractively, in a descriptive sense ('the bird like Oedipus'): the latter creating an especial parallel between the monster and man. But more explicitly Oedipus is also likened to the Sphinx: *heu! simili deprensa viro*.[48] The narrator's horrified exclamation ensures that the tone of this monster-killing is not glorious. In a sense, Oedipus is a monster just like the Sphinx. Elsewhere, Oedipus' own actions had already been presented as monstrous, when the word *monstrum* was used by Jupiter for the first time in the poem to describe the worst of Oedipus' sins – his act of incest:

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[43] Lowe (2015) p59-60, on speaking monsters. See also Gervais (2013) on line 2.506f., on the intertextual echoes between the Sphinx and frenzied women (such as Dido and Hecuba), which make her female characteristics are made perverse. Her monstrosity and humanity are juxtaposed, emphasising her hybrid nature.

[44] Renger (2013) p42-44.

[45] Gervais (2013) on line 2.506f. He also sees the Sphinx as an intertextual hybrid, a patchwork of various literary models. See also Renger (2013) p15-20, for parallels between Oedipus and the Sphinx in visual artworks.

[46] Almost, because when Laius' ghost haunts Eteocles in Book 2, he reveals a big gash in his neck. It seems that Statius has invented this detail: most accounts of the encounter between Laius and Oedipus do not specify how the king is killed, with the exception of Sophocles (*Oed. Rex* 810-13) and Seneca (*Oed.* 769-70), who both make Oedipus strike him to death with a (blunt) staff.

[47] A word coined by Ovid as a grand, adjectival name to ironically describe the ruins of Thebes (*Met.* 15.429); see Hardie (2015) *ad loc*.; Lucan's Lentulus uses the phrase, *Oedipodionias infelix fabula Thebas* (Lucan 8.407), as the example of broken social customs *par excellence*, which the Parthians even outdo; see Mayer and Duff (1981).

[48] Because he is "[a]lso cunning and also a monster", Shackleton-Bailey (2003a) p133, n.50.

hic impius heres

patris et inmeritae gremium incestare parentis

appetiit, proprios (monstrum!) reuolutus in ortus.

(1.233-35)

Moreover, the Sphinx is not just destructive, but she is also a self-destructive creature (2.517-8), like the Oedipal family. But even then her death is not a beneficial event for the world, but is called a *nefas*. It has a lasting and polluting effect on the land. Her death even disrupts the behaviour of nature and its personified representatives (2.519-23), just as it will cause Oedipus and his family to commit more *nefas* themselves and inspire unnatural behaviour in others. The reader cannot see Oedipus' killing of the Sphinx as a heroic act. The honour and elevation of status it brings him is temporary and false; ultimately, instead of removing a monster from the world, it transforms the hero into one.

Accordingly, the current generation of heroes do not celebrate Oedipus as a monster-killer in the same way as they do with the other past heroes – an understandable decision given the stigma associated with him.[49] However, they do see the potential in using the image of the Sphinx to promote their own heroic identity. Thus, the heroes display images of the Sphinx on their equipment, but take care to suppress Oedipus' involvement with the creature. For example, both Polynices and Menoeceus, despite fighting on opposite sides of the war, are equipped with items portraying the same emblem of the Sphinx, without Oedipus. Polynices presents the image of the monster on his sword: *aspera vulnifico subter latus ense riget Sphinx* (4.87), a rather different image from the depiction of a warrior led by blind Justice on his shield in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (642-48), with an inscribed message that he is returning to live in his own country.[50] Menoecus too bears the image of the Sphinx on his helmet:

ipsa insanire videtur

Sphinx galeae custos, visoque animata cruore

emicat effigies et sparsa orichalca renident.

(10.658-60)

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[49] See previous chapter for the stigma associated with Oedipus.
[50] On which see e.g. Berman (2007) p49-50; and Zeitlin (2009) p91-102.

The heroes leave Oedipus out of the picture in order to avoid the negative associations with him. The Sphinx represents the heroes' national affiliation because the display of a monster's image on equipment in battle signifies that the respective heroes from the city it terrorised have appropriated the evil power of the Sphinx for their own strength. It is therefore also an individual's claim of strength. It implies that the warrior is equal in ability to the slayer of the monster depicted, because they come from a city that has the power to eradicate it, and also that they share in the ferocious nature of the monster, using it to frighten their opponents on the battle-field. Polynices' shield also functions as an announcement of his claim to the kingdom, as it does in Aeschylus' version, by marking him out as a Theban native. However, using the image of the Sphinx has dangerous risks. By likening themselves to the monster-slayer, the heroes assimilate themselves to Oedipus, the very association they are trying to avoid. In addition, the Sphinx was a scourge for the Theban people and it is therefore inappropriate for members of the Theban royal family assuming the aspects of such a monster. And finally the fact that both heroes claim Theban identity through the same image ironically emphasises to the reader that this war is a kind of sinful civil war.

The two heroes present the portrait of the Sphinx on their weaponry in order to promote their own warrior ability to others. But the description of the Sphinx-engraved adornments still creates the negative associations between the heroes, the Sphinx and even the latent Oedipus. Polynices' sword is stated as being 'wound-making' (*vulnifico*). However, given that the only wound that Polynices is ever permitted to deal is the fatal blow against his brother,[51] the sword draws attention to the similarities between the familial strife that runs throughout the family. As Oedipus became a reflection of the monster through his actions, so too do his children, whose actions are similarly described as *monstrum* (11.420; 11.578). When Polynices carries the image of the Sphinx back to Thebes, he symbolically returns to his own city the monster that brought so much misfortune and he re-enacts its horrors.

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[51] Polynices is repeatedly barred from using his sword by Adrastus in the poem. Firstly outside Adrastus' palace, the king intervenes before Polynices and Tydeus can draw their swords against each other (1.428-9). Then in the funeral games, Polynices is talked away from taking part in the sword fight because Adrastus considers it too dangerous (6.914-19). Lastly he is prevented from avenging Tydeus' death and puts back his hastily drawn sword into the hilt at his father-in-law's admonitions (9.76-81). However, prior to the duel, Adrastus tries one final time to prevent Polynices from entering combat against his brother, but fails this last time (11.424-446).

Likewise Menoecus, though on the Theban side, equally seems to reawaken the spirit of the Sphinx with his bloody slaughter. The Sphinx appears to become mad again (*insanire*), and she is almost given life again when woken by human blood (*visoque animata cruore / emicat effigies*) – an eerie image that resembles a necromantic rite.[52] Thus Menoecus too brings back the spirit of the Sphinx and the evil she represents through his actions. Elsewhere, when the Argives begin to march to Thebes, as an ill-omen of the destruction about to befall the city, the Sphinx is rumoured to be heard on her rock again (*iterumque locutam / Sphinga petris*, 4.376). And so the Sphinx becomes a representative of the general misfortunes of Thebes that the warriors of both armies bring back.[53]

Therefore, the heroes' use of the Sphinx's image is highly problematic. They fail to present themselves as benefactors of mankind, who remove monstrous evil from the world, but instead they become agents of the Sphinx's evil force. As we have seen, Tisiphone denotes the slaying of the Sphinx as one of Thebe's lowest points, among others, when she rebukes Pietas for trying to interfere so late in the affairs of Thebes:

> aut ubi segnis eras dum Martius impia serpens
>
> stagna bibit, dum Cadmus arat, dum uicta cadit Sphinx,
>
> dum rogat Oedipoden genitor, dum lampade nostra
>
> in thalamos Iocasta uenit?

<div align="center">(11.489-92)</div>

The Fury, with her privileged awareness of the world's events,[54] recognises the slaying of the Sphinx not as a moment of vanquishing evil, but as a moment that engenders instead more acts of evil. Following on from the murder of the Sphinx, Tisiphone continues to accuse Pietas for inactivity during Oedipus' patricide and his incest with his mother. The connection that the Fury makes is that the Sphinx's death led directly to his sins: by killing the Sphinx he could cross the border into Theban lands and hence meet and kill his father, and it was because Oedipus was recognised by the Thebans as the saviour of Thebes that he was given his mother and the throne as a reward. Thus

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[52] Cf. Erictho, who reanimates her dead soldier with blood (Luc. 6.667-69), on which see Ogden (2001) p203. See also Parkes (2012) on 4.443-4, for the importance of blood for necromancy.

[53] When Tydeus defends himself against the Theban ambush at the site of the Sphinx's lair, he becomes another Sphinx-like creature, bringing destruction onto the Thebans. See Vessey (1973) p146.

[54] In fact, she is one of few characters in the *Thebaid*, divine or human, that has full awareness of events.

Oedipus is an example of the risks of monster-slaying. It is not necessarily a beneficial act for the world, but it can also allow more acts of evil to occur. As we will see, this warning will be repeated across the ekphrases of the other monster-slayers. The usual purpose of memorialising the act of monster-slaying is to promote a heroic image to others, but the depicted acts suggest a creation of more suffering and strife, and is never free from problematic associations.

Adrastus' *Patera*: Deified Figures

The first ekphrasis in the *Thebaid* is of Adrastus' *patera*. It is an ancient dish that has been used by Adrastus and his royal ancestors to pour libations to the gods, since the earliest days of the city (1.542-3).[55] It features as part of Adrastus' rites celebrating Apollo, which leads into the king's narration about Apollo and Coroebus. There are a pair of images engraved on the *patera*: Perseus carrying the head of Medusa, and Ganymede's capture by Jupiter's eagle.

> tenet haec operum caelata figuras:
> aureus anguicomam praesecto Gorgona collo
> ales habet, iam iamque uagas (ita uisus) in auras
> exilit; illa graues oculos languentiaque ora
> paene mouet uiuoque etiam pallescit in auro.
> hinc Phrygius fuluis uenator tollitur alis,
> Gargara desidunt surgenti et Troia recedit,
> stant maesti comites frustraque sonantia lassant
> ora canes umbramque petunt et nubila latrant.
>
> (1.543-51)

As the poem's first ekphrasis, the themes that we find in the *patera* become programmatic for the poem as a whole. The first theme that I want to explore in this

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[55] The specific kings mentioned are Danaus and the 'older Phoroneus', *seniorque Phoroneus* (1.542). According to Hyginus *Fab.* 143, the latter of these is the son of Inachus (the city's river) and Argia (the spirit of Argos), making him a founder of the city. Statius is playing with temporal anachronisms here: the *patera* was used by the primordial kings of Argos, but Perseus, whose image is on the dish, must have come chronologically later. Statius prioritises the tone of old-time tradition over strict chronological sense.

ekphrasis is apotheosis, or at least its latent potential. The two figures displayed on the *patera* (Perseus and Ganymede) are both mortals, who had been deified. It is a strange fact of Statius' epic world that Perseus has achieved a state of godhood.[56] In Book 11, he is present on Olympus as an anthropomorphic god, alongside the more familiar apotheosised hero Hercules (10.891-2). There also seems to be an earlier gesture towards his divine status when his cult-statue is paired with Juno's (*Perseos effigiem maestam exorantque Mycenae / confusum Iunonis ebur*, 7.418-9). The Argives attempt to propitiate both of them together, as patron gods of Argos (here identified with Mycenae), when their effigies show signs of emotional distress.[57] Statius was probably reacting to the traditions of catasterisms surrounding the Perseus myth, rather than innovating outright.[58] The catasterism of his wife, Andromeda, is more famous;[59] nonetheless, there are a few accounts of Perseus' too.[60] My suggestion is that Statius is engaging with this tradition, and makes him an anthropomorphic deity.[61] In any case, Statius' reason for incorporating Perseus among the Olympian deities is not as important as the fact that he has done so. The image of his preparation to ascend vertically into the heavens symbolises and celebrates his permanent residency there, as one of the *caelicolae* (1.553), to whom Adrastus is using the *patera* to honour.

But while the *patera* celebrates this achievement, elsewhere in the poem, the narrator's description of Perseus' flight connects the cosmic transgression with immorality, when he condemns the hero's ascension with moralising language.[62] In Book 3, Amphiaraus and Melampus prepare to take the auspices for the war on the top of Mount

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[56] This unusual detail greatly troubled Shackleton-Bailey: see Shackleton-Bailey (2003b) p191, n.64; and Shackleton-Bailey (2000) p475: "Hercules' claim to divinity is unquestionable, but Perseus?".

[57] I follow the reading in Shackleton-Bailey (2003b) p191, n.64; Ogden (2008) p103 suggests that the statue could have been based on a real heroic cult-statue that could have existed in Mycenae.

[58] See Ogden (2008) p32-3, on the relatively obscure myths about the hero's death.

[59] Keith (2014), p71–2, explores how Manilius' *Astronomica* reponds to Ovid's surprising omission of Andromeda's metamorphosis; on Andromeda's catasterism see also Marshall (2014) p179–82; Ogden (2008) p70-77.

[60] See Erat. *Cat*. 22; Ps.-Hyg. *Fab*. 224 (among his list titled: *qui facti sunt ex mortalibus immortales*); Ps.-Hyg. *Astr*. 2.12.

[61] There are blurry lines between catasterism and anthropomorphic deification. It has also been suggested that in Adrastus' final prayer to Apollo, Mithras, which Adrastus identifies with Apollo, should be understood as a constellation of Perseus, see Ulansey (1991) p29ff.

[62] Human flight was often conceived as a sinful feat. Horace *Odes* 1.3 seems to have been a strong influence on Statius. In the Ode, Horace mentions three transgressions: Prometheus' gift of fire to mankind, Daedalus' flight, and Hercules' katabasis. Another interaction between Horace 1.3 and the *Thebaid*, is the closing stanza of 1.3: *Nil mortalibus ardui est; / caelum ipsum petimus stultitia, neque / per nostrum patimur scelus / iracunda Iovem ponere fulmina*. Jupiter echoes these sentiments in his first speech, where he complains about how continuously he has to punish mankind with his thunderbolts (1.214-8).

Aphesas, from which Perseus is said to have initiated his flight to collect Medusa's head: *inde ferebant / nubila suspenso celerem **temerasse** volatu / Persea* (3.462-4). The word *temerasse* indicates a strong condemnation of his actions as he begins his flight. Perseus' violation of the heavens anticipates Amphiaraus' and Melampus' own transgression into heavenly knowledge. Once the prophets have seen the results of the augury, they regret their decision to divine the future: *piget irrupisse volantum / concilia et caelo mentem insertasse vetanti, / auditique odere deos* (3.549-51). In the character's minds, they too have transgressed against heaven (*irrupisse*), which they should not have access to (*caelo…vetanti*).

The narrator adds his own moralising comments, agreeing with the prophets that the ability to foresee the future is more of a curse than a benefit:

> unde iste per orbem
> primus venturi miseris animantibus aeger
> crevit amor? divumne feras hoc munus, an ipsi,
> gens avida et parto non umquam stare quieti.
> eruimus, quae prima dies, ubi terminus aevi,
> quid bonus ille deum genitor, quid ferrea Clotho
> cogitet? hinc fibrae et volucrum per nubila sermo
> astrorumque vices numerataque semina lunae
> Thessalicumque nefas, at non prior aureus ille
> sanguis avum scopulisque satae vel robore gentes
> mentibus his usae: silvas amor unus humumque
> edomuisse manu: quid crastina volveret aetas,
> scire nefas homini, nos pravum et flebile vulgus
> scrutari penitus superos: hinc pallor et irae,
> hinc scelus insidiaeque et nulla modestia voti.
>
> (3.551-65)

Mankind's dependence on prophecy is condemned in strong language.[63] Their desire for this knowledge is described as a 'sickness for wretched souls' (*miseris animantibus aeger*, 3.552), and for 'greedy people' (*gens avida*, 3.554). The act itself is called a 'sin' (*nefas*, 3.563), and the men who commit it are 'perverse and lamentable'

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[63] Compare also Horace *Odes* 1.11, where the poet dissuades Leuconoe from calculating her future.

(*pravum et flebile*, 3.563). As often in moralising statements, the narrator compares the actions of men from an earlier age with the current generation – they had no interest in divination at all – relying on the rhetorical tradition that morals degrade through the ages. Significantly, this type of transgression into divine knowledge actually is a cause for crimes, betrayal, and unrestrained prayers/curses (*nulla modestia voti*, 3.565).

For a mortal to overstep their boundaries and act like the gods, to fly like them or to ascertain their divine secrets, are seen as moral transgressions. Behaving in ways that are more than human carries great risk. However, while Perseus, despite sinning, manages to successfully navigate his flight and eventually join the gods, the heroes fail to follow in his example. In their efforts to continually push themselves to be as 'heroic' as possible, they overstep the limits of humanity. Their actions will be criminal, but without the reward of apotheosis.

The sense of apotheosis in Perseus' image is reinforced by the image of Ganymede and the eagle. His appearance is rather unexpected: as an ancestor of the Argive kings, Perseus is a fitting suitable subject-matter for Adrastus' heirloom (1.542-3). Ganymede, however, as a Trojan prince, has no connection to Adrastus or Argos. But as Newlands has shown, the general outline of the two designs parallel each other: Perseus on the verge of flying away, complements Ganymede who is soaring away in the clutches of Jupiter's eagle.[64] The scene is based on Vergil's ekphrasis of Ganymede's kidnapping on the cloak of Cloanthus (Verg. *Aen.* 5.253-7), which, it has been suggested, should be interpreted as his deification.[65] Two discussions on Vergil's ekphrasis have been useful to me for the purpose of interpreting Statius'. The first is by Putnam, who argues for a pessimistic reading of the artwork. He suggests that Ganymede's sudden kidnapping from earth and the futile reaction of his human and canine companions reflect on the number of tragically premature deaths in the poem – a theme he sees across the *Aeneid*'s ekphrases.[66] However, in response to Putnam, Hardie suggests that the ekphrasis' design and wording glorifies Ganymede. His ascension towards the stars

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[64] Newlands (2012) p76-77.
[65] Vergil's Ganymede scene was a favourite of the Flavian epicists: V. Fl. (2.408-17); Sil. (15.425-32); see Newlands (2012) p77, and Ripoll (2000) p485-88.
[66] Putnam (1998) p55–74.

should be treated as early apotheosis rather than early death, which anticipates the eventual deifications of Aeneas, Ascanius, and Augustus.[67]

To my knowledge, only Newlands has carried out an extended analysis of Statius' Ganymede ekphrasis.[68] She has clearly identified the similarities in the details and differences in the tone between Statius and Vergil's respective scenes.[69] The descriptions share many details: Vergil's unusual depiction of Ganymede as a hunter is repeated in Statius,[70] and both scenes show the boy being seized by the eagle, among his human and canine companions, who respond to his capture with distressed or lamenting gestures. But, as Newlands notes, the tone has none of the optimism that Vergil's scene has; instead the focus is on futility. She argues that Putnam's reading of the Vergilian Ganymede scene fits the Statian version. The ekphrasis seems to forebode early death rather than apotheosis: the dogs chase Ganymede's *umbra*, a word meaning both shadow and ghost, marking out his kidnapping as a kind of death, and the 'dark clouds', *nubila*, has replaced Vergil's *sidera*, the stars which acted as symbolism of his immortalisation.

My own interpretation of Statius' Ganymede image combines these critical discussions. The image, four lines long in total, is evenly divided into two perspectives. The first two lines are focalised through Ganymede. As he is lifted up into the heavens, the narrator describes the scenery below him recede, as seen through the boy's eyes. The next two lines return the perspective to an earthly level, describing the boy's companions as they watch him being lifted away. But in the first half, the emotional tone of Ganymede's ascension into heaven is entirely neutral. Ganymede does not show any sense of alarm or distress as we might expect. Nor does he rejoice, in the manner of Valerius' Ganymede, who is described as *laetus* as he explicitly joins the gods (Val. Fl. 2.414-17). His perspective is related only in visual terms. But it is only returning to the attendants and dogs left behind on the earthly plane that we find an emotional perspective of distress and futility.[71] The humans are *maesti* (1.550), in contrast to Valerius' happy Ganymede, and the dogs bark fruitlessly for their master (*frustraque sonantia lassant / ora*, 1.550-1).

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[67] Hardie (2002) p339-41; cf. also Seo (2013) p60–63 for a discussion on the problematic connections between Aeneas, Ascanius, and the 'eroticised' Paris, and Ganymede. Seo argues that the father and son are tainted by their associations of their predecessors too.
[68] See also a brief discussion by Vessey (1973) p100.
[69] Newlands (2012) p77-80.
[70] Newlands (2012) p77.
[71] For pathos in the scene, see Vessey (1973) p100; Ripoll (2000) p485-6.

The significance lies in the difference in the two perspectives. Because the pathos only lies with the companions Ganymede has left behind, and not the boy himself, the theme of apotheosis is not made moot, as Newlands suggests,[72] but simply limited to Ganymede's perspective, who vividly ascends to the heavens in the description. His upwards motion cannot be doubted, even though he still has his eyes on the earth he is leaving. But a clear sense of separation between earth and heaven is emphasised. The world sinks down (*desidunt*; *recedit*), while he rises (*surgenti*). The insurmountable physical gap replicates the power gap between gods and men. The contrast between the unemotional, deified boy and his lamenting attendants fits in with the sense of divine indifference to human affairs found in the *Thebaid*.[73] The difference in their reactions also emphasises the cost of achieving apotheosis. Elsewhere in the *Thebaid*, the heroes' reckless attempts to get their *virtus* recognised in order to be worthy of immortality often end up causing destruction and misery: Menoeceus, for example, who does manage to be deified, does so at the cost of his parents' happiness. As Ganiban shows, the impact of the news of Menoeceus' fate on his family is described in violent language and metaphors.[74] Notably, when Creon understands from Tiresias' prophecy that Menoecus must sacrifice himself, he feels struck by a metaphorical thunderbolt (a divine weapon), which is oddly followed by a simile, likening the effect to a spear through the heart:

> grandem subiti cum fulminis ictum,
> non secus ac torta traiectus cuspide pectus,
> accipit exanimis

(10.618-20)

Other 'deified' mortals in the poem, like Opheltes or Amphiaraus, are declared as gods only at their funeral, among much lamenting. Thus deification is only advantageous to the deified individual; the loved ones left behind feel almost as if they are attacked by divinity and pay the emotional cost.

The pathos and sense of futility in the passage is limited to his human companions and his pursuing dogs. It is they who are chasing the shadows and dark clouds, which

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[72] "The idea of apotheosis which, for good or for ill, is present in his Virgilian model, is completely absent", Newlands (2012) p79.
[73] Ganiban (2007) p51.
[74] Ganiban (2007) p141.

Newlands saw as symbols of death. Therefore, the parallel should rather be drawn between the the dogs, who are trying to follow the deified figure, and current heroes, aiming to be deified like their heroic models. As the dogs cannot reach their target in the heavens, but can only follow a shadowy notion of him; similarly, while Ganymede has successfully achieved apotheosis, the majority of the current generation of heroes will be unable to follow his ascension and end up in the underworld, as *umbrae* themselves. All of the Seven are doomed to die, with the exception of Adrastus, who flees from the battle alive and physically unharmed; nonetheless, his departure is also portrayed as a kind of death, when he is compared to Dis' own descent into the underworld after being allocated his realm (11.443-6). Adrastus resembles the archetypical figure, who failed to secure a place in the heavens.

Therefore Statius reuses essential themes and details from Vergil's Ganymede ekphrasis and repurposes its design to fit his own epic's course. While the Vergilian Ganymede scene anticipated Aeneas and the Julio-Claudians' deification, Statius' Ganymede scene contrasts sharply, foreshadowing both the destructive effects that the attempts to be deified will bring, and also the many heroes' preclusion from heaven.

As with the collection of Adrastus' ancestral images, this artefact's engravings of deified figures has been designed to authorise the royal status of its owners. As a tool of communication with the gods, the *patera* has religious significance through its function. It is therefore fitting that it portrays figures who passed from a human status to a divine, to hint at the family's close connection with the gods. The implication is that the rule of the Argive kings is divinely sanctioned with the support of the gods, and that they have the same potential to be apotheosised as those on the images. However, the pessimistic tone that the narrator uses to describe the Ganymede image undermines this idea of divine support, and instead focuses the attention on the failure of so many of the poem's heroes to receive divinity. In their efforts to become gods, symbols of cosmic order, they instead add to the moral chaos of the world, and become monstrous figures – a potential that is also found in the ekphrasis of the *patera*, which we will now turn to.

Hybridity

Monsters have a heavy presence in the *Thebaid*. The image of the snake-headed Medusa in Adrastus' ekphrasis anticipates, in particular, among the multitude of monstrous creatures, the dense multitude of snake monsters or part-snake monsters in the

poem. Snakes in the *Thebaid*, as we will see, become symbols of disaster and evil, and so Perseus' killing of Medusa is supposed to be a demonstration of the hero's victory over chaos, a prerequisite to his divinisation.[75] But, as well as anticipating the epic's monsters, the ekphrasis also makes manifest the human potential to become monsters with a focus on human-animal hybrids. As we have seen, hybrids, as entities with both human and bestial parts, are useful bodies to explore the appropriate limits of humanity.[76] The hybrid becomes a visual metaphor of the transgression of these human values.

Medusa is an obvious hybrid on the *patera*, but I will also suggest that the human characters, Perseus and Ganymede, are described as if they were hybrids. The outline of the Perseus/Medusa image (the hero holding the Medusa head and about to leap into the air) is adapted from the proud self-description of Ovid's Perseus: ***Gorgonis anguicomae Perseus superator et alis / aerias ausus iactatis ire per auras*** (Ov. *Met.* 4.699-700).[77] Perseus' boasts in the *Metamorphoses* that he is *superator* of Medusa indicates that this is supposed to be a heroic, monster-slaying moment recorded on the *patera*. The Statian image is in keeping with how Ovid's Perseus wanted other people to see him. The way he bears the head also corresponds to Adrastus' collection of artwork that depicts Coroebus heroically wielding Poene's severed head (2.221). Among the verbal correspondences is the Ovidian coinage, *anguicoma* (Ov. *Met.* 4.699; *Theb.* 1.544), which is not found in extant literature between Ovid and Statius.[78] The compounded form, itself consists of an animal and a human element (*angues* and *coma*) and linguistically

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[75] Snake-imagery did not only stand for destruction in the ancient world: for example, they were also symbols of healing, due to their ability to shed skin in what was conceived as a form of 'rebirth', see Ogden (2013) p310–46, and Kitchell (2014) *s.v. Snakes*. However, in Latin epic (and perhaps early Greek epic, on which see Brown (2014)), the snakes' restorative skin-shedding is appropriated to have sinister overtones: e.g. in the *Aeneid*, Pyrrhus (a reborn, more brutal version of Achilles) is compared to a snake that has just shed its skin (2.471-5). In the *Thebaid*, Vergil's simile is modified to describe Tydeus, having recovered from his wounds sustained in Book 2 (4.95-8). Thus Pyrrhus' and Tydeus' good health indicated by the simile, allows instead a continuation of more excessive, and brutal violence. The chthonic associations of Tydeus' snake comparison may also be significant (*alta / anguis humo*, 4.95-6), in keeping with other snake monsters in the poem (Poena, the Furies, and Apollo's snake-headed phantom), which are themselves all destructive forces that have arisen from the underworld. Vergil also uses snake imagery more generally to represent destruction, particularly during the narration of the fall of Troy, on which see Knox (1950).

[76] Lowe (2015) p167-8 argues that monsters in Latin literature are 'humanised', developing the innovations of Hellenistic authors.

[77] See Keith (2016) p210-14, on Statius' use of Ovid's '*Perseid*'.

[78] After Statius, only Dracontius (5th C.) uses it to describe the Furies (Drac. *Carm. Prof.* 10.439). See *TLL, s.v. anguicoma*. Medusa's hair is the pivot for her femininity/humanity and her monstrosity. See Bexley (2010) p146-7; Fantham (1992) p101; Lowe (2010) p122-25.

simulates the hybrid nature of Medusa. The rare word anticipates and later also describes several of the snake-headed creatures in the poem (*Theb*. 6.495; 12.647).

But the descriptions of both humans in flight also make them hybrid-like. When Perseus (a human), flies using his divine winged equipment, he becomes part bird and part man. The learned reader would be aware that Perseus traditionally flies with the help of the winged sandals, which Mercury bestowed on him.[79] But the narrator does not mention these sandals. The actual words the narrator uses to describe Perseus are *aureus…/ ales* (1.544-5). It is ambiguous whether the adjective *aureus* is a learned epithet for Perseus, who was conceived by Jupiter in the form of a golden shower,[80] or whether the wings are 'golden' simply because that is the material of the bowl. Narrative and artwork overlap. But there is also play in the word *ales* too. The pairing of *ales* with the adjective *aureus* suggests that we should take *ales* as a noun, 'bird' or 'winged one', rather than the adjective, 'winged'. By not referring to Perseus as a man or by a name, but only by an animal or animal part, the description supresses the hero's human aspects. Linguistically, the hero becomes more bird than man. Later, when the deified hero is seen on Olympus, he maintains his bird-like aspect (*volucer Danaëius*, 10.892).[81]

The idea of a merger between man and animal in Perseus' description resonates with the ekphrasis' second scene. A similar metamorphic blur happens with Ganymede. The myth is that the youthful Ganymede was kidnapped from Troy, either by Jupiter's eagle or Jupiter in eagle form, to serve as the gods' cup-bearer. In this ekphrasis, Ganymede is referred to as *Phrygius…venator* (1.548), giving him some appearance of human form at least; however, the narrator only refers to the eagle's presence metonymically, when he explains that the boy is being carried away by tawny wings (*fulvis…alis*, 1.548). The intermingling word order in the whole phrase (*Phrygius fulvis venator tollitur alis*) creates a visual representation of the merging forms between man and bird. The detail of the tawny coloured wings form a balance with the earlier depiction of Perseus as 'golden bird/wing'. The language seems to suggest that Ganymede is being

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[79] See Ogden (2008) p41-6 for the various traditions of the myth.

[80] Ogden (2008) p13-18.

[81] Previously in Latin literature, Perseus and Medusa's encounter has been recounted by Ovid and Lucan. Ovid also plays with the cross-contaminated forms of man and bird. He stresses the hero's human nature by having the narrator refer to him by name (4.730), or words such as *iuvenis* (Ov. *Met.* 4.711), while also repeatedly mentioning his attached wings (Ov. *Met.* 4.616; 4.724), and his aerial suspension (Ov. *Met.* 4.614). The hero is also compared to Jove's eagle (Ov. *Met.* 4.714-17). However, Ovid never directly refers to Perseus as a 'bird', only that he has wings as attachments. However, when Lucan describes Perseus flying back to Argos after having just killed the Gorgon) also describes Perseus as an *ales* (Luc. 9.689).

lifted away by his own wings. The boundaries between bird and man are indistinct for both Perseus and Ganymede, and suggest a hybrid form. As Amphiaraus suggests, birds usually have positive connotations: living in purer air above the sins of earth, they have divine knowledge (3.482-9). However, Amphiaraus' augury, which immediately follows the anecdote of Perseus' transgressive flight into heaven, proves that beneficial birds are absent from this poem: only birds of evil remain (*monstra volant*, 3.502-11). Perseus' and Ganymede's bodily transgressions (man with wings) allow them to commit vertical transgressions, as they fly from earth to heaven, which, as we have seen, was condemned as a crime against natural laws. There is much overlap in their ascension between the process of becoming a god, and moral transgression.

Perseus: Agent of Order or Chaos?

While we have seen Ovid's Perseus celebrate himself as the conqueror (*superator*, Ov. *Met.* 4.699) of Medusa, the equivalent description of him in the ekphrasis notably omits this heroic word. More focus is placed on the violence done to Medusa's head with her severed neck (*praesecto…collo*, 1.544), and the fact that the craftsmanship of the *patera* makes it seem as if she is still dying on the image, and might even move her eyes: *illa graues oculos languentiaque ora / paene mouet uiuoque etiam pallescit in auro* (1.546-7). To what extent then has Perseus fully vanquished the monster? The artistic mastery keeps the monster 'alive'. The static artwork means that she will never actually die; the living gold (*vivo…auro*) will keep her in a state of suspension between life and death. As she almost seems able to move her eyes, the source of her terrifying power,[82] her presence on the ekphrasis reveals the difficulty in eradicating evil for good, like the Sphinx that reawakens on Menoeceus' helmet.

Instead of removing a source of evil, Perseus seems actually to have created more problems for the world. As I have suggested, Medusa's head anticipates many snake or part-snake monsters in the epic. This is in keeping with a mythical anecdote about Perseus and the head of Medusa, through which she is associated with the propagation of snakes. The ekphrasis of Perseus depicts him at the moment of returning to Argos, with Medusa's head in hand. This journey has been narrated before in more detail in a number of earlier

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[82] The ancient sources are inconsistent about whether the eyes have their petrifying effect when they look or are looked at; see Ogden (2008) p50-5.

epics: as the hero flew back to Argos, drops of blood dripped from Medusa's head onto the ground and transformed into a variety of venomous snakes that continued to plague Libya thereafter.[83] Fantham's seminal paper on this anecdote in Lucan identifies the myth as an allegory for the geographical spreading of evil caused by the Roman Empire.[84] I suggest that the Medusa head stands for something quite similar in the *Thebaid*, as a source of evil that refuses to die, that instead generates more and worse kinds of evil.

After setting up the description of Perseus just preparing to fly home, the audience might have expected that the transformation tale would have also been referred to in some way. However, the aetiological transformation of Medusa's blood into snakes is suppressed in the *Thebaid*. Instead, the reader is presented with Adrastus' internal narrative immediately after the ekphrasis, which features numerous snaky entities.[85] I suggest that Medusa's destructive force transgresses across narrative boundaries: her generative power to create more snaky horrors moves from a visual internal narrative (the ekphrasis) to a verbal internal narrative.

Right from the start, Adrastus' narrative begins with a description of Apollo's slaying of the giant snake Python, and his arrival at Argos for expiation.[86] After arriving at Argos, Apollo rapes and impregnates Psamathe, the daughter of Crotopus the king, and leaves. The daughter, fearful of her father's wrath and of punishment (*poenae,* 1.578), hides the child with shepherds. However, the shepherds carelessly let the baby be torn apart by dogs. In her grief, the princess tells her father everything, who, in response, unsympathetically puts her to death. In revenge, Apollo summons an underworld fiend (unnamed by Statius, but known from other accounts as Poena/Poine or Ker): a half-woman, half-snake, with an additional snake rising from her head, who feeds on other Argive babies.[87] Eventually the monster is slain by the hero, Coroebus, but Apollo, his wrath still not sated, personally sends disease-bringing arrows into the city until Coroebus

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[83] The anecdote is found in three epic poets: Apollonius of Rhodes (4.1513-7), Ovid (*Met.* 3.617-20), and Lucan (9.696-733).
[84] Fantham (1992).
[85] See Keith (2014) p78 and Keith (2016) p212-4 for the Medusa head as foreshadowing Python and Poene.
[86] The description of Apollo killing the Python is heavily influenced by Ovid's account in the *Met.* (1.438-51), see McNelis (2007) p29-37; but while Ovid puts the playful elegiac episode of Apollo and Daphne immediately following, Statius follows the account with Apollo's dalliance with Crotopus' daughter, which has tragic results; see Keith (2016) p213.
[87] Fontenrose (1980) p104-5.

offers himself up as a sacrifice at Apollo's temple to appease the god.[88] Apollo, however, finally allows Coroebus to leave unharmed.

Thus, as Perseus kills Medusa and causes more snakes to appear, so too in Adrastus' narrative does the slaughter of one snaky monster lead to the birth of another. The individuals who attempt to remove a source of chaos from the world (Perseus, Apollo, or Coroebus) only add to it. On top of that, at each stage of the process, the destruction scales up. Killing the Python leads to the death of the baby Linus. Linus' death leads to Poena, who kills multiple children. And the death of Poena leads to a mass extermination in Argos, represented by a vivid allegory: *Mors fila Sororum / ense metit captamque tenens fert manibus urbem* (1.632-4). Apollo is allied with Death's personification, another chthonic demon/goddess. Thus encapsulated in this internal narrative, the snake monsters become an image for unending and escalating violence. Even at the conclusion of all these evils, there is no victory to be celebrated. Coroebus leaves Phoebus' shrine with the 'sad honour of life', *tristem…honorem / vitae* (1.663-4).[89] The misery outlasts the narrative.

Perseus' image is on the *patera* as a model of heroism for his descendants, but the artwork becomes a microcosm of many of the problems that face the poem's heroes. It demonstrates the difficulty in walking the line between divinity and monstrosity, for there is great overlap in the process that lead to the two. Perseus successfully rids the world of a monster, but inadvertently contributes to a wider spread of evil. The birth of Medusa's snakes are not shown in the celebratory design; nonetheless, its regenerative energy is transferred to Adrastus' narrative, where misfortune keeps coming in cycles. This, therefore, is in keeping with the tragic tone of the poem, which we explored in the last chapter. Misfortune engenders more misfortune. In their attempts to prove themselves as heroes, the characters will actually commit or cause more sin, and, in the process, they become more similar to the monsters they want to destroy.

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[88] Keith (2013) p311-2 has suggested that the monster retrieved from the underworld should be understood as a hellish, reincarnated metaphor of the princess, by analogy with other Indo-European myths. If interpreted in such a way, then both parents of Linus participate in wreaking vengeance on the Argives, reinforcing the theme of retribution in the internal narrative, and anticipating its relevance in the rest of the poem.

[89] The story itself, though resolved, is by no means a comfortable cause for celebration, and yet Adrastus tries to take away a positive message. As the internal narrative acts as a miniature model for the main narrative, its ending anticipates the ambiguous ending of the *Thebaid*. By failing to recognise the lessons from history, Adrastus endangers his people once more; see Ganiban (2007) p9-10.

Here, I want to take stock of the treatment of monsters and monster-slayers, which we have examined so far. The various description of the monsters have shown that the attributes of monsters tend to overlap. For instance, the Sphinx, which, as we have seen, is presented in the *Thebaid* more like a human-bird hybrid than a lion (*Oedipodioniae…alitis*), flaps its wings in the faces of the citizens of Thebes (*terribili applausu circum hospita surgeret ora*, 2.515). Her actions intertextually recall a Vergilian monster, Jupiter's Fury/Dira, which, in the guise of a bird (*alitis…in parvae subitam collecta figuram*, Verg. *Aen.* 12.862), attacks Turnus' face and beats his shield with her wings: *Turni se pestis ob ora / fertque refertque sonans clipeumque everberat alis* (12.865-6).[90] Through an intertextual avenue, the Sphinx is connected to the Furies, the most frequently recurring fiends of the *Thebaid*, who govern the plot's momentum, and so also to Medusa (1.544) and Apollo's phantom (6.495), who are each labelled *anguicomae*, like the Furies. These monsters, indistinctly described or malleable in shape, begin to blur together with their intertextual and intratextual parallels: their habits and attributes almost seem exchangeable.

But divinity and monstrosity are also confused. Apollo's snake-haired phantom (*anguicomam monstri effigiem*, 6.495), which had been summoned from the underworld to ensure his favourite priest's (Amphiaraus') victory in the chariot race by frightening off the competitors, also plays on the themes of the Perseus ekphrasis and Coroebus narrative. Like Medusa, her purpose lies entirely with her head (*saevissima visu / ora*, 6.495-6), wielded by a monster-slayer (Apollo slayer of Python) as a weapon. The narrator suggest that Apollo has either raised her from the underworld, or created her for that very purpose (*mouet siue ille Erebo seu finxit in astus / temporis*, 6.496-7). For the second time, the god allies himself with hellish monsters. Provocatively, the narrator uses the language of apotheosis and catasterism to describe Apollo raising her from the underworld (*innumera certe formidine cultum / **tollit in astra** nefas*, 6.497-8). The statement threatens to compromise the whole concept of apotheosis. If apparently monsters (a *nefas*) can also find their way to heaven because of their terrifying nature, what does it say about the heroes who aim for the same treatment? Apollo did not grant Coroebus divinity for his heroic actions, instead he begrudgingly spares his life; however, he chooses to bring a monster to the stars. Perseus might have been deified, but a

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[90] The Vergiian *Dira* anticipates the disintegration of the heaven-hell dichotomy, as a chthonic force that works for Jupiter.

Medusa-like monster, also has the potential for it. The polarising rhetoric about good and evil, order and chaos, divine and monstrous is made muddy.

But humans also blend into this crowd of monsters too. In all of the examples we have seen so far, both men and monsters have a preference for attacking the face or head of an enemy. As we saw earlier, Oedipus and the Sphinx both aim for the *ora* of their opponents. Perseus too, as he is portrayed in his ekphrasis, is similar to the Sphinx and Vergil's Dira/Fury: as a flying hybrid entity (another *ales*), he too has made an attack on Medusa's head (*praesecto…collo*, 1.544). The head of Poena, whose presence in the narrative was anticipated by Medusa's own head, is also mistreated in both of the contradictory depictions of her death. In Adrastus' narrative, the Argive citizens vent their rage by violating her corpse, destroying her limbs, with a focus on stamping sharpened stakes on her face (1.621-3). In the images of Adastus' ancestors, her head was fixed instead on Coroebus' sword, in a pose reminiscent of Perseus and Medusa (2.221). The mis-treatment of corpses is a recurrent theme of the *Thebaid*, culminating in Creon's ban on burying the Argive warriors. But even the wild beasts (regularly called *monstra* in the poem, when they are imagined to be feeding on human bodies) leave Poena's body alone (1.624-6); instead it is the humans, who continue to violate the corpse in an empty and irrational gesture of pure emotion (*solacia uana dolori*, 1.621), or, as Perseus and Coroebus are depicted, vaunt it to display their heroism.[91] The humans become more savage than the wild beasts.

All these themes crystallise in the fate of Tydeus. Tydeus is *the* example of the hero who pushes past the acceptable limits of humanity. His superhuman qualities align him with divinity: his actions on the battlefield makes him a candidate to be deified by Minerva. However, while right on the cusp of gaining immortality, he commits the beastly taboo of cannibalism. In his final moments, after he and his killer, Melanippus, have both been fatally wounded, he begs his friends to bring Melanippus to him. It is again Melanippus' *ora* he has his eyes on:

> moti omnes, sed primus abit primusque repertum
>
> Astaciden medio Capaneus e puluere tollit
>
> spirantem laeuaque super ceruice reportat,

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[91] The marvelling at the corpses of slain monsters is traditional in other poems: e.g. Cacus (Verg. *Aen.* 8.265-7) or the Calydonian Boar, into the latter the heroes ritually plunge their spears, to mark them with blood (Ov. *Met.* 8.423-4); but an uncontrolled rage targeted at destroying the monster's body and face is unusual.

terga cruentantem concussi uulneris unda:

qualis ab Arcadio rediit Tirynthius antro

captiuumque suem clamantibus intulit Argis.

erigitur Tydeus uultuque occurrit et amens

laetitiaque iraque, ut singultantia uidit

ora trahique oculos seseque agnouit in illo,

imperat abscisum porgi, laeuaque receptum

spectat atrox hostile caput, gliscitque tepentis

lumina torua uidens et adhuc dubitantia figi.

infelix contentus erat: plus exigit ultrix

Tisiphone; iamque inflexo Tritonia patre

uenerat et misero decus inmortale ferebat,

atque illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri

aspicit et uiuo scelerantem sanguine fauces

(nec comites auferre ualent): stetit aspera Gorgon

crinibus emissis rectique ante ora cerastae

uelauere deam; fugit auersata iacentem,

nec prius astra subit quam mystica lampas et insons

Ilissos multa purgauit lumina lympha.

<p align="center">(8.745-66)</p>

As he sees Melanippus, he 'recognises himself' (*seseque agnovit*) in Melanippus' eyes. He is not just seeing his own reflection, but it also signifies something deeper: a recognition of his own monstrous essence, of what he is about to become. As Capaneus brings the body to Tydeus, the pair are compared to Hercules and the so-called Erymanthian boar respectively. But it is not the Herculean figure that Tydeus recognises himself in, but the monstrous one. Tydeus has been consistently compared to boars, and, as we have seen, he wears the Calydonian Boar hide.[92] His attempts to model himself after the hero completely break down. Finally, instead, his external covering becomes an accurate representation of his internal nature. Now, seeing Melanippus, who himself resembles a boar, he recognises this beastly potential in himself. It is at this point that

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[92] See Feeney (1991) p360-1, on Tydeus' beastly transformation; Hardie (1993) p69.

Minerva approaches about to grant him immortal glory and sees him gorging himself on the brains of Melanippus.

Here all the explored themes coalesce. There are strong parallels being created. The apparent polarisation of good heavenly forces and evil hellish ones reappear: Tritonia offering divinity; Tisiphone pushing for monstrosity – their similar but opposing fuctions perhaps stressed by the alliterative play of the two deities' titles. One snake-haired; one wielding the Medusa head. But here Medusa's function becomes apotropaic, as she conceals the goddess from the polluted hero's sight, while reacting to the scene herself and coming alive. Minerva's presence is supressed in the scene (*uelauere deam*) leaving only the snake-headed monsters. The hellish forces win out this time, but Tydeus' moment of liminality between the two shows how similar the two are. For a moment divinity, humanity, and bestiality are concentrated in the single figure of Tydeus.

But Tydeus' treatment of Melanippus is also the ultimate culmination of the mutual violence done to the face or head between monsters and monster-slayers. Violence to the head is usually a way of destroying someone else's identity.[93] The victim loses their personal features and becomes a prop to strengthen or augment the image of its new owner (like Perseus and Coroebus). Here, the theme of the violated face creates an identity crisis. As he recognises his own bestiality by seeing the boar-like Melanippus, he is both the monster-slayer and monster. As he chomps down on the head of his victim, he enacts the part of the beasts that are imagined to feed on unburied human corpses. But since he sees in Melanippus a reflection of himself, he does not just destroy Melanippus' sense of identity, but, in the process, he also destroys his own.[94] The heroic image he has worked hard to cultivate is destroyed. Only a beast remains.

Men, Horses, Centaurs: The Crater and the Chlamys

Here I will examine the second pair of images in the set of monster-slaying ekphrases. These appear in the prizes for first and second place in the chariot-race of Book 6. Like the first ekphrasis, this one too is a two-part ekphrasis. However, it does not have two scenes on a single object as Adrastus' *patera* did, but two images on two

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[93] Eilberg-Schwartz (1995) p1-4.
[94] Augoustakis (2016) *ad loc*. notes a tradition where Meanippus is Tydeus' half-brother. Tydeus' consumption of Melanippus therefore pushes the imagery of fratricide and civil war to an extreme.

separate objects. Nonetheless, the two descriptions are juxtaposed to one other and should be considered together too. The first prize is a crater, which depicts the battle between the Centaurs and Lapiths, with a particular focus on Hercules wrestling with the Centaur, Hylaeus. The second prize takes the form of a cloak with an image of Leander swimming across the Hellespont to visit his beloved Hero:

> huic pretium palmae gemini cratera ferebant
> Herculeum iuvenes: illum Tirynthius olim
> ferre manu sola spumantemque ore supino
> vertere, seu monstri victor seu Marte, solebat.
> Centauros habet arte truces aurumque figuris
> terribile: hic mixta Lapitharum caede rotantur
> saxa, faces aliique iterum crateres, ubique
> ingentes morientum irae; tenet ipse furentem
> Hylaeum et torta molitur robora barba,
> at tibi Maeonio fertur circumflua limbo
> pro meritis, Admete, chlamys repetitaque multo
> murice: Phrixei natat hic contemptor ephebus
> aequoris et picta tralucet caerulus unda;
> in latus ire manus mutaturusque videtur
> bracchia, nec siccum speres in stamine crinem;
> contra autem frustra sedet anxia turre suprema
> Sestias in speculis, moritur prope conscius ignis.
>
> (6.531-47)

Leander: a Symbol of Transgression

Just as with the first pair of ekphrases involving Perseus and Ganymede, the first half of these two ekphrases befits its context. The contests are being held in Nemea, a land which consigns special honour to Hercules for his involvement in ridding the place of the Nemean lion. In fact, in later accounts it was in honour of Hercules' killing of the lion that the Nemean games were instituted.[95] Statius, although he follows the tradition

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[95] Valavanis (2004) p305-6; see Bravo III (2018) p130-4 on a detailed examination of the literary evidence.

that the games were founded by Opheltes' death, also alludes to the Herculean aetiology, by portraying the moment that he battles the lion in the privileged first position of the procession of ancestral images (6.270-73).[96] Therefore it is not surprising to see after the first race another image of Hercules in the act of monster-slaying again. The chariot-race, the first event of the games, is enclosed within depictions of Hercules slaying monsters.

But Leander's image, like Ganymede's, is less obvious. It is worth considering the two passages as a pair for intertextual and thematic reasons. The setting of Statius' Leander image is modelled on that of Vergil's Ganymede image, which was woven into a *chlamys* with a purple border (*purpura maeandro duplici Meliboea*, Verg. *Aen.* 5.251), and given as a first prize to the winner of the boat race in the first event of the funerary games. Statius' Leander is also set on a *chlamys* with a purple border (*Maeonio…limbo*) that was awarded as a second prize to the winner of the chariot-race in the first event of the funerary games.[97] We might see Statius' choice to downgrade the prize from the winner to the runner-up a provocative act of poetic competition.

But they also share some themes. Both scenes focus on the futility of the internal observers. Hero can only helplessly (*frustra*, 6.546) watch from her tower, as Ganymede's dogs barked in vain (also *frustra*, 1.550) at their departing master. Moreover, both images depict young boys in the midst of a geographical transgression: one into the sky, the other across the sea. As we saw with Perseus earlier, ascension into the skies was figured as a transgressive act. Here too, the boy is marked as *contemptor…aequoris*, a phrase that hints at the hubristic nature of the attempt to overstep natural limits. The word *contemptor* is a charged word in the *Thebaid*. Later in the poem, there is another youth, Cretheus, who also spurns the sea (*contemptoremque profundi*, 9.306). Having successfully navigated difficult straits, it is his fate to die in a shallow stream at Hippomedon's hands. The narrator sardonically comments: *quid non fata queant?…/…heu cuius naufragus undae* (9.309-10). There is a sense of cosmic karma, an ironic payback for his hubris at challenging the gods and nature.[98] Moreover, the word features in Capaneus' characterisation as a *superum contemptor* (3.603; 9.505), the model of resistance against the gods and their world order in this poem.

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[96] See previous chapter.
[97] These races are themselves modelled on Homer's chariot-race in Patroclus' funeral games (*Il.* 23.362-447).
[98] Dewar (1991) *ad loc.*

Statius' Leander replaces Vergil's Ganymede on the cloak, and conveys much less celebratory themes. Instead, he fits a pattern of *contemptores* in the *Thebaid*, who challenge the natural order of things and pay the price for it.[99] The image forms a foil to Statius' earlier Ganymede scene as an example where boundary breaking does not lead to any reward to the individual. As we have seen, geographical, divine, and moral transgressions are inextricably linked in the *Thebaid*, and so Leander's voyage across the sea and imminent death acts as a warning for those who try to cross the limitations set for humans. In this way, like Ganymede's design, the second image supplements the themes of the first: in this case, the figure of Hercules; a hero in whom tensions about transgressing human limits have always been present.

Hercules' Crater

The crater displaying Hercules' image, like Adrastus' *patera*, is a link to the past. While Adrastus' *patera* belonged to his ancestors, the bowl once belonged to Hercules himself (6.532).[100] This is a clear example of a hero fashioning their own heroic identity as they want to be seen by others. The image on the crater presents Hercules himself taking part in the battle between the Centaurs and Lapiths at Pirithous' wedding in his traditional role of *alexikakos*, a slayer of monsters that thus brings peace to the world.[101] Centaurs are a symbol of primitive brutishness,[102] and as Lowe has suggested, they form a monstrous 'other' to humanity.[103] For while they clearly have the capacity to behave in civilised ways,[104], the majority of them stand against the normal order of society, and their most famous conflict at the wedding of Pirithous and Hippodamia marks them out to be "anti-marriage, anti-xenia, anti-sympotic and anti-culture".[105] Thus Hercules' choice to display himself on the crater killing Hylaeus is a celebration of himself as a beneficial force for civilisation. In this way, he freezes this positive aspect of his reputation for posterity, and propagates to his peers a controlled version of his *fama.* And,

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[99] Cf. the account in Verg. *G.* 3.258-63, which lacks the tone of transgression found in Statius.
[100] The same occurs with Theseus later on, whose shield depicting himself is also owned by him (12.665-71).
[101] Galinsky (1972) p4.
[102] Parkes (2012) on lines 4.488-92; Vessey (1973b) p97; 157;199; 216-7; 221; 224; 233; 286; 312.
[103] Lowe (2015) p165–74.
[104] The most famous example is Chiron, whose liminality is explored in Statius' *Achilleid*; see Heslin (2005) p170-5; p181-4.
[105] Lowe (2015) p167.

indeed, this is how the characters of the *Thebaid* remember him. His Tirynthian contingent honour his role as monster-slayer: *Herculeum paeana canunt, vastataque monstris / omnia* (4.157-8), and, as we have seen, his battle with the Nemean lion is commemorated (6.270-3). He is also the poster boy for the hero who is granted divinity for his achievements in life, in whose footsteps, the current generation of warriors are trying to follow.

The crater has a symbolic function for the winner. Fittingly, the prize is awarded for the chariot-race – an exercise that proves the heroes' ability to control and show dominance over the horse, just as Hercules has superiority over the half-horse creatures. Polynices' failure to control the horse that Hercules once did (6.311-3) highlights his lesser heroic status. Furthermore, Polynices' crash associates him with Phaethon indicating his threat to the cosmos.[106] Thus Hercules' domination of Hylaeus becomes a symbol for the competitors to emulate, and a standard for them to aspire towards.

However, as with any ekphrasis, the description invites more than one interpretation which can run 'against the grain' of the glorious message that is suggested by the image. In the literary traditions, Hercules is a famously slippery hero in regards to his morality. At times the hero is a lawless transgressor,[107] at other times, a symbol of virtue.[108] Galinsky's diachronic exploration of Hercules' character reveals that the hero is associated with spectrum of qualities that can be quite contradictory, indeed with the result that later authors could "deliberately exploit the tensions which naturally arose from these diverse characteristics".[109] Statius too manipulates these tensions in his character of Hercules, allowing the reader to see the hero's 'darker' qualities inherent in his character, while the current generation perceive him to be *the* standard to strive towards. They are only able to remember or acknowledge his positive aspects. In an attempt to mimic his good qualities, the current group of heroes take up his bad qualities.

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[106] Lovatt (2005) p32-40; On the political implications of Polynices' comparison to Phaethon and failure to control the horse, see Rebeggiani (2013) p190-3.

[107] Cf. e.g. in the *Iliad*, Herakles is set alongside giants, transgressive theomachs, and condemned for his overreach as a mortal (*Il.* 5.381-404). In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus mentions that Herakles (and others) believed they could compete against the gods at the discus (*Od.* 8.223-8). Elsewhere in the *Odyssey*, Hercules violates *xenia* by killing his host, Iphitos (21.26-30). See Galinsky (1972) p12 on Herakles' 'stone-age behaviour'. On 'seasonality', or lack of, as a quality for heroes, see Nagy (2013) p44-6.

[108] For his heroism, such as his status as *alexikakos*, or later as a Stoic sage.

[109] Galinsky (1972) p4. However, Galinsky's study does not feature Statius' treatment of Hercules. For an examination of the nuances of Hercules' character, see also Bowden and Rowlings (2005).

An ekphrasis with its different layers of audience and interpretations is therefore a suitable medium to showcase these contrasting characterisations.

Certainly by the Flavian period, Hercules has become the standard for the epic hero. Epic protagonists consistently find themselves struggling to break out of the shadow of the great hero, and the reader uses him as a measure of their ability.[110] His influence as a model on the heroes of the *Thebaid* has also been recognised.[111] His apotheosis, the ultimate reward for heroic deeds, is emphasised though frequent mentions of his divine status, and his appearance in the narrative as an anthropomorphic god. As a successful hero-turned-god, he acts as a foil to the heroic failures of the *Thebaid*'s characters. However, since the pessimistic voice is the dominant one in the *Thebaid*, with its strong message of misdirected hopes of glory, the reader is left to examine Hercules' own imperfections which exist behind the positive portrayal of the hero, and thus his negative aspects can also be used as a tool for evaluating the heroes. But the hero's status as one who creates order is made questionable by his activity in the narrative. Rather, his deified self actually contributes to the *nefas* of the poem: he divinely inspires the men of Tiryns to join the Argive expedition (*suus excit in arma / antiquam Tiryntha deus*, 4.146-7), but assists his Theban brother-in-law (8.480-518). Thus the hero, instead, helps to drive the conflict towards the war. His patronage of individuals on both sides emphasises its nature as a civil war.

The narrative of Hercules' crater, like Adrastus' ancestral images, are focalised through two audiences: the internal spectators, and the external readers. Since we are never given the internal audience's perspective or reaction to the image, the reader can only interpret the artwork through the narrator's description. A further layer of audience perspective within the narrative of the artwork is created by the text too. The physical artefact is identified as *cratera…/ Herculeum* (6.531-2). But within the design of the wine-bowl are yet further craters, *aliique iterum crateres* (6.537). Craters are found

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[110] Cf. e.g. Feeney (1986) on the effect of Hercules' invisible presence on the heroes of the *Argonautica* and the *Aeneid*. On the Hercules-Cacus narrative in the *Aeneid*, see Buchheit (1963) p126-31; Galinsky (1966) p25; Hardie (1986) p112-9 and 115; Clausen (1987) p71-2, for the hero as a force of good; but see e.g. Lyne (1987) p27-35, who reads Aeneas through the lens of Hercules' more controversial aspects. In Lucan, the relevance of the narrative of the Hercules-Antaeus fight in Libya (modelled on Vergil's Hercules-Cacus) to the protagonists of the narrative has been debated. Their battle seems to reflect on the encounter between the Roman Curio and the African Juba; but the pair might look also to Cato, who also endures trials in Libya: Saylor (1982); Lowe (2010) p129–31; though rejected by Martindale (1981) p74. In Silius too, recent studies shows how the positive and transgressive aspects of Hercules are divided among the figures of Scipio and Hannibal; Rawlings (2005); Tipping (2010) p11–24.
[111] See a detailed analysis in Parkes (2009a) p481-88.

within craters, and the doubling nature of the image is emphasised with the words *alii* and *iterum*, which serve to distinguish the physical crater with the depicted ones, but we will see that they also simultaneously to draw attention to the similarities between the narrative told by the artwork, and the narrative of the *Thebaid*.

The internal viewers can only see how the artefact is presented and its depictions. Thus they see this wine-bowl carried out by two young men (6.531-2), and they see the scenes depicted on the bowl: the Centaurs battling the Lapiths at Pirithous' wedding, which is recognisable from the different parts of the wedding banquet being hurled as missiles (e.g. the *faces* (6.537) and *crateres* (6.537)). In particular, they see the centrepiece of the artwork: Hercules himself wrestling with the Centaur, Hylaeus. Thus, it is the heroic, monster-slaying aspect of Hercules that is available to the internal audience.

However, the narrator also provides for the external audience the crater's history and its function, which would not be immediately available to the internal audience. According to the narrator, this was the crater that Hercules used to use for a celebratory drink, whenever he had been victorious against a monster or in battle, *seu monstri victor seu Marte* (6.524). This makes the scene on the cup appropriate for its original purpose. Hercules celebrates his victories with an artefact that celebrates his ability to defeat monsters.

But the manner in which the narrator describes how Hercules takes his drink might give the reader cause for concern. For Hercules' own monstrous strength and his tendencies towards his dangerously excessive nature is demonstrated through the act of drinking. The duality of the two young men carrying out his crater, *gemini…iuvenes* (6.531-2), is contrasted with his ability to lift the crater up high with his own single hand, *manu sola* (6.553).[112] The ease with which he handles the great object is particularly stressed, when he takes a swig from the crater: tipping the foaming wine into his supine mouth (6.532-4). The act itself seems rather uncouth and brutish, and his generosity with the free-flowing wine draws out monstrous tendencies and parallels with the Centaurs. This act of immoderate drinking is modelled on two intertexts. The *Argonautica*'s Idas is the original *contemptor deorum*, a belligerent character that relies on violence. He swigs

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[112] This is partly an epic convention that depicts men of old being physically stronger than posterity (e.g. Hom *Il.* 5.302-4; *Aen.* 12.896-8). For Statius, the contrast is not between the heroic age and the poet's generation, but between the greatest hero (Hercules) and others: cf. also Demoleus' armour in *Aen*, 5.263-5, a prize that is heavy for others but worn by Demoleus easily.

his wine after a particularly iconoclastic speech (*Arg.* 1.462ff.) and connects his immoderate words with immoderate actions.[113] Vergil turns Idas' menacing drinking into a humorous moment, when Bitias' "unpolished manners" contrasts against Dido's "dainty" sip (1.742-3).[114] Nonetheless, Bitias is thought to be connected to violence (*Bia*),[115] and his juxtaposition with the queen emphasises the latent stength within. Similarly, Hercules' own manner of drinking demonstrates his raw, mighty power, but his immoderation adds sinister overtones to the hero.

The double layer of craters help add to this effect. By stressing that the Centaurs used craters in their transgressive battle at the wedding of Pirithous, we are reminded that the Centaurs' immoral acts stem from a lack of restraint when it comes to wine. From Homer, the Centaurs' violent actions in the centauromachy were used as warnings against grabbing and then drinking wine immoderately (οἶνός σε τρώει μελιηδής, ὅς τε καὶ ἄλλους / βλάπτει, ὃς ἄν μιν χανδὸν ἕλῃ μηδ᾽ αἴσιμα πίνῃ, Hom. *Od.* 21.293-8). Thus Hercules' own unrestrained swilling of wine from the crater draws the hero and monsters he slays closer together. His actions celebrating the vanquishing of monsters, re-enact the act that made the monsters monstrous in the first place. The immoderate draught marks him out as having, at least potentially, the same characteristics of the Centaurs, and suggests that he too is liable to stir up transgressive violence – something he is known to do, in the past literature.[116] The lack of restraint fits in with the theme of boundary breaking, which we have examined. It is a characteristic that is shared by the heroes, such as Tydeus, who is marked from the prologue of the poem as *immodicum irae* (1.41). Though Tydeus might want to mimic the admirable monster-slaying aspects of Hercules, as he hurls a rock at his enemies, he also resembles the crater-throwing Centaurs: *qualis in aduersos Lapithas erexit inanem / magnanimus cratera Pholus* (2.563-4).

But this ancedote about the crater's history and the way it was used is not accessible to the internal audience. They are only able to see the positive and celebratory aspects of Hercules as the monster-slayer and cannot recognise the dangers of overreaching and excessiveness. Thus through the way that history has been recorded on

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[113] See Green (1997) *ad loc*.
[114] Austin (1984) *ad loc*.
[115] Paschalis (1997) p68-9.
[116] Excessive desire for alcohol and food has traditionally been one of the more negative traits associated with Hercules, often assoicated with his bumbling comic role. But the hero also condemns his own gluttony in the problematic play *Alcestis* (831-2).

the artwork, the current generation are limited in regards to the lessons that can be learnt from it.

Becoming Centaurs[117]

As we have seen, Oedipus' two crimes against his family, violence against his kin, and incest, are repeated on symbolic levels by the next generation of heroes. I suggest that the narrator's sustained use of Centaur imagery to describe both Thebans and Argives represents a continuation of Oedipus' violent and sexual perversity. Thus, though the heroes may honour Hercules' achievements as a Centaur-killer, and so, in this way, present themselves as being aligned with these values and abilities, instead, they act more like the monster, and become destructive forces in the world.

Instead of recognising the dangers in Hercules' immoderate personality, the heroes surpass him by becoming even more similar than he does to the monsters that he vanquishes. Tydeus' simile (2.563-4) is one example. But their transformation into a monstrous state is also partly facilitated by their close relationship with their horses. Given that the poem's intended subject-matter is war, the heavy presence of the horse, the animal most used in warfare, is understandable. But nonetheless, Statius narrows the distinction between man and horse. For example, Newlands has argued that Arion, the horse loaned to Polynices by Adrastus, is a better candidate for heroism than the human heroes, with its divine parentage (*Theb.* 6.301-5), its prescient powers (6.424; 11.442), and its ability to secure glory in the chariot-race where no human character can (6.530).[118] Elsewhere, the relationships between masters and their horses remarkably close, to the extent that warriors and horses are often closely assimilated with one another physically as well as emotionally, so that they become Centaur-like. The imagery of the Centaurs demonstrate a corruption of physical boundaries, and, as we will see, also suggests a sexual transgression, reminiscent of Oedipus' own original sin. Once again, the current generations of heroes unconsciously take on the monstrous qualities of their predecessors.

The close relationships between the warriors and the horses are helped by the fact that the *Thebaid*'s horses are surprisingly sentient. Such relationships are not unknown

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[117] The remaining sections in this chapter (p143-164) have been reworked and expanded from my master's dissertation at the University of Oxford: Tang (2014).

[118] Newlands (2011b).

in the epic tradition:[119] for example, in the *Iliad*, Achilles' horse, imbued with the power of speech by Hera, is able to engage its master in conversation and even prophesies his master's death (Hom. *Il.* 17.399-423). While Statius never quite goes so far as to give his horses the ability to speak, he does often reveal their thought processes that show their loyalty to their masters. Their thoughts and actions are frequently so harmonious with their masters that they act in unison with their masters, or can even anticipate their masters' commands. One example of this comes at the end of the night-raid in Book 10:

> pariterque horrore sub uno
> vox, acies sanguisque perit; gemitusque parantem
> ipse ultro convertit equus.

<div align="center">(10.471-3)</div>

The Theban Amphion, upon the sight of his massacred countrymen, is stunned completely motionless. The horse, however, feels his horror and turns his master back on its own initiative (*ipse ultro*). In this case, the horse can anticipate its rider's intention and feel its master's emotions before the master himself does. Thus, we see that horse and master almost share a well attuned, mental connection.

But it is during the battles, where the fates of horse and rider are intertwined, that the boundaries separating the two entitites collapse further. Not only do they share the same sentiments, but their joint physical appearance are described in a way that blurs together the forms of horse and man, and the image of their unification is further perverted through the use of an established martial topos.

On the second day of battle in Book 8, the opposing armies line up in organised battle array for the first time. The previous day's battle had been brought to an abrupt halt by Amphiaraus' descent with his horses into the underworld.[120] Chaos marked the initial battle, where the battle was fought with no coordination, *nullo venit ordine bellum* (7.616), and an indication of this was the mingling of horsemen, foot-soldiers and chariots, *una equites mixti peditumque catervae / et rapidi currus* (7.618-9). On this second day, however, both armies' battle-lines have been drawn up prior to the conflict,

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[119] See Giusti (2018) p105-110, on the paradox of horses being both bellicose and tame. See Walker (2016) p309-25, for a study on the horse's perceived position in society and thus as representative of society in Greek literature.

[120] Amphiaraus and his horses are an example of horses sharing the same destiny as their masters too. Most of the references to Amphiaraus' descent into the underworld mentions the fact that he will take his horses down with him.

though the atmosphere is still thick with blood lust. Again, we see the same strange concordance between the horses and masters. Just as the riders are instilled with eagerness for battle, so too are their horses. But the similarities between the separate entities do not stop at their mental state, but their harmony with each other is so extreme that they seem to also undergo a physical assimilation into their respective partner's bodies:

> Quid mirum caluisse viros? Flammantur in hostem
>
> cornipedes niveoque rigant sola putria nimbo,
>
> **corpora ceu mixti dominis irasque sedentum**
>
> **induerint**: sic frena terunt, sic proelia poscunt
>
> hinnitu tolluntque armos equitesque supinant.
>
> <div align="center">(8.390-94)</div>

The emphasis is on the merger of their physical forms, *corpora mixti dominis*, and their mental spirits, *iras sedentum / induerint*. In this striking simile, the chaos and disorder arising from the mass mingling of horses and horsemen on the first day of the war is reflected again on the coporeal level of individuals in the second day of the war. The first day's dissolution of the boundaries of ordered ranks, and the metaphorical dissolution of form in the second day suggest the chaos and potential violence that arises when limits are not adhered to. The transformation of horse and rider into a single figure, implicitly points towards the Centaur figure, a symbol of primitive violence.[121]

This fusing of bodily forms, suggesting a Centauric transformation, had already been anticipated in the chaotic first day of battle, since Tydeus had already "created" a Centaur by fixing Pterelas, a Theban warrior, to his horse with a javelin: *ceu nondum anima defectus utraque / cum sua Centaurus moriens in terga recumbit* (7.6.39-40).[122] This is a rare example in the poem when man and horse are not working in concordance with each other. Pterelas was swept into the enemy battle lines by his horse acting 'in bad faith', *male fidus* (7.632), and on its own accord, *iam liber* (7.634). As with Polynices' lack of ability to control Adrastus' horses, this acts as a warning that the inability to control and restrain one's own animalistic part threatens the individual and their humanity.

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[121] Vessey (1973) p97; Lowe (2015) p166-70.

[122] Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* comments on the "mannered", chiastic arrangement of the pair's introduction as a representation of their conjoined fate.

The previous examples show that the imagery of the physical form of the Centaur is used to describe the close connections between man and horse, and symbolises the innate potential and propensity for violence in the warriors. Thus the physical transgression in the blurring of individual forms reflects the chaos that they wreak externally in the fraternal war – itself an expansion of Oedipus' kindred murder. My next example will examine the sexual and martial undertones in the relationships between man and horse – a reflection of Oedipus' second sin of marrying his mother. When yet another horse and rider pair is killed together, this time their death likened to the mutual fall of an elm tree and a vine:

> ruit ille ruentem
> in Prothoum lapsasque manu quaerentis habenas
> in voltus galeam clipeumque in pectora calcat,
> saucius extremo donec cum sanguine frenos
> respuit et iuncta domino cervice recumbit,
> sic ulmus vitisque, duplex iactura colenti,
> Gaurano de monte cadunt, sed maestior ulmus
> quaerit utrique nemus, nec tam sua bracchia labens
> quam gemit adsuetas invitaque proterit uvas.
>
> (8.539-47)

The elm carrying the vine represents the horse that carries its rider. The tone in this passage is one of pathos. The close relationship between the horse and its rider is portrayed by the elm's sadness (*maestior*) and perhaps also guilt in playing a part in its passenger vine's death.[123] Just as the horse accidentally crushes its master as they both collapse, so too does the tree squash the vines. Again the theme of perverse shapeshifting continues, highlighted by the detailed, gory description of the horse's forcing the helmet and shield into its master's face and chest. Horse, man, and armour are forcefully crushed into a singular being. The man completely loses his human identity with the destruction of his face and form. But the overriding transgression here is one of a perverted marital state. The close connection between the elm and the vine has been established as a symbol

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[123] On the textual issue of *utrumque/utrimque/utrique* in line 8.538, see Shackleton-Bailey (2000) p471.

of marital unity by past literature.[124] Moreover, the fruitfulness of the vine that grows around the elm is connected to the fertility of a successful marriage.

Statius, by reattributing an image typically used of a successful marriage between a husband and a wife to an image used of a dying man and his horse in warfare corrupts the image's message of a legitimate union. It implies an erotic relationship between man and beast – an unnatural union. The image is further strained by the pathetic force arising from the horse's concern for its master. The elm/horse that helplessly crushes the grapes destroys the "fruits of their union", symbolising children and a successful marriage.

This reflects upon a much wider theme of the poem: the corruption of the harmonious relationship that ought to be present between husband and wife. Marriages in the poem are so often doomed or perversified, especially in the family of Oedipus.[125] This terrible war of Polynices was itself initiated by marriage to Argia, and now the course of the war has provided a fertile environment for others outside of the family to mimic Oedipus' and Jocasta's illegitimate marriage. The perverse relationships that Oedipus has with his family, that is illicit union and violence, are reflected in this image, where the relationship between the horse and the man recalls that between mother and son, while at the same time, the elm plays a role in destroying the grapes (though unwillingly, *invita*), as Oedipus had cursed his sons. This image captures and replicates in minature the sins of the Oedipal family.

As well as representing the two armies in general, the horses can also be used to characterise specific characters. Here we will examine the Centaurs as allegories for the war lust of the humans' characters.[126] After Tydeus' death, the next hero to undergo his aristeia and subsequent death is Hippomedon. At the start of his aristeia, Hippomedon actually inherits Tydeus' horse, who initially rejects its new master (9.209-11).[127] But Hippomedon explains to the horse that his former master is dead and will not be coming back (9.2114), and that instead of resisting him the horse should be helping Hippomedon

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[124] See Demetz (1958); Fuentes-Utrilla, López-Rodríguez, and Gil (2004) for a diachronic examination of the elm and vine simile. Catullus thematises love and marriage in poems 61-8; see Arkins (1982) p117-56; Dettmer (1997) p115-50; Most (1981); the elm-vine is used as a metaphor for the ideal marriage in Catullus 61-2; see Panoussi (2007) p287; Thomsen (1992) p108-12. Ovid uses the elm-vine topos in contexts of love and marriage in *Amores* 2.16.41; *Met.* 14.755-63; *Fasti* 3.411; and *Tr.* 2.143 (see Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.*, on the final example). However, in *Tr.* 5.3.35-6 the elm-vine image is not used in an elegiac sense, but as renewal of inspiration.

[125] See Newlands (2016). Polynices and Argia's marriage is doomed from the start and Ismene loses her betrothed.

[126] Vessey (1973) p. 295.

[127] Recalling Polynices' failure to control Adrastus' horses.

avenge Tydeus, and prevent itself from becoming a Theban captive, which would dishonour his previous master (9.215-7). The horse displays remarkable sentience and, apparently convinced by Hippomedon, is fired up by his words. The incredibility of the horses' reaction is emphasised with the phrase *audisse accensumque putes* (9.218), requiring the reader to momentarily suspend their disbelief in the horses' sentience. Hippomedon's inheritance of Tydeus' horse, represents his simultaneous inheritance of Tydeus' dreadful desire for war, and signifies that he is the next of the Seven to take up the mantle and to succumb to *furor*.

The result of this new harmony between Hippomedon and the horse is that their unified strength becomes all the more terrible to the Theban soldiers. Their joint stature drives them to flight, becoming reminiscent of a monstrous Centaur:

> semifer aeria talis Centaurus ab Ossa
>
> desilit in valles, ipsum nemora alta tremescunt,
>
> campus equum.

<div align="center">(9.220-2)</div>

The image is in dialogue with the earlier simile comparing Tydeus to a Centaur hurling a crater (2.563-4). Hippomedon's comparison to the same creature shows that Hippomedon has transformed into the next beastly Tydeus. Statius continues to play on the two-parts of the Centaur with the compound word *semifer*, 'half-wild'. It plays on the idea that humanity ought to represent 'civilised' behaviour, while the bestial part represents barbarity. But *semifer* implies that there is a tension between the two halves of the Centaur's form, which are not entirely compatible with each other. The resulting form is unnatural, unstable, and should not have happened. However, the horse part of the Centaur becomes dominant, when the creature is metonymically referred to as *equum*. The man completely yields his place to the beast. The animal takes over the control of the body and has a terrifying effect on the landscape. The illicit union of the two parts results in the creation of a bestial, destructive force in the world – a parallel to Oedipus' ill-fated marriage with Jocasta, which has led to the *nefas* that pervades the *Thebaid*.

There must be some ironic word play going on between Hippomedon's name, 'horse master',[128] and his associations with horses and Centaurs. For this Centaur simile

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[128] Statius' wordplay (see Dewar (1991) on lines 9.683-711 and Hardie (1993) p11) continues the work of previous authors (see e.g. Cameron (1970) and Lamari (2010) p48-50 on wordplay in Aeschlyus' *Seven against Thebes*; and Torrance (2013) p97-102 for wordplay in Euripides generally).

is the second connected to Hippomedon. The first occurred when Hippomedon initially appeared in the narrative, in the catalogue of heroes in Book 4:

> Illum Palladia sonipes Nemeaeus ab arce
>
> devehit arma pavens umbraque immane volanti
>
> implet agros longoque attollit pulvere campum.
>
> Non aliter silvas umeris et utroque refringens
>
> pectore montano duplex Hylaeus ab antro
>
> praecipitat: pavet Ossa vias, pecudesque feraeque
>
> procubere metu; non ipsis fratribus horror
>
> afuit, ingenti donec Peneia saltu
>
> stagna subit magnumque obiectus detinet amnem.

<div align="center">(4.136-44)</div>

This works in concordance with the second Centaur simile. Both scenes are set on Mount Ossa, with a strong emphasis of the Centaurs' downwards movement. In this earlier scene *duplex* is used to underline the double nature of the Centaur. Both Centaurs are a source of fear to the landscape (4.141-3). But in the first simile, Hylaeus is also a destructive creature, breaking apart the woodlands, and terrifying other beasts, including herds, wild beasts, and indeed even its own kind. But this initial comparison has additional points of contact between Hippomedon and the Centaur. Both are terrifying beings: Hippomedon's joint size with the horse creates a vast shadow that is described as *umbra…immane* (4.137). The adjective *immanis* has connotations of monstrousness, which helps to facilitate the transition from the figuratively monstrous Hippomedon into the literally monstrous Centaur in the simile. Statius has also made a specific choice with regards to the river that is dammed in the simile. The river Peneus is better known in the literary tradition as an anthropomorphic god,[129] thus Hylaeus' final damming of the river/river-god Peneus looks forward to Hippomedon's own river and divine transgressions: his symbolic fording of the river Asopus as he leads the Argive army into Theban territory, and his battle with the river/river-god Ismenos.

And yet, as Hippomedon becomes closer to Hercules' enemy through imagery, he is also takes on the more transgressive characteristics that are shared by the hero himself. Hippomedon's characterisation in the catalogue of Book 4 encourages

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[129] For Peneus behaving anthropomorphically, cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 2.757; Hes. *Theog.* 343; Pind. *Pyth.* 9.26; Diod. 1.69; Serv. *ad Aen.* 1.93; Ov. *Am.* 3.6.31; *Met.* 1.1.452-568; 4.452; Hygin. *Fab.* 203.

comparison between the hero and the hero-god by being carefully positioned between the catalogue entry for the Herculean contingent and just after the catalogue for Tydeus' men, in which we are reminded that Hercules had also tussled with a river god before: *Herculea turpatus gymnade vultus / amnis* (4.106-7).[130] Even when Hippomedon successfully emulates his predecessor, it is only the hubristic and violent characteristic that we find in the earlier Homeric accounts that is imitated, and not his heroic, civilising aspects celebrated by the Tirynthians. Thus Hippomedon both embodies the Centaur-monster and Hercules' theomachic tendencies.

Hercules' image of himself killing a Centaur on his own crater glorifies himself and establishes himself as a positive role model for posterity. His attempts are successful: as the heroes publically swap ownership of the artwork, this *fama* (as reputation) of Hercules spreads and encourages the current heroes. But the crater supresses the problematic side of Hercules' character. The tensions within the image are only available to the reader, who has the privilege of the narrator's additional commentary. Instead of learning from their model's transgressive actions, the heroes of the *Thebaid* inadvertently repeat and exacerbate them. The heroes also end up resembling the monsters, whose eradication they celebrate and hope to replicate. In both the Perseus and Hercules ekphrases, there is a gap in between the way that the narratives about the past heroes are manipulated, and the effect that they actually have on the world. When later generations are only given access to a partial view of history, there is a risk that they would cause the same problems as their predecessors.

Theseus: the Bull-Slayer

The poem's final ekphrasis comes in Book 12, in the form of Theseus' shield. The ending of the *Thebaid* has been a controversial one for quite some time. Scholars have found it hard to reach an agreement regarding the character of Theseus and his function in the epic. Some have interpreted him as the champion of order who restores peace to the broken world of the *Thebaid*, behaving in accordance with his role in Greek tragedy.[131] Others have questioned the moral superiority of Theseus and the impact that

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[130] A statement that also has significance on Tydeus' characterisation, as one who goes too far, not stopping at simply disfiguring a head but also cannibalising it.
[131] Such as Vessey (1973) p309-12; Hardie (1993) p44-8; Lewis (1995) p55; Braund (1996); Ripoll (1998) p446-51; Braund (2006) p271; Bessone (2011) p136-177.

the death of Creon has on the world of the *Thebaid*.[132] And a final group lies between the two extremes and sees a tension between complete resolution and aperture in the ending.[133] In this section, I will examine how other characters perceive the hero, and how Theseus encourages postive interpretations of his character. However, as with the other ekphrases, the narrator leaves details for the reader in the ekphrastic passages, which undermine the hero's self-constructed heroic image.

Theseus' *fama* is widespread in the *Thebaid*'s narrative. A number of other characters have heard of and often refer to his exploits. For example, Dis, remembering a personal offence, complains about the time that Theseus broke into the underworld with Pirithous to kidnap Persephone (8.53-4). Other characters, however, tend to remember him in a positive manner. Hypsipyle recalls meeting him when he was one of the Argonauts when he had just saved Marathon from a monstrous bull (*ab adserto nuper Marathone superbum / Thesea* [*cernimus*], 5.431-2). In particular, Evadne, Capaneus' wife, beseeches Theseus to help the Argive women secure burial for their male relatives by calling upon his past deeds:

> tu quoque, ut egregios fama cognouimus actus,
> non trucibus monstris Sinin infandumque dedisti
> Cercyona, et saeuum uelles Scirona crematum.
> Credo et Amazoniis Tanain fumasse sepulcris,
> unde haec arma refers; sed et hunc dignare triumphum.
> da terris unum caeloque Ereboque laborem,
> si patrium Marathona metu, si tecta leuasti
> Cresia, nec fudit uanos anus hospita fletus.
> sic tibi non ullae socia sine Pallade pugnae,
> nec sacer inuideat paribus Tirynthius actis,
> semper et in curru, semper te mater ouantem
> cernat, et inuictae nil tale precentur Athenae.
>
> (12.575-86)

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[132] Feeney (1991) p362-3; Dominik (1994b) p92-8; Davis (1994) p471; Hershkowitz (1998) p296-301; Ganiban (2007) p214-29.

[133] Criado (2015); McNelis (2007) p160-3, who sees Theseus as a resolution with problematic associations.

Theseus seems to have been successful in cultivating his *fama* as a hero. He is known among the other characters for his ability to exterminate evil and also for showing clemency (*ut egregios fama cognovimus actus*, 12.575). Evadne even equates his actions with those of the divine Hercules (*nec sacer inuideat paribus Tirynthius actis*), suggesting that he too is heading towards obtaining immortal fame, if not literal immortality. Evadne's list of heroic deeds evokes Theseus' activities from past literature and the wider mythic tradition. His literary *fama* becomes his personal *fama* in the world of the *Thebaid*.[134] Evadne cleverly forces Theseus' hand to act, by holding the hero's own reputation (and that of his literary selves) up as an exemplum to himself. She especially forces the point with the repetition of *si* in lines 12.581-2: if he was the type of person to have killed the Marathonian bull, and the Minotaur, then he must also be the type of person to restore order to heaven and hell (*caeloque Ereboque*) by securing burial for the Argives.[135] After her list of praises, Theseus has no choice but to act in accordance with this reputation he has built up. His reputation rests on a hypothetical sentence structure: it is not fixed, but directly connected to how he will conduct himself in the future as well. As we have seen earlier, identity must be consistent: for Theseus to fail to act now, would be to ruin the reputation he has created for himself.

However, there are signs that this idealistic image of Theseus is constructed. Evadne's flattery of the hero is rhetorically tuned, and is not necessarily a true assessment of the hero. A sign of this occurs when Evadne almost undermines her own depiction of Theseus with a faux pas. When she mentions that Theseus even allowed burial to his enemies, she claims that he did not feed Sinis and Cercyon to monsters, playing on the conventional fears that unburied bodies will be eaten by wild animals. But having said this, she must quickly justify Sciron's fate on behalf of Theseus. In Theseus' mythic narratives, Sciron would kick passers-by off a cliff for a giant man-eating turtle to feed on, until, finally, Theseus punished him with his own crime.[136] After holding him up as an example of someone who does not feed enemies to monsters, Evadne must explain away the occasion when he does: *uelles Scirona crematum*. She does this with the

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[134] Evadne's list is modelled on the Athenians' praises of Theseus in Book 7 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (7.425-52), itself modelled on the Salian hymn to Hercules (Verg. *Aen.* 8.285–305).
[135] However, this also echoes Creon's words: *caeloque animas Ereboque nocentes / pellere fas* (12.96-7). Creon had used the same rhetoric to the exact opposite effect: it is morally right (*fas*) for the Argives to be banned from heaven and hell. Different characters can interpret the same event in very different ways, but rely on the same kinds of rhetoric for their purpose.
[136] Brommer (1982) p14-18.

subjunctive, *velles,* 'you would have wanted'. But the subjunctive force reminds us that Theseus did actually feed a man to a *monstrum*. It also makes the reader question how Evadne would know what Theseus 'would have wanted'. Similarly, Evadne says that she believes (*credo*) that the Amazons were also given due burial. But again there is no legitimate reason for this belief. In this way, Evadne creates an idealistic version of Theseus, an invention comprised of rumour and her own mind. Nonetheless, it strengthens Theseus' heroic image.

But Theseus himself works hard to promote this image. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter: he styles himself as a monster-killer, rhetorically making Thebes a city of monsters, while making himself the hero who must vanquish them with the support of the gods. This image of himself as a monster-slayer is reinforced by Theseus' shield – the last of the three monster slaying ekphrases:

> at procul ingenti Neptunius agmina Theseus
>
> angustat clipeo, propriaeque exordia laudis
>
> centum urbes umbone gerit centenaque Cretae
>
> moenia, seque ipsum monstrosi ambagibus antri
>
> hispida torquentem luctantis colla iuvenci
>
> alternasque manus circum et nodosa ligantem
>
> bracchia et abducto vitantem cornua vultu,
>
> terror habet populos, cum saeptus imagine torva
>
> ingreditur pugnas: bis Thesea bisque cruentas
>
> caede videre manus; veteres reminiscitur actus
>
> ipse tuens sociumque gregem metuendaque quondam
>
> limina, et absumpto pallentem Gnosida filo.
>
> (12.665-76)

Like Hercules' crater, this artefact displays an image of its own owner. On his own shield, which he carries into battle, Theseus presents himself heroically grappling with the Minotaur, a half-bull, half-human creature. The choice of image has been carefully chosen: it is his most famous deed, from which he began his reputation as a hero (*propriaeque exordia laudis*). It makes him a fearful enemy in battle (*terror habet populos*). Thus it is a self-conscious attempt to reinforce his heroic identity. From such a deed, Theseus seems to have gained a reputation, particularly as a slayer of bulls:

Hypsipyle remembered the hero as the slayer of the Marathonian Bull (5.431-2). And Evadne, when she put stress on her persuasive point, called upon him as both the slayer of the Marathonian Bull and the Minotaur, with an additional mention of Hecale, the old lady whose cottage he stayed at the night before facing the Marathonian bull. It is this facet of his reputation, which Theseus cultivates on his shield.

Animal Imagery in the *Thebaid*

However, to fully appreciate the ekphrasis, we will need to first explore how Statius uses animal similes more generally, which build up to Theseus' appearance. In particular, I will pay special attention to the use of the multitude of bull-similes,[137] which will become significant for Theseus' role as a slayer of monstrous bulls. Since Theseus only arrives in the poem in the final book, I will first lay out some of the earlier uses of animal imagery and the paradigms that they establish.

The *Thebaid*'s first extended simile engages with Homer's first extended simile in the *Iliad*. Right from the beginning of the narrative, Eteocles and Polynices' discord is characterised by comparison to bulls, who refuse to bear a yoke together, and head in different directions (1.131-6). This becomes a repeated image in their characterisation. This bears some thematic resemblance to the *Iliad*'s simile, which compared the Greeks gathering on the shore to bees (Hom. *Il.* 2.86-90).[138] Since the ancient scholia, Homer's bee simile has been understood as symbolic of the general social cohesion of the Greeks (with the notable exception of Achilles).[139] The first extended similes of both texts consist of imagery animal from the bucolic world. Like the bees from the *Iliad*, the bull-simile from the *Thebaid* represents the mechanics of society; however, it differs by showing social disunity rather than the cohesion in the Homeric bees-simile.[140] Shortly afterwards an unnamed Theban picks up this imagery, expressing his dissatisfaction at his servitude to alternating rulers with the metaphorical language of yoking: *alternoque iugo dubitantia*

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[137] Mozley (1982) pxviii, "we get rather tired of the endless bulls and boars to which his heroes are compared". I hope to show that the sustained animal imagery is relevant to the hero's characterisation. See Kytzler (1962) p144-9 and Taisne (1994) p142-3.

[138] ἠΰτε ἔθνεα εἶσι μελισσάων ἀδινάων / πέτρης ἐκ γλαφυρῆς αἰεὶ νέον ἐρχομενάων, / βοτρυδὸν δὲ πέτονται ἐπ᾽ ἄνθεσιν εἰαρινοῖσιν / αἳ μέν τ᾽ ἔνθα ἅλις πεποτήαται, αἳ δέ τε ἔνθα.

[139] Feeney (2014) p189-193.

[140] Bees are familiar as symbols of social uniformity and coherence from Vergil's *Georgics* 4.8-315 (see Batstone (1997) p139-141), and *Aeneid* 1.430-5, which describes Carthage while its citizens work together to build the city (see Giusti (2018) p103-2), though in both cases, there are underlying tensions.

subdere colla? (1.175). The Theban continues, and suggests that perhaps Polynices and Eteocles' fraternal rivalry has been inherited from the time of Cadmus, who, while searching for the Sidonian heifer (Cadmus' sister, Europa, 1.181) created men spawned by dragon's teeth who fought to the death (1.181-5). Therefore, the unnamed Theban reminds the reader that since Thebes' origins, its people have been controlled by the whims of bulls and cows. The fate of Thebes and of its rulers have always been tied in this paradigm of bull-imagery.

Animal similes continue throughout the *Thebaid*, frequently (but not exclusively) regarding bulls.[141] These can be divided into two kinds.[142] One involves a combination of predatory and domesticated animals, which is used to represent one character attacking another.[143] The other involves only the same kind of animal; although sometimes humans, such as herdsmen or hunters, may be involved.[144]

The first group which consists of both predatory and domestic animals are only ever used to describe the aggression directed either from a Theban to an Argive, or *vice-versa*. The latter kind (that is imagery which only portrays one type of animal) is almost always used to describe Thebans interacting with Thebans, or Argives with Argives. In these situations they reflect a society in harmony or agreement. This model of interaction can be found between domesticated animals. A few examples of this kind include: Adrastus reigning over his kingdom like a bull rules over his herd (4.69-73), or Hippomedon, as he bravely leads his men over the river Asopus, being compared to a ruling bull that leads his terrified herd over a river (7.435-40). This also happens in the unusual format of the dis-simile, such as when Hippomedon protects Tydeus' corpse with even more determination (*non sic*) than that of a mother cow protecting her calf (9.115-9).[145]

However, this pattern is not only restricted to domesticated or gentle animals, but even savage beasts protect and support their own. Thus, for instance, Atlanta's pursuit of Parthenopaeus after he had joined the Argive troops was likened to a tigress chasing down her stolen cub (4.315-16), and Dymas, trying to protect Parthenopaeus' corpse, is

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[141] Parkes (2012) on lines 4.69-73, though she overgeneralises in stating that all the bull similes represent aggression, which is not the case.
[142] Taisne (1994) p137-45.
[143] 2.675-81; 3.45-52; 4.363-8; 7.529-32; 8.691-4; 10.42-8; 11.26-31; 12.166-72; 12.739-40.
[144] 3.330-5; 4.69-73; 7.393-7; 7.435-40; 9.82-5; 9.115-9; 9.228-34; 10.458-62; 10.574-9.
[145] For a discussion of this negative kind of simile, see Dewar (1991) *ad loc.*

compared to a lioness protecting her young from Numidian hunters (10.414-9). As Tydeus puts it, even monsters get along with their own kind:[146]

> pariter stabulare bimembres
> Centauros unaque ferunt Cyclopas in Aetna
> compositos, sunt et rabidis iura insita monstris
> fasque suum.

<div align="center">(1.457-60)</div>

Tydeus' point is that creatures of the same kind are supposed to take care of and support one another. They are only supposed to attack animals from a different species. Tydeus calls this interaction *iura insita* and *fas* and thus sets out the paradigm for the normal state of nature early on in the work.

However, there are a few significant exceptions to the pattern, with similes containing like-animals clashing in violence. These similes represent conflict between three pairs of warriors. The first pair consists of the brothers Polynices and Eteocles, who are compared with competing pairs of animals on five occasions.[147] The second use for this kind of simile occurs when Tydeus performs in his wrestling match (6.864-9) and finally the third pair of similes showing the same kind of animals fighting occurs when Theseus decides to take action against Creon (12.599-605). In these exceptions the bull-images show internal fighting within a herd, either from the point of view of an exiled bull, who challenges the current leader of the herd or from the point of view of the reigning bull, which is challenged by a new arrival.[148]

When Statius provides us with an image of animals of the same kind that are in harmony with one another, this represents a natural state of peace within society. On the other hand, the brothers are represented by clashing bulls in clear disharmony. The majority of the bull-fighting-bull similes refer to them. Vergil's use of fighting in bulls (*G.* 3.209-41) politicised the image, where the fight of two creatures from the same species is used to represent the nature of civil war. This contrast with the other type of

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[146] This is a common line of thought in the Roman world; cf. Cicero, *Pro Roscio* 63, or Juvenal 15.159-64, on which see Mayor (2007) *ad loc.*

[147] 1.131-6; 2.323-30; 4.397-404; 11.251-6; 11.530-5. All these involve pairs of bulls except the last, which portrays Polynices and Eteocles as boars.

[148] Parkes (2012) on lines 4.387-404: challenged bulls are common images from Apollonius' *Argonautica* 2.88-9, Vergil's *Georgics* 3.219-36, *Aeneid*, 12.716-24, Ovid *Met.* 9.46-9, and Lucan 2.601-9.

simile, where animals of the same kind get on with one another, emphasises the unnatural strife between the brothers. They are transgressing the *fas* obeyed by animals, both gentle and savage, and monsters alike (and therefore they commit *nefas*). The relationship between Polynices and Eteocles is perverse: being brothers from the same city they ought to follow the pattern of protecting one another, but instead they lead armies from separate cities against each other. Similarly, the bulls they are compared to, which nature expects to support each other, stir up violence instead. Moreover, Statius reuses the bull fighting simile with disturbing effect. Traditionally, bulls in such epic similes fight over the land or a heifer, and the associated right to rule the herd.[149] The brothers are fighting over property and the right to rule, but they are not fighting over any literal female lover. However, the association suggests again a messy web of inter-familial, love affairs, in keeping with Oedipus' perverse marriage. Through animal imagery, Statius emphasises the unnatural relationships between the family members.

A prophecy early in the *Thebaid* had already begun revealing the perversity in family-relationships through animal associations. It was foretold to king Adrastus that his daughters were to marry a lion and a boar (1.395-99). This prophecy was fulfilled by the arrival of Polynices and Tydeus dressed in the hides of these very animals. The imagery of the unnatural unions between Adrastus' daughters and the lion and the boar, the pairings between man and wild beast, ought to have caused discord but resulted in a marriage. In contrast, Polynices and Eteocles are brothers represented as like-animals, who ought to be united in peace with one another, but nevertheless they are the ones that clash in both imagery and literally. Thus, Polynices' relationships that pervert the customs of nature reflect Oedipus' sins against his family, who treated his father as an enemy, and formed an unnatural marriage with his mother. The unnatural madness of Oedipus has certainly been inherited by his sons.

The second set of similes that describe two of the same kind of animals attacking each other describes Tydeus in his wrestling match. As we have seen, Tydeus' cannibalism makes him one of the most beastly characters of the *Thebaid*. In his wrestling match at Opheltes' funeral games, as the hero crashes against his opponent, he is

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[149] On bull similes as a metaphor for erotic and power dynamics in Vergil, see Morgan (1999) p110.

described with a threefold set of animal similes, contrasting him with bulls, boars, and bears:[150]

> non sic ductores gemini gregis horrida tauri
>
> bella mouent; medio coniunx stat candida prato
>
> uictorem expectans, rumpunt obnixa furentes
>
> pectora, subdit amor stimulos et uulnera sanat:
>
> fulmineo sic dente sues, sic hispida turpes
>
> proelia uillosis ineunt complexibus ursi.
>
> (6.864-69)

Perhaps because of its unusal triple format, this simile has stood out to commentators, who have read it proleptically. Taisne suggests that with this animal imagery: "*le poète accentue la violence et l'archarnement du combat, symbole des lutes à venir*",[151] and Lovatt suggests that the words *ductores gemini gregis* (6.864) look forward to the fratricide to come.[152] However, more specifically to Tydeus, the nature of the dis-simile (*non sic*) that opens the set of comparisons, also indicates that the hero is acting more ferociously than the bull, and so anticipates his own upcoming bestial transformation. In addition, the boar part of the comparison adds to and foreshadows Tydeus' characterisation: as we have seen, the boar is the animal that Tydeus is consistently associated with, and will eventually become.[153]

The bull dis-simile, which initiates the threefold animal comparison, takes up four full lines, while the boar and bear similes combined only take up two lines. It is significant that the emphasis is placed on the bull part of the comparison, as this image corresponds with the kinds of bull-similes used to compare Polynices and Eteocles. In many ways, the war can be considered to be as important (if not more) to Tydeus as to Polynices. Tydeus repeatedly forces the war to progress; it is Tydeus' visit to Thebes, as ambassador, that results in the declaration of war; and Tydeus is the one who breaks off Jocasta's (nearly

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[150] This especially engages with the boxing match in Apollonius' *Argonatuica*, where Polydeuces' clash with Amycus is described with a number of similes in quick succession, including ships vs. waves, hammer vs steel, bull vs bull, and bull vs bull-slayer (Apoll. *Arg.* 2.67-97). Statius replaces the humans and human artistry in his own similes with a wider variety of animals. The contrast emphasises the rawer, more bestial force of Tydeus.

[151] Taisne (1994) p143.

[152] Lovatt (2005) p205.

[153] On Proleptic similes in the *Thebaid*, see Dominik (2015).

successful) attempts to restart peace talks between her sons.[154] While Polynices is not especially prominent in the battles: *nec segnem Argolicae sensere Eteoclea turmae / parcior ad cives Polynices in horruit ensis* (7.689-90), Tydeus, we see, has no problem with inflicting violence against the Thebans.

In fact, Tydeus holds an integral position in the relationship between the two brothers, almost as a third brother to the duo. Upon receiving the news of Tydeus' death, Polynices remarks: *alius misero ac melior mihi frater ademptus* (9.53). This line echoes Catullus 101.6 where he laments the death of his actual brother: *heu miser indigne frater adempte mihi*. Catullus' grieving words put in the mouth of Polynices strengthen the apparent fraternal bond between Polynices and Tydeus, while Polynices' lamenting of the cannibalistic Tydeus as the 'better brother' perversifies Polynices and Eteocles' real fraternal relationship. Moreover, Polynices' grief is displayed in a simile describing a bull whose yoke-partner has died:

> ducitur amisso qualis consorte laborum
> deserit inceptum media inter iugera sulcum
> taurus iners colloque iugum deforme remisso
> parte trahit, partem lacrimans sustentat arator.
>
> (9.82-5)

This is modelled on a passage from the *Georgics*, when a bull loses his yoke-partner, his own brother, to a plague:

> it tristis arator
> maerentem abiungens fraterna morte iuvencum,
> atque opere in medio defixa relinquit aratra.
>
> (Verg. *G.* 3.517-19)

The Catullan and Vergilian evocations transfer the same grief of losing a true brother and partner to Polynices and Tydeus, despite the fact that they are not true siblings. The portrayal of the grief of the bull, who has lost his yoke-partner is particularly pointed: it responds to the *Thebaid*'s first extended simile of two bulls refusing to work under the same yoke, which represented Polynices and Eteocles. Tydeus has replaced

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[154] Vessey (1973) p270-94.

Eteocles as Polynices' "brother",[155] and as the one who can work in harmony with him. Moreover, Tydeus' words reveal how he thinks Eteocles treats him as a substitute for Polynices, as Tydeus hints at the cowardly ambush: *nec frater eram* (7.540) and he follows this up with: *me opponite regni*, suggesting that he could act as a substitute for Polynices in his place in the fraternal duel against Eteocles as a hostile brother. Thus in this representation of Tydeus as a 'brother' to Polynices and Eteocles, family ties are again complicated and disturbed. It is therefore not surprising that Tydeus is also compared with a bull attacking another bull, sharing the same pattern as Polynices and Eteocles, which goes against the *fas* of nature; he, as much as Polynices and Eteocles, is implicated in the unnatural *furor* of the Oedipodionians.

Finally, let us turn to Theseus and the last occurrence of the simile describing competing bulls (12.601-5). In the final book of the epic, the Argive women persuade Theseus to help them lift Creon's ban on burial, and to free Thebes from his tyranny. It is at the moment when he sets out to Thebes that we are presented with the final simile of competing bulls. The challenged bull in this simile represents Theseus and the approaching opponent in the simile represents Creon.

What are we to make of the controversial character of Theseus, and his comparison with bulls? Though he is acting as a champion of *clementia* for all humanity, his associations with bulls are one of the main causes for confusion. It is disturbing to see Theseus portrayed in the bull versus bull simile-model, which, as I have argued, symbolises transgressions of nature. However, Theseus' other traditional associations with bulls would suggest that he really does restore order to the broken world of the *Thebaid*. As we saw earlier, Hypsipyle and Evadne both recall Theseus as a slayer of the Marathonian Bull and the Minotaur. These bulls were not only past examples of destruction, but the Minotaur, especially, as the illegitimate offspring between a woman and a bull, is the symbol of broken natural laws and unnatural sexual union *par excellence* – in other words, sins similar to those that Oedipus committed. These would indicate that Theseus is the perfect candidate to end the misfortunes brought down upon Thebes by Oedipus' fatal marriage with his mother.

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[155] Henderson (1993) p176.

Theseus on the Shield: a Saviour or an Oedipus?

This image of bull-slayer, however, brings us to the final ekphrasis. The image of his victory over the Minotaur is presented proudly on his shield, which he carries into his war against Creon. Theseus presents himself in the role of monster-slayer, as Hercules did for his bowl. As a result not only do the Thebans see Theseus doing the same action twice (on the shield and in person), but Theseus too re-enacts his role as the slayer of the Minotaur. The hero actually remembers his struggles with the Minotaur (*reminiscitur*, 12.674) as he fights at Thebes – unsurprisingly: once again he is ridding the world of monsters born from unnatural couplings, and the Thebans too recognise that he is performing this same action both in his past and his present.

However, these words also give us an underlying sense of unease: among the things that Theseus 'remembers' here is Ariadne, the *Cnosida* (12.676). A verb like "remembering" often flags an allusion,[156] in this case to another famous ekphrasis narrating Theseus' myth. The reader too remembers that Catullus' Ariadne had accused him of being 'forgetful' (*immemor a!*, Catull. 64.135).[157] In her anger, she had cursed the hero, by praying to the Furies, so that his forgetfulness towards her would be fittingly punished with more forgetfulness, so that he forgets to change the sails as he arrives home, resulting in the death of his father (Catull. 64.246-8). Ariadne had also questioned his lack of *clementia*: *tibi nulla fuit clementia praesto* (Catull. 64.132-8), the very virtue that is supposed to encourage him to engage in combat with Thebes.[158] Finally Ariadne even states that Theseus' abandonment will leave her unburied, and at the mercy of wild beasts and birds: *pro quo dilaceranda feris dabor alitibusque / praeda neque iniecta tumulabor mortua terra* (Catull. 64.152-3), even though Theseus' motive for the expedition is to force Creon to allow burial of the Argive corpses, and Evadne had specifically called upon Theseus' claims that he would not even leave enemies unburied if he could (12.575-7). The intertext with Ariadne's speech thus raises questions about whether Theseus really is a suitable person to embody *clementia* and his capabilities for the task at hand.

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[156] See Hinds (1998) p1-5 on markers of allusion.
[157] McNelis (2007) p172. On memory as an intertextual marker in Catullus 64, see Conte (1986) p57-69.
[158] Bessone (2011) p171-177.

His inadvertent role in contributing to his father's death is a useful parallel to Oedipus' own accidental murder of his father. But the similarities between Theseus and Oedipus do not stop there. Theseus' depiction on the ekphrasis makes him not only one who overcame the Minotaur, but also one who overcame the labyrinth, which has its own monstrous qualities (*monstrosi ambagibus antri*, 12.668) – another feather in his heroic cap. But the word *ambages* has dangerous connotations in the *Thebaid*. For instance, Apollo's riddling prophecy that foretold the marriage between Adrastus' daughters and Polynices and Tydeus was referred to as: *nexis ambagibus* (1.495), at the very moment that Adrastus unravels its meaning. But the moment that the king solves this riddle, is the moment of Argos' downfall. His recognition that Polynices and Tydeus are fated to be his sons-in-law is in accordance with Jupiter's plan to destroy the city: the two marriages are Jupiter's seeds of war (*belli…semina*, 1.243-45). And so the overcoming of the *ambages* presents a problem more than a solution.

However, even more alarmingly, the ekphrastic phrase looks back to the poem's very first use of the word, and the poem's first description of defeating a monster: Oedipus' declaration that he killed the Sphinx (*si Sphingos iniquae / callidus ambages te praemonstrante resolui*, 1.66-7). As we have seen already, Oedipus saw the killing of the Sphinx as one of his sins – a mistake committed under the influence of the Furies which led to his incest. For this reason, he could no longer take pride as a monster-slayer, or as someone who solved *ambages*. Therefore, Theseus, as the poem's final portrayal of a monster-killer and solver of riddles,[159] has uncomfortable parallels with the poem's first. In the *Thebaid*, overcoming *ambages* perversely leads to more problems. As we have seen, Theseus' *fama* rests on being a hero who brings order in the world by killing monsters and civilising savage people. But as I have argued, Oedipus' killing of the Sphinx devalues the act of monster-killing, and shows that it does not necessarily have a positive effect on the world. The intratextual echo of Oedipus in the very artwork, in which Theseus celebrates and publically projects his status as monster-killer undermines this glorious presentation of himself. Instead, the narrator's choice of words indicates that Theseus is at risk of becoming another Oedipus.

The wider literary narratives about Theseus' future reinforce this idea. Theseus is described as the son of Neptune twice in his short appearance (12.588; 665).[160] As we

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[159] See Gaisser (1995) on the use of the Labyrinth as a metaphor for riddling words.
[160] Ganiban (2007) p229.

have seen in the previous chapter, a genetic descent from a deity is highly desirable for an aspiring hero. But Theseus' relationship with Neptune also has uneasy associations. The fraternal rivalry on earth between Polynices and Eteocles has reflected a wider cosmic rivalry in the epic between Heaven and Hell, between Jupiter and Dis.[161] The third brother Neptune has been completely missing from the epic. Thus, Theseus may be regarded as Neptune's representative in the cosmic warfare. But just as Tydeus came between Polynices and Eteocles as a 'third brother', which resulted in more violence and sundering of any chance of peace between the two, does Theseus' appearance, as the substitute of the third brother, Neptune, also represent an expansion of the discord to yet another cosmic sphere?[162]

Moreover, Theseus' identity as the son of Neptune also raises some disturbing issues in combination with the bull imagery. When Theseus first appears, he has just returned to Athens after subduing the Amazons. He returns with his newly married wife, Hippolyte, who has renounced her native customs, adopting instead those of the 'civilised' world (12.532-9). Vessey regards this scene as representing Theseus' ability to civilise the barbaric, which anticipates his liberation of Thebes from Creon's tyranny.[163] However, the narrator explains that the warrior woman does not join her husband in war, because she is currently pregnant with Theseus' child (12.635-8). This partly strengthens Theseus' characterisation as someone who can create order in the world: he has 'tamed' that wild side of her so that she now acts as a good Greek woman should, staying away from the battle and preparing for motherhood. However, what is concerning is that this unborn child will be Hippolytus. Regarding his future, a reader would undoubtedly think of Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Seneca's *Phaedra*.[164] The plot of these tragedies involve similar inter-familial sins to those in the *Thebaid*. In the tragedies, we find Phaedra's desire for a pseudo-incestuous relationship with her step-son, Hippolytus,[165] and we also find a father praying for divinely-wrought retribution against

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[161] See Dis' threats against Jupiter in 8.34-85.

[162] Though see also Bessone (2013) p158-161, who argues that Theseus replaces Jupiter as a moral arbiter, rather than joining in with the conflict.

[163] Vessey (1973) p312.

[164] On the problematic associations of bull imagery in Latin tellings of the Cretan myths, see Armstrong (2006) p71-95.

[165] Though we should note that Phaedra was only Hippolytus' step-mother, unlike Jocasta who was Oedipus' real mother, and that Phaedra attempted to resist her passions. However, an earlier version of the tragedy may have had a more aggressive version of Phaedra, see Barrett (1964) p13-5.

his children, when Theseus prays to Poseidon to destroy Hippolytus,[166] just as Oedipus curses his sons by praying to the Furies.

The manner in which Hippolytus is destroyed is particularly significant to us. In both plays, Poseidon/Neptune summons a bull-like monster from the sea which results in Hippolytus' death (Eur. *Hipp*. 1213-4; Sen. *Phaed*. 1036-7). The bull in these plays also symbolise the perversion and rupturing of family relationships, just as it has done in the *Thebaid* for Polynices and Eteocles. Through Seneca's version of the tale too, we may wonder whether Theseus' status as bull-slayer is actually a positive attribute. As mentioned earlier, Evadne calls upon this aspect of Theseus and believes that because he has brought order to the world before by killing these monsters, he can do so again at Thebes. However, Seneca's Hippolytus had also relied on Theseus' renown as bull-slayer to survive the confrontation against Neptune's bull: *haud frangit animum vanus hic terror meum: / nam mihi paternus vincere est tauros labor* (Sen. Phaed. 1066-7). The tragic irony lies in the fact that he does not know that this monster had been sent by his father, and therefore this bull-slaying reputation of Theseus cannot and does not save him. Thus Theseus' *fama* and his self-presentation of himself as a bull-slayer raises concerns about how suitable Theseus is to bring order to Thebes.

The mentions of Theseus' parentage and his marriage to Hippolyte recall these unfortunate events that will occur later in Theseus' lifetime. Through these associations, we question whether Theseus really does bring resolution to the issues at Thebes, or whether he instead will replicate the Oedipal sins later in his life-time, expanding the chaos of the *Thebaid* into Athens. His comparison to a bull attacking another bull, which defies natural order, directly conflicts with his other representation as a bull-slayer, a restorer of order in nature. As before, the ekphrasis is aimed to portray the hero only in a positive light, but the additional intratextual and intertextual information, which is accessible to the reader beyond the limited representation on the shield, colours Theseus' character rather differently. On the surface, Theseus seems to have resolved the horrors that have occurred at Thebes and restored natural order to the world, but the other disturbing references to other literary presentations of Theseus reveal both his troubled past and future. The peace he has brought to Thebes and the world can only be a temporary one and so the world of the *Thebaid* is doomed to a repetition of cyclic sin.

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[166] See Kohn (2008) on the tradition of Theseus' curse on his son.

Chapter 3 - Self-Fashioning in Flavian Rome

<u>Introduction</u>

In this section, I will examine the cultural background during which the *Thebaid* was written. I will suggest that the themes we have observed in the *Thebaid* (in particular, the characters' anxieties over their self-presentation) reflect a contemporary dialogue in Flavian society. We have explored the contradictions in the *Thebaid*, between the image of heroism projected by the characters, and the narrator's portrayal of them. While the heroes of the *Thebaid* do their best to perform their ideals of heroism to other members of their society, so many of them fail to live up to this idealised identity they have created for themselves. Instead, often they reveal or even recognise their own "true", essentialist natures in the moments leading to their death. These gaps, I have suggested, encourage the readers to reflect on their own methods of self-presentation, and thus respond to the conversation about changing cultural attitudes towards self-presentation at Rome.

In the first part of this chapter, I hope to show, with a variety of textual sources, that members of Flavian society had a special interest in the methods for expressing identity. Of course, that is not to say that the Flavians were the first to be concerned about how they appeared to others, nor that they were the first to discuss how one should manage their appearance. Nonetheless, there does seem to be a shift in the attitudes towards self-presentation, as they come out of the Neronian age and the disruptive 'Year of the Four Emperors' in 69AD. The second part of this chapter will explore Domitian's own methods of self-representation, especially with regards to the idea of deification. For an emperor, self-representation and politics are inevitably intertwined: the methods he uses to style his own image will legitimise his own high status, but will also set an example for the people under his rule to follow. I will draw a link between the problematic portrayal of deification in the *Thebaid*, and the association with divinity as a mode of self-representation in Flavian Rome.

<u>The Renegotiation of Methods of Self-Representation</u>

The turbulent times from which Flavian Rome arose created a period of social anxiety. A new family dynasty was in charge of Rome, and with its ascension came a

reorganisation also in the equestrian and senatorial orders.[1] Vespasian expanded the membership of both of these social ranks, and then removed a number of the old guard, whom he considered unsuitable, replacing them with Italians and provincials from even further abroad.[2] Under the Flavians, there was a sudden increase in social mobility in the previously rigid class system of Rome. Tacitus, for example, was one who benefitted from the Flavian policies: though probably from an equestrian and provincial background, he began an illustrious senatorial career during Vespasian's reign, rising high under Titus and Domitian (Tac. *Hist.* 1.1).[3] The result was a radical change in the social landscape. It was the task of these new ruling elites to legitimise their own recent promotions by finding suitable ways to present themselves to the public. For the imperial family in particular, it was important to show that their rule would be stable, and far removed from the perceived decadence that marked the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the chaos that followed its demise.

Under these pressures, I suggest that the concern over one's self-portrayal becomes a point of interest under the Flavian dynasty.[4] That is not to say that techniques of self-representation are exclusive to the Flavian age; but rather, I wish to show that Flavian society was self-consciously talking about it. How should the members of the new group at the top of society prove that they are worthy of their new positions? The traditional ways to create an identity that legitimises one's position were open to renegotiation. The old methods, particularly of relying on the deeds of an ancient family, were not really valid anymore.[5] Vespasian, leading by example, is said to have scoffed at a flatterer's attempt to link his ancestry back to the ancient founders of his hometown, Reate, and to a companion of Hercules, choosing instead to promote his humble origins (Suet. *Vesp.* 12). The times were changing, and so were the ways of representing oneself. But what they were changing to was unclear. As we will see, there seems to be a sense

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[1] See e.g. (*Vesp.* 9.2); *Epit. de Caes.*9.11. Modern historians have explained Vespasian's choice for reorganising these social ranks in various ways, including the practical, political, military, and philosophical; see Mellor (2003) p84-6; Dészpa (2016) p167; Levick (2017) p89-104. On sources demonstrating the fluid social mobility in Flavian Rome, see Cooley (2015) p373-95.

[2] For a detailed analysis of the promoted individuals, see Devreker (1980) and Jones (2000) p73-4.

[3] See Damon (2005) p1-2, for a brief discussion of Tacitus' background and senatorial career.

[4] See Wood (2016), who explores how the Flavian Dynasty with unknown backgrounds had to introduce themselves (or rather an idea of themselves) to the public through art.

[5] See Bernstein (2008) p16-25, on the changing attitudes towards using ancestors as a mode of self-representation as a result of the new social organisations in Flavian Rome. See also Newlands (2002) p91.

that society was feeling its way into uncharted territory: different authors offer their take on the topic, but there is not one unified destination in mind.

I will explore two options discussed in the Flavian literature, by which members of society could justify their social positions. The first is wealth. High positions of power are naturally associated with affluence. In particular, in cultures or periods of high social mobility, socio-economists have noticed a trend of "conspicuous consumption".[6] As I understand the term, it refers to a phenomenon whereby individuals purchase and display goods that do not necessarily have a practical purpose in everyday life, but which serve to demonstrate that the owner has a certain level of prestige or social status. It is by making these purchases "conspicuous" that individuals can prove to others in society that they have the surplus capital to spend on non-essentials. This is then perceived to be an indicator of social status.[7] I think that this is a useful model for exploring self-representation in the Flavian period. As we will see from the literature, this kind of ostentatious activity is frequently remarked upon, though different authors might condem or praise it.

The second way that an individual could justify their position in society is by one's morality. Those who were unexpectedly promoted to the high ranks of society were portrayed as men who deserved to be there for their merit and their good moral character. An example of this is when Suetonius describes Vespasian's reorganisation of the senatorial and equestrian ranks: *summotis indignissimis et honestissimo quoque Italicorum ac provincialium allecto* (Suet. *Vesp*. 9). The contrasting judgment values of *indignissimis* and *honestissimo* ought to be focalised through the perspective of Vespasian.[8] These newcomers with no political background in Rome had to be legitimised in the eyes of the public by their apparent integrity – though how they might convey their inner qualities to an external public is debated.

Statius' *Silvae* marries these two methods together. As many have noticed, the *Silvae* heavily emphasises the visual material in his reconstruction of Flavian Rome.[9] As an example, Statius puts a new spin on the traditional poetic trope of inexpressibility: not

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[6] The phrase is coined by Veblen (2017) (first published in 1899).

[7] Burke (1996) p403, who uses Petronius' dinner as an example of "conspicuous consumption" by the *nouveaux riches*.

[8] On the word *honestissimo*, Jones (2000) p73 notes only that "The word *honestissimus* was regularly applied to one of the wealthy and influential members of the municipal aristocracy" (cf. 'the Honourable' *vel sim.* as a title for British MPs). I agree with this, but I suggest that, as well as being an honorific title, the moral force of the word must also be invoked here, as a contrast to *indignissimis*.

[9] Cf. e.g. Hardie (1983) p119-136, Newlands (2002) p38-43.

even if he had all the different sources of divine poetic inspiration would he be able to relate the *innumeras species cultusque locorum* (2.2.41ff) at the villa of Pollius Felix. There was so much to see that his eyes barely even managed to take it all in, *vix ordine longo suffecere oculi* (2.2.41ff.). Elsewhere, the new shrine for Hercules' statue at Pollius' house is so grand that his eyes and mind can barely believe it, *vix oculis animoque fides* (3.1.8). The poet's eyes continue to be drawn this way and that in Manilius Vopiscus' villa, *huc oculis, huc mente trahor* (1.3.38); *dum vagor aspectu visusque per omnia* (1.3.52), and it is a difficult task, *labor est* (1.3.48), to describe all the art works in the house. Later in Domitian's banquet, again Statius has difficulty in seeing everything that is on offer (the meals, the surroundings, the servants) for his eyes attempt to focus on Domitian alone (4.2.38-44). The crowd turn their eyes on Abascantus mourning, instead of his deceased wife in her funeral procession, because his lament is more of a sight than the wife's funereal splendour (5.1.239-41).

There is great emphasis put on catering to the sense of sight.[10] There is so much to see in most of these examples that it is with difficulty that Statius manages to see everything, or relate it afterwards. Statius glorifies the "conspicuous". It is through these great spectacles that individuals shape their identity in the eyes of their audience.[11]

As Newlands and Zeiner have shown, Statius redefines the concept of wealth in the *Silvae* from its traditional association with luxury and loose morals.[12] Instead, the display of wealth indicates the owner's virtue – as long as it is refined and elegant. Statius is well aware of the negative stereotypes about wealth, and so the poet must repeatedly refute charges of luxury. So Statius' description of Manilius Vopiscus' residence focuses on its rich furnishings and decorative features: imported gilded beams (1.3.35-6); marble (1.3.36); indoor water features (1.3.37); gardens with a riverside view (1.3.39-42); as well as a mass of artwork (1.3.47-56). The poet seems to realise that his description could be construed as luxury, so he also provides the following addendum:

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[10] On the Flavian's use of spectacle more generally, see Lovatt (2016).

[11] McCullough (2008) examines the theme of the difficulty of looking at the emperor Domitian in the *Silvae*. She follows the historical records from Pliny, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio, which characterise the emperor as a private individual, who prefers to stay out of the limelight. Thus there is a disjuncture between the imperial figurehead whose presence is felt across Rome through his images, and the man himself, who hides in the background. Even in the *Silvae*, the people's perception of the emperor is a shadowy image that must be constructed by visual artwork and the values conveyed by his association with certain constructions. The conspicuous displays come to represent the emperor to his people.

[12] See Newlands (2002) p6, "through the celebration of luxury Statius proposes a provocative new concept of nobility to which economic, moral and artistic values rather than hereditary qualifications are essential", and Zeiner (2005) p75-134. Cf. also Hardie (1983) p174-76 on wealth in the *Silvae*.

hic premitur fecunda quies, virtusque serena

fronte gravis sanusque nitor luxuque carentes

deliciae.

(Stat. *Silv.* 1.3.91-3)

Statius carefully qualifies the *nitor* and *deliciae*, normally markers of luxury, with *sanus* and *luxu…carentes* respectively.[13] Instead of extravagance, the highly decorated house is associated with a 'solemn virtue', (*virtus…/…gravis*). Similarly, Statius praises Crispinus, where he manages his visual splendour (*nitor*), without it becoming the vice, *luxuria*. Instead it is associated with another moral quality, *pietas*:

hinc hilaris probitas et frons tranquilla, nitorque

luxuriae confine timens,[14] pietasque per omnes

dispensata modos.

(Stat. *Silv.* 5.2.73-5)

I would like to push this a little further, and suggest that not only is it acceptable to Statius for individuals to own wealth, but there is also a moral obligation to display it. Thus, the expensive ornaments legitimise their owner both with the prestige conveyed by "conspicuous consumerism", as well as conveying their good morality. So Statius praises Atedius Melior for walking through the lines of the 'honest and sweet': *sed medius per honesta et dulcia limes*. The Latin is difficult here,[15] but the sense is clearly that Melior manages to balance a moral goodness (*honesta*) with acceptable levels of pleasure (*dulcia*).[16] Statius continues:

et secrete, palam quod digeris ordine vitam,

idem auri facilis contemptor et optimus idem

comere divitias opibusque immittere lucem.

(Stat. *Silv.* 2.3.69-71)

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[13] Words for "shine", an eye-catching quality, is a repeated theme in the *Silvae*; see Cancik (1965) p45; and Nagle (2004) p10-11.

[14] Assuming Barth's emendation from *tenens* is correct.

[15] van Dam (1984) *ad loc.*; Shackleton Bailey (2003b) *ad loc.*; Newlands (2011a) *ad loc.*

[16] Perhaps playfully literalising the idea of *aurea mediocritas*.

Melior carefully avoids straying to extremes. He is private in his affairs (*secrete*), but also openly displays his life to others (*palam*). At the same time he is ready to despise gold (*auri facilis contemptor*), while being very good at arranging his riches (*comere divitias*) and displaying his wealth to the public (*opibusque immittere lucem*). For Statius, there is a risk of being criticised as a stingy miser if wealth remains behind closed doors. It needs to be shown off to the world, in order to demonstrate the owner's noble character.

Likewise, in the poem celebrating the villa of Pollius Felix, Statius turns to address Pollius' wife, and again praises her for not hiding her wealth, but making it open to public display:

> non tibi sepositas infelix strangulat area
> divitias avidique animum dispendia torquent
> fenoris: expositi census et docta fruendi
> temperies.
>
> (Stat. *Silv.* 2.2.151-54)

Again there is a careful differentiation between the use of wealth and its abuse: Statius has to again qualify *fruendi* with *docta…temperies*. This suggests that Statius makes a theoretical distinction between the right ways to use wealth and the wrong ways to use wealth, even if he does not specify in detail what this distinction is.

Statius makes the visibility of wealth a key feature of his *Silvae*. What one displays is used as a measure of the owner's moral character. So for example, in the examples earlier, the wealthy house of Manilius Vopiscus was associated with his *virtus*, while Crispinus' eye-catching appearance was connected to his *pietas*. Ekphrases permeate the *Silvae*: statues, large constructions (such as houses, roads, or public buildings), a tree, a bird cage, funeral pyres, the trappings of an individual etc. Many of these descriptions come with lists of precious materials sourced from across the empire.[17] Moreover, there are frequent references to the large number of precious artworks on

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[17] Cf. Violentilla's house (1.2.145ff.); the villa of Manlius Vopiscus (1.3.34ff); the baths of Claudius Etruscus (1.5.34ff.); Glaucias' trappings, the slave boy of Atedius Melior (2.1.128ff.); the villa of Pollius Felix (2.2.85ff.); the birdcage of Atedius Melior's parrot (2.4.11ff.) and its funeral pyre (2.4.33ff.); the funeral pyre of Flavius Ursus' slave boy (2.6.85ff.); the funeral pyre of Claudius Etruscus' father (3.3.33ff.); the trappings of Flavius Earinus, the slave boy of Domitian (3.4.50ff.); Domitian's palace (4.2.26ff.); the funeral procession of Priscilla, wife of Abascantus (5.1.208ff.).

display.[18] These objects become conduits for praising the owner or commissioner.[19] For Statius, the beauty and artifice of the items come to represent also a nobility of the owner's character. In this way, wealthy individuals in society could use external ornaments to shape a virtuous identity for themselves.

But Statius' association of wealth and virtue is certainly not universally accepted by all members of Flavian society. Pliny the Elder, writing a little earlier under Titus, had already been involved in the discourse about the appropriate modes of self-representation. Isager's important study on Pliny's sections on art history has shown that they reflect a wider concern about Flavian society and the way it uses art.[20] Pliny guides his contemporaries' own moral habits with historical examples of the use and abuse of art. In his discussion of portraits, he states:

Adeo materiam conspici malunt omnes quam se nosci . . . Itaque nullius effigie vivente imagines pecuniae, non suas, relincunt.

(Plin. *NH*. 35.4-5)

Unlike Statius, Pliny frowns upon luxury goods, which only serve to show off an individual's means. As Carey argues, there is an implicit assimilation of medium and character.[21] But while the owner clearly wants to advertise their own greatness with these items, Pliny sees them only as a superficial representation of wealth (*pecuniae*), not as a representation of their actual character (*suas*). If anything, for Pliny, the ostentatious show of wealth, and the very impracticality of the items become a sure sign of the vice *luxuria*:

Murrina ex eadem tellure et crystallina effodimus, quibus pretium faceret ipsa fragilitas. hoc argumentum opum, haec vera luxuriae gloria existimata est, habere quod posset statim perire totum.

(Plin. *NH*. 33.5)

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[18] In the villa of Manilius Vopiscus (1.3.47ff); in the villa of Pollius Felix (2.2.41ff; 2.2.63); the shrine housing the statue of Hercules at Pollius Felix's house (3.1.37ff.); a portrait of Claudius Etruscus' mother (3.3.112ff.) and the waxwork of his father (3.3.200ff.); a collection of antiques in Novius Vindex's house (4.6.20).
[19] Bright (1980) p12-13.
[20] Isager (1991).
[21] Carey (2003) p143.

But elsewhere, Pliny does give an example where art is able to show one's inner qualities in a way that avoids reproach: he mentions an ancedote about Messala, who criticised the inclusion of tenuously linked family members among one's ancestral *imagines*. But Pliny disagrees with Messala, arguing that an idealistic construction of a family (and thus also the family's values), even if not quite accurate, at least shows an individual's desire to associate themselves with the *virtutes* of these earlier men. In doing so, they aim to replicate them, and so become morally good themselves:

sed — pace Messalarum dixisse liceat — etiam mentiri clarorum imagines erat aliquis virtutum amor multoque honestius quam mereri, ne quis suas expeteret.

<div align="right">(Plin. NH. 35.2.2)</div>

For Pliny, it is more important that art conveys messages of an individual's inner qualities rather than superficial qualities like wealth or power. Pliny is particularly interested in the contrast of public and private: art, which can benefit the public (like the *imagines* that make men serve society better), is good; whereas private art is only self-serving and can bring charges of *luxuria*. As we can see, Pliny is interested in guiding his readers towards what he considers to be suitable modes of self-presentation: how they should do it, and what aspects of themselves they should emphasise.

In keeping with Pliny's scepticism towards the idealistic view of "conspicuous consumerism" held by people like Statius, are Martial's epigrams. Recent studies in Martial have shown that the poet's subject-matters, though apparently light-hearted, engage with contemporary societal beliefs and habits. [22] These verses range from the celebratory to the polemic, which have been read as a way of reinforcing or correcting the behaviour of members of society, in accordance with Martial's own beliefs.

Like the *Silvae*, Martial's epigrams contribute to the idea that the culture of Flavian Rome was one of spectacle, with a society that was concerned with how one looks in comparison to others. However, Martial demonstrates this with a much more mocking tone. There is a reoccurring motif of a shared sense of vanity among the epigrams' wide-ranging subjects. This vanity is represented by their desires or their attempts to amend other people's perception of their overall appearance though external

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[22] Spisak (2007) explores Martial's epigrams as a way of instructing correct modes of behaviour in Flavian Rome. See Fitzgerald (2007) p4-18 and Rimell (2008) p7-14, for Martial's epigrams as microcosm of Rome and Roman society.

tools: in 3.43, Laetinus dyes his grey hair black; in 3.55, Cosmus douses himself in perfume; Fabulla lies about the fact that she wears a wig in 6.12, and is followed by Phoebus who hides his baldness by painting hair on his bald scalp in 6.57; especial venom is aimed at Galla in 9.37, who pushes this trend of vanity to the extreme with a completely fake appearance. She wears false hair, false teeth, silk clothes, and even fake eyebrows, to the extent that Martial sardonically comments that the different parts of her sleep in a hundred different boxes (*centum…pyxidibus*).[23] The joke in these satirical epigrams lies in the fact that it is painfully obvious that the person in question is trying to cover up their physical defects for a sense of respectability. Thus, a feature of Martial's poetry is the extreme lengths that individuals might go to, so that they might be perceived as someone better than they 'truly' are.

In epigram 2.57, Martial describes an unnamed individual with a notably flashy, purple cloak. The cloak's luxury convinces others to devote themselves to him as clients. But Martial adds cynically towards the end: in fact this person needs to pawn off other items in order to eat. The poem is similar to epigram 2.58, where Zoilus, well dressed in a beautiful cloak, mocks Martial's threadbare one. The poet responds to the jibe by implying that Zoilus only rents his cloak, and does not own it. Both cloaks, because they are extravagantly beautiful to observers, are intended to raise the wearer's standing in society, so that in the first, clients will flock to him, and in the second, Zoilus can sneer at others who are apparently less wealthy. But even having a large flock of dependents, however, can be considered part of the costume of the performance. In epigram 2.74, Martial points out Saufeius, who is surrounded by a great entourage, to Maternus. However, the poet advises his friend not to be envious (*invidere nolito*, 2.74.4), for Fuficulenus and Faventinus (moneylenders) have had to pay for this large crowd of followers. Again, the "conspicuous consumerism" of expensive goods and services is part of the culture of Martial's Rome; but Martial mocks these individuals for trying to show off their prestige in this way. The objects help the owner create the illusion that they belong to a higher class in society, but it is superficial. In reality, it comes at great cost to

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[23] The vanity shown by individuals in the literature of Flavian Rome seems to be corroborated by the material evidence. It is during this time in history, for example, that wigs for women become particularly ornate and flashy in the Roman world as we see from depictions of women in busts (see Kleiner (2010) p125-6; and Stewart (2008) p93) and coins, the former of which often had 'swappable' hairstyles so that the busts can be updated. But men too would wear wigs in order to improve their appearance, although this ran the risk of an accusation of effeminism. Hair, in Bartman's words, is a "gender marker" and an expression of "personal identity", Bartman (2001) p1.

the individual. Thus, we see that Martial also has strong opinions about how individuals should, or rather should not, present themselves in society.

But, as we have seen earlier, aside from "conspicuous consumerism", an individual can also justify their position in high society by their morality. Quintilian offers an alternative method to demonstrate one's worth – not through material wealth, but through behaviour. His *Institutio Oratoria* is written to guide future leaders of the state (such as Pliny the younger and Tacitus, two of his students) in how to act and present themselves in society, informed by rhetorical skill.

Judging an invidual's moral character by how they act is an old concept. But this association is one that Quintilian draws immediate attention to, from the outset of his *Institutio Oratoria.* Quintilian's guidebook on rhetoric – a performative art – recommends (male) individuals to act in a certain way. He regularly draws attention to the similarity of actors and rhetoricians. For example, he stresses how the rhetorician should assume an emotional character to give power to their words (11.3.4; 11.3.62), rebutting those who think that the strength of the speech should be in the speech itself and not with cheap performative tricks (11.3.10).[24] However, unlike an actor, Quintilian does not think that the rhetorician's act should be limited to isolated moments in a circumscribed performative space, but the rhetorician should use his skills in a wide societal context:

vir ille vere civilis et publicarum privatarumque rerum administrationi accommodatus, qui regere consiliis urbes, fundare legibus, emendare iudiciis possit, non alius sit profecto quam orator.

(Quint. *Inst*. 1 *praef.* 10)

For Quintilian, rhetorical skill is necessary for anyone who is truly integrated in society (*vere civilis*), and it plays a part in both private and public affairs. Performing rhetorical skill is a benefit to the state. Quintilian, therefore, gives advice on a general code of behaviour: not just performance, but performativity.[25] He also connects rhetoric with morality:

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[24] Stroup (2010) p27.
[25] See e.g. Gunerson (2000) for rhetoric as a mode of performing masculinity.

Oratorem autem instituimus illum perfectum, qui esse nisi vir bonus non potest, ideoque non dicendi modo eximiam in eo facultatem sed omnis animi virtutes exigimus.

<div align="right">(Quint. Inst. 1 praef. 9)</div>

The actions of an orator can be artificial: the emotions and gestures convey a particular image of the speaker to gain their audience's sympathy, but need only be employed for the sake of the performance, without being a 'true' representation of the speaker. Nonetheless, Quintilian allows this performance to be virtuous. His idea of the perfect orator' (*oratorem…perfectum*) must also be a 'good man' (*vir bonus*), whose powers of speech should be proportional to all the virtues of his inner character (*omnis animi virtutes*). Thus, Quintilian suggests that an individual should display their inner quality from the way that he conducts himself.

An example from Statius' *Silvae* also engages with the discussion on how behaviour can show one's inner nobility. Poem 4.5 addresses Septimius Severus, who was originally from the Libyan city, Leptis Magna, but was transplanted to Rome as a boy. Statius commends his naturalisation into a Roman way of life:

> non sermo Poenus, non habitus tibi,
> externa non mens: Italus, Italus.
> sunt Vrbe Romanisque turmis
> qui Libyam deceant alumni.

<div align="center">(Stat. Silv. 4.5.45-8)</div>

Statius praises the way he performs Romanness. From a visual perspective he does not wear foreign clothing. But in addition to this, how he conducts himself is also important: for Statius also specifies that Severus neither has a Punic way of speaking (*non sermo Poenus*) nor a foreign mind-set (*externa non mens*). Thus, how he behaves reflects his internal nature. Then, in a comment that is unusually acerbic in tone for the *Silvae*, Statius jibes some unspecified native Romans for behaving as though they should be the ones from Africa. Therefore, Statius shows how, by modifying one's appearance and behaviour to fit the stereotypes of a particular role, an individual can change the perceptions of others towards them. By behaving as an Italian, Severus is as good as Italian; and by behaving as Africans, these unspecified Romans may as well be African.

Statius' moralising tone puts forward his idea of how indviduals should act if they wish to appear respectable and worthy of their position in society.

However, we find criticism over this kind of performance in Martial again. He mocks Gellia, who weeps only for her deceased father when there are witnesses around, and not when she is alone (Mart. *Epigr.* 1.33). Though her mourning is apparently insincere, Gellia tries to create a pious character for herself in the eyes of others. On a similar theme, Galla in epigram 4.58 will only mourn her husband in private, which Martial cynically implies is down to the fact that she does not weep for her husband at all, but also cannot be seen by society to not be weeping. For Martial, these women should be condemned for performing (or 'faking') the role of a dutiful wife and not being 'true' to the role.

The observations of other people can therefore enforce a particular code of conduct from an individual: they act in accordance to a role that they believe that they should be playing. Thus Martial's depiction of Gellia and Galla forms an inverse reflection to Statius' Septimius Severus. They are examples of when just acting a part fails to convince others that the act is reality. Martial criticises this kind of behaviour more than Statius in his *Silvae.* He displays the risks of failing to play the desired role successfully. The poet himself plays the critical eye of society, and condemns the failures of his peers' performances.

As we can see, the literary sources we have examined make up part of the conversation in Flavian Rome about how individuals should present themselves in society. But there is no agreement on the various methods, which are open to both criticism and praise. Each author has their own opinion about how this should, or should not be done. Nonetheless, the fact that each author has an opinion about correct or incorrect modes of self-fashioning indicates that it was an important concern of the Flavian age.

One final point on this topic: the Flavian authors saw themselves as able to freely discuss how individuals should represent themselves.[26] This marks a difference to the way that the Flavians perceived attitudes towards self-representation under the Julio-Claudians, in which the need for careful control over one's self-image was perceived as a necessary way of life in order to survive. It was dangerous to let others see what one

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[26] Though this perception will contested by authors writing after the Flavian dynasty comes to an end; cf. Tac. *Hist.* 1.

truly thinks and feels. The period was haunted by a fear of informers and imperial retribution. The safest course of action was for all members of society to engage in dissimulation, through a kind of scripted activity, both on the ruler's part and his subjects'.[27]

For example, the tragedy *Octavia* is a testimony to how Neronian society was received by the Flavians.[28] Frequently, discussions between the play's characters refer to the need to suppress their true thoughts from those who wield absolute power in order to maintain their status and their physical safety.[29] But Nero is also aware of the scripted nature of the relationship between tyrant and subject. From the other side of the exchange, he demands such dissimulating behaviour from his subjects (492-4). It shows how a stereotype of the Neronian age had formed, as a society where dissimulation was a matter of life and death. This exploration of power dynamics between ruler and subjects is itself drawn from Seneca's tragedies. Seneca's themes become a representation of his own relationship with the tyrant.[30]

However, in stark contrast, the Flavian writers did not present their own careful self-fashioning as a necessary dissimulation out of fear of a tyrant, which marked the Neronian age. Instead, their concern over the methods of self-representation manifested itself with debates about ostentation and performance of a different sort, as a way of promoting their own positions in society. While the Flavians were not the first to make use of self-representation, nor even the only ones to talk about how it should be done, the Flavian writers were renegotiating their own attitudes against their perceptions of the past. Although there was no consensus among the Flavian writers about how they should represent themselves in society, in their eyes, they were doing something different from the constrained situation in Neronian Rome, and they wanted to mark this new freedom of expression. The *Thebaid*, as it explores the methods of promoting oneself by one's

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[27] E.g. Tiberius was also famed for his ability for dissimulation, and Tacitus makes pretence and acting repeated themes in his *Annals* when ruler engages with subjects and vice versa. See Bartsch (1994), ch.1-3 on Nero.

[28] Cf. Lucas (1921); Smith (2003) p391, Ferri (2003)p5-27, Boyle (2008) for a Flavian date; cf. Barnes (1982), Kragelund (1988) and Wiseman (2008) ch.12 for a date probably under the reign of Galba (or early Flavian).

[29] E.g. 65-71; 98-9; 177; 213-4; 674-5. See Smith (2003) p416-8 on dissimulation in the play.

[30] This, in turn, paved the way for Flavian poets to explore the theme too, cf. e.g. Dominik (1994b), Bessone (2011). However, there are some differences in the Flavian material. In the *Thebaid*, however, more of the characters openly speak out against tyranny, rather than hiding their feelings and capitulating.

ancestors, or by styling one's self as a beneficial force to society and civilisation, responds and adds to the continuing debate occuring in Flavian Rome.

Deification in the *Thebaid* and Flavian Society

From here I will look at some of the Flavian family's methods of self-portrayal, which are reflected in the *Thebaid*. Part of the Flavian family's strategy for legitimising their new imperial status was to manufacture associations to the Augustan past.[31] In doing so, they separated themselves from the decadence of Nero that ended the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and rebranded themselves as a return to an untarnished version of the Augustan golden age, a stereotype that the Augustans themselves had cultivated.[32] The fact that both the Augustan and Flavian regimes brought relative peace to Rome after a period of civil war meant that there was a convenient model on which the latter dynasty could base themselves on in their attempts to legitimise themselves.[33] Naturally, such a strategy relies also on a general approval of the Augustan regime among Flavian society.

But the Flavians' use of the figure of Augustus, as the first of the Julio-Claudian emperors, to secure their own self-image is a double-edged risk, which is especially poignant with the hindsight of history. Just as the Julio-Claudians were eventually 'corrupted' from Augustus' golden age to Nero's tyranny, so too do the Flavian family in resetting the golden age run the risk of eventually giving rise to another Nero. Indeed, this becomes a convenient pattern for authors writing after Domitian's assassination to revert to, as they attack Domitian's character in similar ways to those by which Nero's reign was condemned. Juvenal, for instance, famously calls Domitian the *calvus Nero* (Juv. *Sat.* 4.38).

In this section, I will explore how the Flavian family promoted the idea of their destined deification, as a way of stabilising their imperial status. This practice mimics the policy of Augustus, who instituted the imperial cult when he deified his adoptive father,

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[31] See e.g. Rosso (2009); Tuck (2016) p109-10; and Levick (2017) p66.

[32] The imperial Flavians created a clear distinction between themselves and Nero. The Flavians styled themselves as benefactors of society, and constrasted themselves against the stereotype of Nero as a self-serving tyrant. So, in a strong symbolic gesture, they buried Nero's *Domus Aurea*, a private palace that came to symbolise his decadence, and built over its grounds with large public works that included the Baths of Titus and the Flavian Amphitheatre. On Flavian building strategies, see e.g. Southern (1997) appendix A; Andreu (2010). On Nero's building projects as proof of his decadence, see Elsner (1994).

[33] McNelis (2007) p5-8.

while preparing the way for his own posthumous ascension.[34] This relationship is well documented by the Flavian writers. For example, Martial recognises the connection between the Augustan and Flavian use of deification with the phrase: *Augusti Flavia templa poli* (Mart. *Epigr*. 9.34), merging the Flavian divine cult with the circle of deified imperial family members established by Augustus.

There has been much scholarly attention on how the Flavian emperors advertised their relationship with divinity. But aside from developing further associations with the Augustan past, the approach stands for itself as a way to legitimise the new Flavian regime. By highlighting their associations with the divine, the Flavian family members make themselves seem integrated in some divine plan, with a predestined right to power, and therefore too, with the divine power and authority to restore order to chaos. First Vespasian and then Titus cultivated their strong connections with divinity in the eyes of the public. In the provinces, they were treated as divine rulers almost immediately.[35] But in Rome, their use of divine self-representation began more subtly to avoid outright association with eastern cultures that were regarded as slavish societies under the rule of living gods. However, following Augustan custom, they hinted that they would join the gods after death, sending the message that they had the divine right to rule. It seems that the propaganda machines spread and took advantage of anecdotes supporting this belief.[36]

Domitian, however, pushed his divine associations further than any Roman emperor before him, portraying himself as a god even when he was still alive, in the model of the Hellenistic kings.[37] This was partly facilitated by the deification of his father and brother, as well as other members of his close family.[38] His claims of blood ties with these gods made it so self-evident that he would join them that he could be treated as a god already.[39] His cultivation of his divine image is evident from the material culture. Domitian raised the temple of Capitoline Jupiter to its grandest ever incarnation.[40] Images of the emperor and Jupiter were frequently paired together on coins and artwork.[41] A number of statues or busts also exist dressing Domitian's face with Herculean features,

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[34] Scott (1975) p2-4.
[35] Levick (2017) p74-5.
[36] See Scott (1975) p2-3.
[37] E.g. Scott (1975) p88-112, Newlands (2002) p10-17, Newlands (2012) p21-23.
[38] See e.g. Jones (1992) p162, Wood (2010).
[39] Domitian had erected a huge temple to the *Gens Flaviae* signifying his relationship with divinity. Jones (1992) p77-78.
[40] Jones (1992) p92.
[41] Scott (1975) p141-46.

making the emperor seem both a hero and a god. As an additional similarity to Hercules, Domitian takes Minerva as his personal patron.[42]

Intriguingly, this mode of self-representation seems to seep into popular culture too. Perhaps following their rulers, Roman women of the time began to be styled after goddesses.[43] Funerary statues were commissioned comprising their own head on top of the bodies of goddesses (such as Venus or Roma), which were recognisable by their poses or garment. Notably, only female Flavian citizens seem to be portrayed in this way. Perhaps their sex made them less threating to the emperor, if they were to use his strategy for self-representation. Moreover, these were funerary statues in private settings, not public displays, and so were less likely to clash with the imperial designs. Thus Rome starts to become saturated with individuals associating themselves with divinity.

But the contemporary literature also supports the emperor's designs of divinity. Most striking are Martial's frequent references to Domitian as *dominus et deus*, apparently in accordance with Domititan's official, self-bestowed title.[44] On other occasions, Martial directly calls Domitian 'Jupiter', or some other title that equates him with the supreme god, such as the 'earthly Jupiter'. Moreover, there are frequent comparisons of Domitian with other gods, and, in particular, gods that started off mortal and were apotheosised, such as Bacchus or Hercules – a reference towards the emperor's own destiny.[45] Statius' *Silvae* also place an emphasis on Domitian's divinity and his relationship with his deified family members.

We have already explored some issues of divinity and deification in the *Thebaid*, but I will briefly recap here some important issues. Like the emperor, the characters of the *Thebaid* also put great emphasis on their own associations with divinity, as is customary for epic heroes.[46] Their relationships with the gods are far more tangible than the inhabitants of Rome. The divine framework of the *Thebaid* allows gods and mortals to engage with one another, with much fluidity between the celestial sphere, earth, and the underworld. But, moreover, one of the driving motivations for the heroes is to gain

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[42] Scott (1975) p166-188.

[43] Stewart (2008) p98-101; Pickup (2015) p144-5.

[44] See Suet. *Dom.* 13.2; Dio, 67.4.7. However, the lack of archaeological evidence for this has caused doubt over its reality, Jones (1992) p109. Statius comments upon the *dominus* part of the title in *Silvae* 1.6.81-4, claiming that Domitian banned the title, but his people continued using it out of enthusiasm for him; see Newlands (2002) *ad loc*.

[45] Scott (1975) p141-7.

[46] With the exception of Capaneus, the *superum contemptor*. And yet, even then, his identity is nonetheless defined by his relationship to the gods, although the relationship is one that is inversed from the norm.

their own form of immortality through *fama*. We have seen that the heroes attempt to cultivate and spread their personal *fama* at all costs, including even their own lives.[47] It is by displaying their *virtus* that they gain a particular reputation and are commemorated. For example, the narrator honours Maeon for standing up to the tyrant Eteocles, and voices his desire to bestow *fama* upon him for his inner virtues (*quo carmine dignam, / quo satis ore tuis famam virtutibus addam*, 3.102). The reward of a widespread *fama* is a kind of immortality: the heroes keep themselves 'alive' posthumously in the memory among those still living. In the case of Maeon, the narrator immortalises him and his *fama* within his narrative.

But in the world of Latin epic, there is a more concrete version of immortality available to the heroes as well. If the characters display enough *virtus* through their deeds, and from this amass enough *fama*, then there is also an opportunity for them to be apotheosised.[48] This is a feature that follows the *Aeneid*, where the destined deification of Aeneas and Ascanius looks towards Augustus' own future divinity. This kind of deification is referred to often within the *Thebaid*'s narrative. Perseus and Hercules are both heroes who have achieved apotheosis. Their successful transition makes them attractive models for the current characters in the hopes of acquiring the same reward. Two characters, Opheltes and Amphiaraus, are proclaimed as gods after their death. And the hero, Tydeus, though on the cusp of obtaining deification, is emphatically denied the status of godhood. Menoeceus, on the other hand, is granted immortality for his virtuous self-sacrifice.

This emphasis on deification in the poem, I suggest, is a response to the use of divinity as a strategy of self-representation, particularly by the Flavian cult. Just as the characters use the gods to define their own heroic statuses, so too does the imperial family fashion their image with divine associations. Although the authorial voice clearly states that the *Thebaid* will not be a poem about Domitian or Rome, Latin epics are national texts that reflect upon Roman history and society.[49] And although the *Thebaid* is set in the self-consciously fictional space of mythical Thebes, and can mostly be detached from

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[47] Cf. Coroebus' men (1.606-8).

[48] The association between *virtus* and apotheosis is perceived by the Romans to go back to the earliest days of Rome. For example, Cicero makes Scipio attribute Romulus' apotheosis to his *virtus* (Cic. *Rep.* 2.17), see Cole (2013) p93-4. For other examples of the relationship between *virtus*, *fama*, and deification, see Pease (1935) on *Aeneid* 322, where Dido claims her *fama* should have been her ticket into the heavens.

[49] Even in Latin epic's earliest forms, as translations of Greek epic, they were given an Italian focus and shaped Roman culture, Farrell (2005) p426-8.

the real world both historically and spatially,[50] the subject-matters of the Theban myths overlap with Roman history, and have been used and interpreted as allegories for Roman concerns.[51] In the case of apotheosis, as a special privilege of the ruling family, it would be difficult for the reader not to connect the theme of divinisation in the *Thebaid* to the emperors. However, the parallel reveals some anxieties over the emperors' mode of self-characterisation. We have seen how the concept of apotheosis was made problematic by the characters, Tydeus and Menoecus. Here I want to focus on two more deified characters in the *Thebaid* that are controversial – Opheltes and Amphiaraus.

Opheltes dies as a child, and is announced as having ascended to godhood by the priest Amphiaraus. Statius, following the more popular accounts, makes the boy's funeral games an aetiology for the real life Nemean games. However, as we saw earlier, Statius also teasingly alludes to the version where the games were established because Hercules killed the Nemean lion, only to reject it. These are two very different possible aetiologies of the Nemean games, the death of an infant versus a heroic act of monster-killing. By alluding to the two options, but then supressing the more heroic one, the narrator undermines the heroic nature of the games.[52] It suggests a diminution in the requirements for the presiding god, which complicates the process of apotheosis.

Moreover, the divinisation is an entirely humanly appointed one. In the closing speech of Book 5, Amphiaraus persuades the citizens to lay aside their anger and grief over Opheltes' death, and to pay honour to the boy as a god instead:

> differte animos festinaque tela
> ponite; mansuris donandus honoribus infans.
> et meruit; det pulchra suis libamina Virtus
> manibus, atque utinam plures innectere pergas,
> Phoebe, moras, semperque nouis bellare uetemur
> casibus, et semper Thebe funesta recedat.
> at uos magnorum transgressi fata parentum

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[50] The only senses of contact that the *Thebaid* has with the reader's world are the aetiological references to Opheltes' and Amphiaraus' cult.

[51] Cf. e.g. Ahl (1986) p2812; Hardie (1990b); Janan (2009); McNelis (2007) p2-5; Janan (2009) p6-9.

[52] See McNelis (2007) p91-3, who argues that "Statius' interest in Opheltes, then, follows more general Callimachean practice by emphasising the small child at the expense of the larger heroic narrative". See also Brown (1994) p192.

> felices, longum quibus hinc per saecula nomen,
>
> dum Lernaea palus et dum pater Inachus ibit,
>
> dum Nemea tremulas campis iaculabitur umbras,
>
> ne fletu uiolate sacrum, ne plangite diuos:
>
> nam deus iste, deus, Pyliae nec fata senectae
>
> maluerit, Phrygiis aut degere longius annis.
>
> (Stat. *Theb*. 5.740-52)

The boy is given honours that will last, *mansuris…honoribus* (5.741). The act of being recalled in eternal memory is conflated with the true immortality of a deity.[53] Although, according to Amphiaraus, Opheltes' parents will also be remembered forever, they themselves do not seem to be destined for deification (*longum quibus hinc per saecula nomen*, 5.746-9).[54]

There may be reasons to question the boy's apotheosis. Amphiaraus claims that the boy deserves it (*et meruit*, 5.742), and qualifies this statement with the image of Virtus personified, offering libation to the dead boy (5.742-3). Opheltes' deification seems to fall in line with the common paradigm of deification in the *Thebaid*: exhibiting enough *virtus*, and having enough people know about it, will allow one to gain passage to the heavens. However, one wonders what qualifies Opheltes and his actions to be applied to such a quality. In the previous chapter, we explored how fighting monsters could be used as an indicator of a hero's *virtus*. But the encounter with the snake is far from that kind of battle. In place of a warrior is a baby, while the monster was not even aware that it was taking part in the 'combat' (*ignaro serpente*, 5.647). The unheroic nature of their encounter is further stressed by the narrator's description of the lament over the snake's death, which is reminiscent of the lament for the boy and plays with the same imagery (5.579-82).[55] This is not a glorious victory, but a pathetic occasion for all. The scene is a parody of the traditional 'heroic battle', and fails to provide an opportunity to display martial *virtus*.[56] Amphiaraus' declaration of this quality to the child seems arbitrary.

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[53] It also alludes to the Nemean games as a real life institution, which still honours the boy.

[54] Cf *Silvae* 1.4 where Rutilius Gallicus retrospectively grants honour to his ancestors. See Bernstein (2008) p82 on these lines and their relevance to Polynices in the *Thebaid*.

[55] Keith (2000) p59.

[56] Cf. McDonnell (2006), who argues that the original meaning of *virtus* was simply physical aggression in a martial situation. Though cf. also the concerns in Kastor (2007).

When we consider the associations of the word *virtus*, the contrast between the boy and the abstract value is thrown into greater contrast. *Virtus* is etymologically related to *vir*, and therefore is a marker of being masculine; but it is also a marker of being an adult male. However, Amphiaraus stresses the boy's youth: he is called *puer* (5.738) and *infans* (5.741); he is certainly not a *vir*.[57] *Virtus* seems an especially inappropriate value to be attributed to a baby.

Amphiaraus emphatically repeats his divinity: *ne plangite diuos: / nam deus iste, deus* (5.750-51), but there should be some scepticism towards his enthusiastic words.[58] His speech is a consolation to the child's parents, but it also has a political impact. The boy's death had almost caused a civil war between the Argives and the Nemeans, and Amphiaraus is still in the process of calming tensions: *differte animos festinaque tela / ponite* (5.740-1). Hence, we might see a political motivation for his deification of the boy. It is a contrived way of turning the sad occasion into a happy one, and preventing a political fallout. There is no evidence to suggest that Opheltes actually becomes an immortal god. Two books later, as the Argives prepare to leave Nemea, Adrastus treats him as one:

> at si Boeotia ferro
>
> uertere tecta dabis, magnis tunc dignior aris,
>
> tunc deus, Inachias nec tantum culta per urbes
>
> numina, captiuis etiam iurabere Thebis.

<div align="center">(Theb. 7.100-3)</div>

Adrastus' prayer engages in the traditional reciprocity of favours between god and mortal. The invoked god offers their support, and in exchange the mortal offers their worship. However, clearly Opheltes does not live up to his end of the bargain. Argos fails to take Thebes and is utterly defeated in the war. This undermines Opheltes' effectiveness as a god, and indeed his very status as one.[59]

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[57] On the contrast between *puer* and *vir* see Hardie (1990a) p11-12; Hardie (1994) on *Aen.* 9.641.

[58] See Wills (1996) p61, on gemination as a traditional feature of the proclamation of a god in Latin literature. The earliest iteration of the pattern seems to be Lucretius 5.8, where the poet declares Epicurus a god (*deus ille fuit, deus*). Of course, Lucretius is not really calling Epicurus an immortal deity in the traditional sense. Perhaps there is a sense that like Epicurus, Opheltes is more a symbolic god than an anthopomorphic one that can effect any difference in a tangible sense.

[59] Ganiban (2013) p251, sees Opheltes' divine status as relying on the Argives' victory.

Later, Amphiaraus's own process of deification is also problematic. After Amphiaraus' death, it is his successor and disciple, Thiodamas, who declares his master's posthumous state:

> modo me sub nocte silenti
>
> ipse, ipse adsurgens iterum tellure soluta,
>
> qualis erat (solos infecerat umbra iugales),
>
> Amphiaraus adit: non uanae monstra quietis,
>
> nec somno comperta loquor.
>
> (10.202-6)

He does not explicitly describe Amphiaraus as a god, but readers from the ancient world would have been familiar enough with the real life cult of Amphiaraus at Oropos. Located roughly 30 miles east of Thebes, the Amphiareion was a sanctuary to the chthonic deity, which by the Flavian period had surpassed even the Delphic oracle as the popular choice for oracular consultations.[60] Amphiaraus' was an incubation cult: his mode of prophecy was through dreams that visitors had while sleeping within his sanctuary.[61] It is with this historical context that ancient readers would come across these lines. Though Amphiaraus is not called a god here, he would be recognised as acting within his familiar role of a chthonic deity that handles dreams: *non uanae monstra quietis, nec somno comperta loquor* (10.205-6).[62]

Thiodamas' announcement here therefore functions as an aetiology for the cult of Amphiaraus. It is the first proclamation of Amphiaraus' divine status, in a similar way that Amphiaraus had announced Opheltes' apotheosis. As was the case for Opheltes, the evidence that the ascension has actually occurred is problematic. Opheltes never appeared in an epiphany to mortals, nor was he ever mentioned in the councils of the heavenly gods.[63] Amphiaraus, however, does make a posthumous reappearance in the epic. But, this is presented to the Argives and the reader only through the medium of Thiodamas' reported speech.

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[60] Augoustakis (2016) pxxiv-xxvii and note on lines 335-6.

[61] Dignas (2007) p163-4.

[62] Cf. Augoustakis (2016) *ad loc.*

[63] Ganiban (2013) p250-1, argues that there is a surprising lack of confirmation from the gods that Opheltes' death was part of a larger divine plan.

On top of that, Thiodamas' narrative shows contradictions with the narrator's. He describes his master rising from the earth as looking exactly the same as he used to and that only his horses had become underworld shades (*qualis erat (solos infecerat umbra iugales)*, 10.204). But the narrator had already revealed earlier that in fact Amphiaraus was in the process of fading away to insubstantiality, after arriving in the underworld: *iam tenuis uisu, iam uanescentibus armis, / iam pedes* (8.86-7). Moreover, the prophet himself had hinted towards his own conversion into a shade: *nec deprecor umbram / accipere*, which Lactantius paraphrases as *nec refuto umbra esse*, which seems to me to be the most natural way of understanding the phrase as it is.[64] The inference from the inconsistency is that Thiodamas may not be telling the truth, casting doubt on whether Amphiaraus has actually become a god.

Aside from inconsistences in Amphiaraus' physical appearance, there seems to be great confusion too in the instigator of this nocturnal prophecy in the first place. Thiodamas solely attributes the inspiration to his master Amphiaraus, but the narrator himself seems unclear on the source of the divine intervention. He attributes it to either Juno or Apollo: *siue hanc Saturnia mentem, / siue nouum comitem bonus instigabat Apollo* (10.162-3). The former deity is appropriate, since Juno has just helped her favoured Argives by forcing all the Thebans to fall into a deep sleep, in a series of events that also involve the deities Iris and personified Sleep. But Apollo is also appropriate, as the narrator explains, for he is Thiodamas' divine patron (*Theb* 10.163), and the god associated with prophecies. The process of divine inspiration also points towards Apollo as the prophetic source. It causes in Thiodamas a frenzied lack of physical control (10.164-169), which strongly evokes Vergil's Sibyl and Lucan's Pythia, who were both also inspired by Apollo and suffered similar physical distortions.[65] Thus with the dense mass of divine action surrounding Thiodamas' prophecy, the readers are forced to question whether Thiodamas is right in asserting that Amphiaraus has come in his own self to impart his exhortations. The inconsistencies between narrator and Thiodamas create competing characterisations of the warrior-priest. But Thiodamas' description of his predecessor must yield to the authority of the narrator. When even the usually

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[64] However, Alton (1923) p183, finds it a "strange" phrase and amends *umbra* to *undam*, in reference to the waters of Lethe, since the sentence continues with Amphiaraus' willingness to forget his prophetic skills: *et tripodum iam non meminisse meorum*. However, most editors and translators have preferred the original *umbra*.
[65] Cf. Williams (1972) *ad loc.*

omniscient narrator is unsure of his facts, the strong assertion of Thiodamas is paradoxically further compromised and feels overly forced to the reader.

There is a lack of evidence that deification has actually happened in both cases. Neither deified characters reveal themselves as gods. They are both only declared to be gods, or seen as a god, through an individual's second-hand accounts. The effect of this then, is that the divine statuses of these two characters seem to be artificial constructions. Through their wording, and their insistent portrayals of them as gods, it is men who have created gods. There seems to be a hollowness to the declaration of deification.[66] The attributes that are awarded to a mortal as they are declared a god do not have to reflect on 'reality'. What does it mean then when *virtus* can be attributed to a child like Opheltes, or humans to be pronounced gods with no evidence? The complex system of imperial apotheosis is deconstructed and questioned by Statius.

But Statius is not the first to question the process and value of apotheosis. Towards the end of the Julio-Claudian rule, the idea of imperial deification had begun to be viewed with some scepticism. The literature of Seneca and Lucan had discredited the notion of apotheosis and reveals it to be more of an automated kind of process, simply an insincere act of showing that one has done one's duty to the deceased, whether the honour is due to them or not.[67] Seneca had written the parodic account of Claudius' apotheosis, with the punning title of *Apocolocyntosis*, the 'pumpkinification' rather than the 'deification'.[68] In the narrative, Claudius' ascension to Olympus is ridiculed. But right from the start, the work makes fun of any claim that there is historical truth behind the idea of various members of the imperial family ascending to the heavens (Sen. *Apoc.* 1.1).[69] Claudius' apotheosis is debated and eventually vetoed by the gods, most vociferously by the deified Augustus, who had initiated the tradition of imperial deification.

In Lucan's epic, after the battle of Pharsalus, the narrator's bitter comments about the non-existence of gods and then an explicit allusion to the deification of the Julio-Claudian emperors in quick succession (7.445-59) reveal a sceptical attitude towards the

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[66] Opheltes' death too creates disillusionment with the gods. The result of the boy's death causes Lycurgus, a priest of Jupiter, to disavow his god for allowing his son to be killed unpunished (5.688-9). See Ganiban (2013) p262-3.

[67] Nero, for example, went only so far as to declare Claudius a god, but never even got around to finishing his temple, which was begun by Agrippina. Instead he had razed most of it for his own grand building works. It was eventually completed by Vespasian (Suet *Vesp.* 9.1).

[68] Cf. Eden (2002) introduction.

[69] Damon (2010) p50-3.

concept of deification through the paradox between the two ideas: how can men become gods if gods do not exist?[70] Lucan further claims that civil war makes men equal to the heavenly gods (*bella pares superis facient civilia divos*, 7.457). The word *facient* highlights the artificiality of the created godhood. Moreover there is a hint of a reprehensive tone from the fact that individuals might benefit from something as dreadful as *bella…civilia*. Lucan continues: *Fulminibus manes, radiisque ornabit, et astris, / Inque deum templis iurabit Roma per umbras* (7.458-9). It is the ghosts of humans which are worshipped. Both *manes* and *umbras* are terms that evoke insubstantiality; they are not truly gods but only treated as such by the living.

These examples of attitudes towards divinisation from the Neronian corpus of literature are completely different in tone from the Vergilian tradition, in which the heavenly ascension of Aeneas, Ascanius as well as their descendants who follow in their example (most notably Augustus), was regarded as confidently assured and beneficial to the state.[71] While the Flavian imperial family emphasised their divinity publically for political reasons, the historical narrative suggests that they were privately more sceptical of their divine associations, at least initially. Suetonius records Vespasian's final words as *vae…puto, deus fio* (Suet. *Vesp.* 23), a sardonic comment on the honorific rites of deification that would come after his death. Because of Domitian's rumoured rivalry with Titus, he is also said to have honoured his deceased brother in one way – by declaring him a god (Suet. *Dom.* 2.3).[72] This gives an idea that the formal process was becoming insincere and meaningless by this point. Suetonius' anecdotes suggest that there was a general understanding that deification is simply a legitimising mode of self-fashioning, and that the deified individuals were not genuinely going to become gods.[73]

Statius' poetry fluctuates between the traditional celebratory tone of the emperor's future deification in the *Silvae*, and a more sceptical attitude towards the process in the *Thebaid*. In his addresses to the emperor in both the prologues of his epics and the *Silvae*, Statius treats Domitian not only as if destined to become a god, but even

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[70] See e.g. Fratantuono (2012) p288-290.

[71] The theology in Lucan's proem, in which the poet hails Nero as a god to be, also contrasts with that of the main narrative, where gods do not exist. However, even in this positive declaration, if read subversively , "Lucan suggests that his emperor, when deified, will enter Olympus as a usurper or as an actor choosing a role to play" Wilson Joyce (1993). There is a sense that the human Nero, does not belong among the heaven, and that human emperors only make imitations of gods.

[72] Scott (1975), however, shows that Suetonius exaggerates somewhat, and honours were paid to Titus in various other ways.

[73] Whitmarsh (2016) p196.

as if already a god, in accordance with the official imperial propaganda of the time. However, deification in the *Thebaid*'s narrative is a much more uncertain process, since few of the living heroes are proven to become gods, or are outright denied the honour. This draws on a more general scepticism of the formal process of deification in the latter half of the first century. Statius questions what it means to be declared a god, and what values make one worthy of such a status. In doing so, he raises awareness that deification is (just) an artificial method of raising one's status.

Why then is there a difference in the celebratory tone towards the emperor's divinity in the *Silvae* and the more critical attitude towards apotheosis in the *Thebaid*? It is a difficult question to answer. I suggest that both play a part in the wider conversation about methods of self-representation in the Flavian period. The *Silvae* interpret deification as part of Domitian's glorious destiny, corresponding to the official imperial propaganda. However, the *Thebaid* extends the debate further. That does not mean that it bluntly questions its effectiveness or validity. Any criticism levelled at a mode of self-representation, associated first and foremost with the imperial family as their legitimacy to rule, would be ill-advised and would risk offending the emperor. Nonetheless, as I have shown, the *Thebaid* engages in an exploration of the issue of deification, and, from there, problematises it (though discreetly).

I do not think that Statius meant this as a direct attack on the emperor.[74] Rather my suggestion is that Statius is reflecting on contemporary issues. Afterall, we have also seen this mode of self-representation beginning to be used by citizens in private settings too. However, Statius could not address the practice without impacting on the figure that is most associated with deification – the emperor. In order to address the issue in a respectful way, and so avoid the disfavour of the emperor (or worse),[75] the poet finds recourse in using a mythic narrative as a safe space,[76] in which he can explore the theme in complete freedom and up to its full implications.

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[74] As, e.g. Ahl (1986), Dominik (1994b), and McNelis (2007) do.

[75] To some extent, Statius was dependent on the emperor as patron, though see also Newlands (2012) p.20-36. But the historical sources also point to Domitian's habit of censoring authors for perceived slights, by condemning them to death. Cf. Suet. *Dom*. 10 for a list of people that Domitian had sentenced to death, which include the following authors: Hermogenes with his copyists; Junius Rusticus; Helvidius the younger. Tacitus and Pliny add Herennius Senecio to this list (Tac. *Agr*. 2.1; Pliny *epist*. 3.11.3).

[76] Cf. Ahl (1984a) and Ahl (1984b) on various authors' methods of circumventing censorship, and avoiding the ill-will of the emperor. See Coleman (1986) p3111-15, on Domitian and censorship.

In his book *Roman literature and society,* Ogilvie made a statement, which is now infamous in Statian studies: "[the] *Thebaid* cannot be said to be about anything".[77] With this thesis, I hope to have added to the growing number of voices repatriating Statius' epic to its place in society. I have tried to show that Statius' *Thebaid* was sensitively responding to contemporary trends and concerns, and that the problematic performance of heroism from the poem's heroes critically engaged with a debate about modes of self-fashioning in Flavian society.

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[77] Ogilvie (1988) p292.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations of classical references follow S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.) (2012) *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edn. Oxford.

EAA	*Enciclopedia dell'arte antica* (1958–), Roma.
LCS	Trendall, A. (1967). *The red-figured vases of Lucania, Campania and Sicily.* Oxford.
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (1981–), Zürich.
OCD	Hornblower, S. and Spawforth, A. (eds.) (2012), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford.
OLD	Glare, P. G. W. (ed.) (1982), *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford.
RIC	H. Mattingly, E. A. Sydenham, and others (1923–67) *Roman Imperial Coinage*, London.

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